

Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Report on the inspection of denominational education under Section
48 of the Education Act 2005

St Richard's Catholic College
Ashdown Road
Bexhill on Sea
TN40 1SE

Chair of Governors: Mr Peter Champion
Headteacher: Mr Anthony Campbell
Inspectors: Rev Dr W J Dickson SDB
Mr Joe Carvill
Inspection dates: 13 -14 November 2006

Introduction

Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Hastings and St Leonard's Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by East Sussex LEA. The principal parishes which the school serves are Eastbourne, Hastings, St Leonard's, Bexhill, and Langley. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 82.5%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 9% in Key Stage 3, 10% in Key Stage 4.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 16 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 992. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is just-above average. The school also serves an area of considerable deprivation around Hastings. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals is below average. Around 18.5% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of the pupils come from a white British background but the school has recently accepted a significant group of Filipino and Polish children. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Richards is an outstanding Catholic school. It reflects vividly the holistic vision of an educating Christian community that is genuinely human and deeply spiritual. In this school the highest standards of learning, teaching and personal growth are integrated into a caring and challenging educating community.

Since the last inspection the school has gone from strength to strength, achieving national recognition as a Leading Edge school, a Specialist Science Maths and ICT College and as a national model for other schools to follow with regard to its ethos and values. All this is founded explicitly on its fundamental commitment to being a living, worshipping and educating Christian community.

Its identity as a Catholic school informs its commitment to the highest standards of teaching learning and outstanding levels of achievement and pastoral care.

Grade 1

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

The governors should continue to explore the best way to offer St Richard's distinctive and extremely successful style of education to its post 16 students and the wider community.

The prospective appointment of the new lay chaplain is to be commended but he/she must be sensitive to the already excellent levels of commitment and engagement of both staff, students and local clergy to the Spiritual and liturgical life of the school. He/she should be prepared to encourage the further development of the innovative existing structures for engaging students' energy and enthusiasm.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of St Richard's as a Catholic school are outstanding.

The school is whole heartedly committed to the Every Child Matters agenda as a natural outcome of its Catholic and Christian belief in the unique value every child has as a son or daughter of God.

This imbues its pursuit of children's safety and security, their enjoyment and success in learning, their holistic development as engaged citizens and conscientious believers on their journey of faith.

All the different aspects of the school's life serve this vision: teaching and learning, monitoring, evaluating, tracking and target setting and the excellent pastoral care.

The staffing and investment in the RE department and the Liturgical area of the school and the proposed appointment of a lay chaplain all testify to the governor's effective commitment to the vision.

The governors should consider how best they might most effectively develop further their systematic monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic ethos of the school.

Grade 1

Quality of Catholic life of the school

The outstanding quality of the Catholic life of the College is evident, not just from the religious symbols and art work that greet the visitor; the excellent mission statement; the abundant policies on pastoral care and emotional well-being of the students; the care for those suffering loss or bereavement, but most of all from commitment of the staff and the moving student testimony to the quality of welcoming and caring community that they experience at St Richard's.

Students testify to the genuine care and encouragement that staff offer to all the students.

Those entering the school late or from abroad are offered effective help through the student 'buddy system' and student listeners.

Students are well aware from assemblies, and the example of RE, pastoral and academic staff of the very high standards that are expected and the expert support and advice they will receive.

Students have regular opportunities for reflection, days of retreat, and pilgrimages appropriate to their age, which enrich their personal faith journey.

Parents are well served by the school that seeks to inform them of their children's progress and support them through extension sessions in the face of the challenges that families sometimes face, for example, drugs, family break up, bereavement or personal problems.

The school carefully and sensitively uses the services available from the local authority and other local agencies.

Students are encouraged to be involved in campaigns to increase their awareness of the global issues of justice and peace and they raised over £15,000 last year for charity.

Year 11 students are well prepared for leadership roles they undertake by the training days they are offered at the end of Year 10.

The students are offered excellent opportunities for serving the wider community through attending and contributing to the National Anti-bullying Conference at Brighton and in running a Christmas party for disabled children at Glindgap School. They also work on the HCPT pilgrimage to Lourdes and on other community outreach projects.

Grade 1

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

The culture of prayer and reflection is very well established at St Richard's and is outstanding in meeting the needs of the students, staff and their families.

An outstanding corporate act of Remembrance enabled students to reflect and pray in gratitude for the servicemen and women who died in the wars and conflicts of modern times. The playing of the last post by one student and another singing an appropriate modern song, together with poems and prayers, attested to student involvement and the rich quality of prayer and worship offered in the school. Students were commended for their response to the poppy appeal.

The Form Period prayer offered was reflective, personal and meaningful and the prayer and reading led by one of the TAs at staff briefing was heartfelt and effective.

The Form Mass was remarkable for the devout and prayerful atmosphere, the excellent preparation and reading and the participation and engagement of the form teacher and children in the liturgy conducted by the dean.

The engagement of the local clergy in the chaplaincy team involving them in preparing Form and Year Masses is excellent and allows them to get to know the children and engage with them informally in the playground during breaks.

