



St Richard's Catholic College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114612
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 289994
Inspection date 14 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline White HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Ashdown Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Bexhill-on-Sea
Age range of pupils	11–16		TN40 1SE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01424 731070
Number on roll (school)	992	Fax number	01424 215623
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Peter Champion
		Principal	Anthony Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	14 November 2006	289994

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Richard's Catholic College is a specialist college in science with mathematics and information communication technology (ICT). It is a very settled, over-subscribed school which benefits from strong parental support. The vast majority of students are Roman Catholics. Most are from White British backgrounds and very few have English as an additional language. Some of the parishes served by the college are in areas which suffer from high levels of disadvantage. However, in comparison to the national context, most students' economic circumstances can be described as broadly average.

The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average, as is the percentage with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Since its last inspection in 2001, when it was judged to be very good, the college has continued to improve and provides an outstanding education for its students.

It is a place with some special qualities where everyone matters. Staff and governors are unified in their commitment to excellence and dedication to the care of every child. The very responsible students are supportive of one another and their families value the work of the college highly and contribute to it. This is a community focused on creating a place of high quality learning and well-being. One comment, from the parent of a Year 7 student, captured the almost universal appreciation expressed by the high number of families who returned questionnaires. It read, 'We are thrilled with all aspects of the school. It feels like our daughter has become part of a new extended family.'

Staff have high expectations for all students, and relationships are strong and encourage a culture of success. There is a relentless focus on achievement and raising standards. Excellent teaching is based on an understanding of effective learning. Teachers know students well, use assessment information astutely to plan lessons and give students clear guidance about what they need to do to improve. Students know what their targets are and how they need to go about achieving them. Consequently, they make outstanding progress to reach exceptionally high standards by the end of Year 11.

Student attitudes are exemplary, as demonstrated in their excellent attendance. Outstanding personal development helps students to mature as thoughtful, confident young people able to enjoy and make the most of the opportunities available to them. The college's specialism in science with mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) contributes to the high quality of provision and extends choice. A wide variety of extra activities gives students scope to explore and develop their potential. Individuality is valued and sustained through excellent care, guidance and support.

The excellent curriculum is flexible and tailored to students' needs. However, the college is outward looking and wants to secure a rewarding future for its students beyond the leaving age of sixteen. It is working effectively with partners in the wider community to develop 14–19 provision that will further enhance the choices available to its own students but also help all young people in the locality to realise their potential and make a successful transition into the world of work, further training or higher education.

Leadership and management are excellent. The outstanding leadership provided by the principal has been instrumental in maintaining the improvement of the college to its present very high standard. He has the whole-hearted support of an effective senior team. The consistency of subject and pastoral leaders adds powerfully to the excellent capacity to improve. Together, leaders set a very clear direction for the college. There is a coherent and concerted approach to bringing about achievement and success. The college has rigorous systems for reviewing its work and evaluates its performance

accurately. It knows where it is going and it knows how to get there. There is no room for complacency, only constant endeavour to make things even better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to work in partnership with local schools and colleges to develop 14–19 provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students enter the college with just-above-average attainment. By the end of Year 11, students attain standards that are exceptionally high, making outstanding progress to achieve challenging targets. Excellent systems for tracking students' progress ensure that wherever students start out, they reach their potential.

The emphasis on how well students of all abilities can learn and the celebration of achievement engenders deep pride in the college among staff, students and parents.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' enjoyment of college life is evident in their enthusiasm and respect for learning. Their confidence stems from believing they can succeed and knowing they are valued. They understand the importance of hard work, healthy lifestyles and adopting safe practices. They have a strong sense of belonging to the college, which they express in their willingness to take responsibility for its continuing improvement.

They appreciate the many opportunities to develop leadership skills and exercise these with a sense of duty and an awareness of the difference they can make as positive role models. The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of students is outstanding. They are also well prepared to gain economic independence and success in the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are excellent overall. Staff have an excellent rapport with students and expect them to do well. The right balance is struck between support for the individual and guidance for the whole class. Teachers work closely with teaching assistants. Together, they are highly effective in planning lessons and evaluating learning. Lesson objectives are well matched to students' needs. The most successful teaching maximises opportunities to develop students as independent thinkers and learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is broad, well balanced and flexible. It not only meets the needs of students but captures their interest and inspires ambition. There is an impressive range of courses in Years 10 and 11. The college's specialism has improved facilities and enhanced students' choices. It is now seeking to build on the excellent curriculum it offers by working with partners in the wider community to develop 14–19 provision that will further increase choice and opportunity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are excellent. Arrangements for care throughout the college are sensitive, inclusive and founded on mutual respect. The pastoral team gives detailed guidance to individual students on academic and personal development. Support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties is exemplary. Child protection procedures and records meet requirements and are well managed. Students receive excellent guidance about academic and careers choices at all stages, but especially in Year 9 and Year 11.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The principal is an inspirational leader. He conveys his passion for learning and his belief in the integrity of the human spirit to everyone. Consequently, a sense of purpose and warmth pervades the college. The strong teamwork among the staff and governors has meant the momentum of improvement has continued apace. There is a clear, shared vision placing the needs of students at the heart of the day-to-day life of the school. As a result almost all students, whatever their background, achieve exceptionally well.

Self-evaluation is rigorous, accurate and used effectively to raise students' achievement. The professional development of all staff is given a high priority. There is a robust system of performance management that is rooted in developing leadership and improving achievement. All roads lead back to the importance of learners and leaders realising their potential.

Governors are involved in the life of the school and its strategic direction. They are well informed about development plans and effective in supporting and challenging those charged with responsibility for implementation. The school successfully tackled the issues identified in its previous inspection and then extended its expectations. It is very well placed to continue improving and be instrumental in the development of the wider community.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I recently inspected your college. This letter is to tell you about my findings. However, first, I would like to thank you for your openness and co-operation during my visit. I enjoyed meeting some of you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that yours is an excellent college that is very well led. The range of courses and activities available to you is excellent. Your lessons are very well planned and effective in helping you to learn. You are set challenging targets and make outstanding progress. You are encouraged to take responsibility for self-improvement and you do. Your attitudes to your learning are exemplary and evident in the commitment you make to the continuous improvement of the college. The staff and governors care about you deeply and offer you very effective support. Relationships between you are strong. You told me that you feel safe and valued. You are rightly proud of the achievements of the college. Of course, you play a very important part in making the college such a purposeful and supportive place. You strive to do your best and support others in doing theirs. All this adds up to an effective education and the college being a special place for you.

The staff want you to feel secure about the future when you leave the college. To this end, your principal and others in the local community are working to develop between them a wide menu of educational choices and opportunities to help you and other young people realise their potential and make a successful transition into the world of work, further training or higher education.

You should be very proud of yourselves. You are an example of how supporting each other, self-belief and commitment to learning can lead to remarkable achievements and fulfilment.