

Information about this review

- The review team, comprising two former NLEs and one current practitioner, two of whom are Ofsted trained, observed over 50 part-lessons. The overwhelming majority of these lessons were jointly observed with members of the senior leadership team (LMT) and Subject Leaders.
- Meetings were held with members of the LMT, Subject Leaders, pupils and representatives of the Governing Body.
- The review team discussed lessons they had seen with teaching staff and examined a range of documents including the College Improvement Plan, the self-evaluation (SEF) and data about progress, standards, exclusions, attendance and behaviour.
- The review team looked at a range of work and talked with groups of pupils in lessons.

Safeguarding

The Single Central Record is a comprehensive document, containing the relevant checks and information required. Two anomalies eg a missing SAP number were explained by the DSL. The key concern was the missing record of "date seen" for document checks for staff appointed before CRB and DBS checks were introduced. HR staff at the college at this time are no longer in post.

Governors check the SCR termly and visits are recorded in GB minutes.

The safeguarding policy, based on the ESCC model policy, is robust, containing all elements required.

The DSL, supported by a strong team, is totally committed to ensuring that pupils are safe and that procedures are followed stringently. Record-keeping is very thorough. Liaison with Governors is regular. Links with outside agencies are a strength. Pupils feel safe at the school. Safeguarding is effective.

Recommendation:

Carry out checks to confirm validation of data entries for all staff appointed prior to the introduction of CRB and subsequently DBS checks.

Leadership and Management

The headteacher's clear and strong leadership has led to significant improvements in all aspects of the school's work. Working with Governors and senior leaders, she has forged a dedicated and professional team who are all highly committed to achieving the very best education possible for every child.

The leadership team's vision for the school is shared by the governors and staff. They have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and tackle these with determination and energy, striving for excellence in everything they do. Leaders take appropriate action making any necessary adjustments. Consequently, the school is continually improving.

There is an unrelenting focus on improving teaching and learning, which is linked to a personalised professional development programme, which teachers appreciate and contribute to with great enthusiasm. Performance management is robust and the headteacher has not been afraid to tackle underperformance.

Subject Leaders are enthusiastic and highly committed, with a clear understanding of what is required to improve standards in their subject areas. Although a culture of collaborative learning, coaching and professional dialogue has led to improved teaching and learning across the school, Subject Leaders would benefit from greater exposure to innovative approaches to curriculum delivery particularly in relation to high ability pupils.

In some subjects such as Computer Science, the use of interactive classroom technology is beginning to address the over reliance on prepared worksheets which was evident in many areas.

The headteacher and leaders have been able to support other local schools effectively through their work as a Teaching School although this has yet to become an integral part of the County's school improvement strategy. Involvement in research partnerships, subject networks and close working relationships with other schools have led to better teaching and leadership in a range of subjects.

Subject Leaders have responded well to the demands of the new national curriculum and have developed new schemes of work and assessment opportunities. Approaches that worked well last year have been adapted effectively to work with the new way of assessing pupils' progress from their different starting points. As a result, leaders accurately monitor all groups of pupils in each year group and are able to target support and interventions appropriately.

The highly successful curriculum is broad and balanced and designed to meet the needs of all pupils, who achieve extremely well. The wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities available to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is impressive. As a result, they are very well prepared to take the next steps in their education, training or employment.

The school is a highly cohesive community, which has equality of opportunity for all pupils at its heart. Leaders and staff at all levels promote good relationships and ensure that discrimination is never tolerated. As a result, all groups of pupils thrive and achieve well, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, together with those in receipt of the pupil premium (PP).

Recommendation:

Review the line management of Middle Leaders to ensure consistency of approach

Reduce the number of priorities for teaching and learning

Align the strategic vision for the development of T&L with Teaching School initiatives

Ensure that the SEF is more evaluative and less descriptive

Governance of the school

Governors are enthusiastic about the school and members of the Governing Body have a range of skills and educational experience that they use generously to support and challenge leaders at all levels.

Through very detailed reports and regular meetings, Governors have an in-depth knowledge of the strengths in teaching and in different subjects. They track the implementation of school development plan priorities very closely and work effectively with all members of the leadership team.

Regular visits to departments and events enable Governors to evaluate a wide spectrum of aspects of the school such as safeguarding, the provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability and the impact of the pupil premium funding.

Governors scrutinise performance information regularly and, alongside externally produced reports, are able to assess the success of the school against its own targets, and the standards achieved by similar schools.