The newly developed Liturgy Student Representatives and their committee have undertaken an important monitoring exercise of daily prayers in Form Periods. They have effectively contributed to the establishment of prayer walls and books for prayer intentions in all the classrooms. They have guided the redecoration of the school chapel. They have also encouraged staff and clergy to reshape the school liturgies with more drama and different music more engaging for the students. Their enthusiasm and engagements speaks volumes for the importance the school gives to student voice.

The prospective appointment of the new lay chaplain is to be commended but he/she must be sensitive to the already excellent levels of commitment and engagement of both staff, students and local clergy to the spiritual and liturgical life of the school. He/she should be prepared to encourage the further development of the already existing innovative structures for engaging students' commitment.

Grade 1

Religious education

The RE department has undergone a major reorganisation in the last 18 months after the sudden departure of the previous Head of Department and consequent staffing difficulties. Despite an extremely difficult staffing situation students have achieved outstanding results.

Achievement and standards

The levels of achievement and standards in the RE department are outstanding.

The students levels of attainment at both Key Stages are well above the national average.

The GCSE results were the highest in the College's history and well above the national average for Catholic Schools.

93% of Year 11 students achieved their target grade or above.

The Year 10 GCSE module results showed 35% of students achieved A or A*.

At Key Stage 3, 67% of students achieved levels 6 or 7, well above the national average.

The radical turn round in results from 65% A* to C to 75% in a year when two of the 4 GCSE classes had three different teachers represent an outstanding achievement for the staff and students.

Grade 1

Quality of provision for religious education

The teaching and learning were good with many outstanding features.

Nearly all the lessons observed were good or better. Half the lessons were judged to be outstanding.

The students commended the improved the quality of teaching and commented on their high levels of interest and the high levels of commitment to work which was noted in class.

All the classes observed were almost invariably on task and highly motivated by their lessons.

The students often displayed high levels of response that were both knowledgeable and reflective to the carefully phrased questions asked.

The lessons were often stimulating and exciting using imaginative methods to engage the pupil's interest and enthusiasm.

ICT was well used in most lessons.

All the lessons began with a genuine student - led prayer moment.

Most of the lessons also had a moment for reflection on the personal meaning of the topic being studied, for example, life after death.

The students were able to make connections with previous knowledge, for example, at Key Stage 4 they use their knowledge of the Gospel to illuminate their study of moral problems.

The department follows enthusiastically the school monitoring, tracking and target -setting policy for students and teaching is regularly monitored and reviewed.

The students have very high expectations and are encouraged to engage in their own assessment for learning by frequent group work, paired evaluations and team projects.

Staff know their students really well and the quality of the relationships witnessed in the classroom was excellent. Students were unfailingly polite and remarked that at St Richard's the culture of hard work and unsparing effort enthuses both staff and students.

While marking and evaluating students work is consistently thorough at Key Stage 4 there seems to be less consistency at Key Stage 3.

Grade 2

The religious education curriculum

The RE curriculum at St Richard's has been massively improved over the last 18 months and is judged to be outstanding.

The revision of the schemes of work at Key Stage 3 and the new GCSE curriculum has stimulated the interest and enthusiasm of the students.

They more than adequately meet the diocesan requirements and encourage the students 'to learn lessons for life, not merely theory'.

While the weekly timetabled RE class time at Key Stage 3 is less than that recommended by the Bishop's Conference, extra time is systematically set aside for Mass preparation and days of retreat and religious visits.

The RE contribution to Sex and Relationships education is highly appreciated by the students who feel that they are engaged in an adult discussion which is both open and sensitive.

The students feel that the curriculum is 'relevant and interactive' and that their knowledge and understanding are deepened and their personal evaluations are really treasured.

The provision of Gifted and Talented classes in the guise of Master Classes or of the Philosophy Club is highly valued.

The offer of after school and Saturday morning GCSE revision sessions were very well attended and much appreciated by the students.

The ongoing development of the curriculum will no doubt encourage even higher levels of attainment.

Grade 1

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the RE department are outstanding.

The Assistant Principal, subject leader and second in department have formed a cohesive team, working with great confidence in a very difficult situation prompted by the sudden resignation of the previous Head of Department.

Despite last year's staffing crisis they lead the department with resourcefulness, confidence and enthusiasm to the best GCSE results in the department's history, well above the national average for Catholic schools.

They also embraced an ambitious programme of revised schemes of work at Key Stage 3, a new modular GCSE exam at Key Stage 4 with immense verve despite a major shortage of staff, which was filled from Christmas by the Principal himself taking over 4 GCSE sets.

The department has made rapid progress under this leadership and offers its students the prospects of even more success in the years to come.

The department has been generously supported by the Governors in terms of promoted posts and capitation and also by a special grant for new text books to promote the new GCSE.

The Chair of Governors is the link Governor and actively promotes, monitors and supports the work of the RE department. The Governors should seek to maintain the current generous staffing position in what is a very competitive labour market.

Grade1