Governors oversee the school's finances closely and ensure that all resources are well managed. They know exactly how the school has spent its pupil premium funding and have

monitored the impact of this on raising standards and narrowing the gap. They ensure that safeguarding meets all requirements fully.

Recommendation:

Develop the role of Governors to monitor impact rather than to track actions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

All staff at St Richard's are working with great determination to enable pupils to achieve well. There is a clear focus around effort and pride in work and pupils are very aware of what is expected of them. They respond consistently to these expectations, demonstrating impressive attitudes to and a clear love of learning.

Teaching is characterised, through a strong cohort of new and experienced teachers, by strong subject knowledge, a passion for their subjects and the ability to convey their enthusiasm to pupils through engaging lessons.

The school has focussed, through an effective CPD programme, on improving the quality of questioning and this has been effective in the majority of cases. In the best lessons questioning is used highly effectively. For example, in a drama lesson, the teacher was able to target questions highly effectively to push the pupils towards a more focused revised performance, which demonstrated rapid progress. Where questioning is not so well thought out, pupils are rarely challenged, only a minority of pupils answer questions and questioning is used to demonstrate factual recall rather than to extend understanding. The overwhelming majority of lessons demonstrate effective planning, with a good balance of fast pace with time given for pupils to develop mastery. On some occasions, the short length of some sessions results in classes ending somewhat abruptly without time for a plenary.

All teachers manage pupils' behaviour highly effectively with clear rules that are consistently enforced.

In most of the lessons enough time is given to practise and embed skills, knowledge and understanding. There is consistent evidence that the delivery of subject content, including the delivery of new enlarged and more challenging programmes of study, is being structured over time in ways that enable the majority of pupils to learn effectively.

Teachers are skilled at monitoring the progress of all pupils in their classes and work hard to support any pupil, who is falling behind, enabling almost all to catch up. In some lessons, this results in pupils working on a multitude of different activities or at different paces apparently quite seamlessly. Where this is managed less effectively, teachers could usefully bring the whole class together more often for whole class feedback around the common assessment requirements of the activities.

Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils are as well prepared with regard to examination board assessment requirements as to the demands of subject content. This emphasis is being introduced effectively in lessons from Year 7.

In a strong English lesson, the subject teacher was using interactive classroom technology to allow pupils to collaborate to create revision guides for other pupils, which focussed on the style of assessment. An online quiz in the same lesson demonstrated quickly and effectively that this class had very successfully understood the exam requirements.

This lesson exemplified the considered way that the school is starting to make use of ICT to support learning. This ability to share resources and work collaboratively was being thoughtfully used in a way that produced rapid and easily checked progress.

Teachers are very good at circulating classrooms to check the understanding of individuals effectively. In some cases, the structure of the lessons could be better planned to allow for other swifter means of checking understanding to be deployed. There were some cases, where a minority of pupils were left waiting, doing little, until the teacher was able to reach them.

The school has developed some highly effective methodologies around feedback which the pupils have learned to expect and which, when used as planned, are resulting in clear progress in the books. In particular, the structured use of self-assessment has been well thought out in a way that ensures that the pupils' own self-assessment is moderated and checked by staff. In one Geography lesson, this approach was used particularly effectively with a simple strategy, using pupil response boxes of different size, designed to differentiate the extent and depth of pupil response required. The marking policies have yet to be fully embedded across the school as, in some cases, books had only been marked to a limited extent or, albeit rarely, not at all.

Teachers set challenging homework, and evidence from the books confirms that this is often well thought out and appropriate. There were some examples, however, where the concept of reviewing what the pupils had been doing in the lessons, often by the provision of non-differentiated worksheets, did not provide sufficient challenge nor allowed them to progress as rapidly as a more structured task might.

Teachers across almost all subjects are working hard to embed literacy skills. This was particularly noticeable in some highly effective practice in maths where a year 7 nurture group were being challenged as effectively around their literacy as around their maths skills.

The school is pioneering effective work around growth mind-sets and, in most of the lessons, pupils were confident to try out new approaches and were resilient to failure. In many effective lessons there are clear structures to encourage this attitude. In a maths class, for example, pupils were successfully encouraged to think through questions before asking for help. In a small minority of classes, however, ineffective differentiation results in pupils finding it less easy to remain resilient as they are not able to access the key objectives of the lesson.

Differentiation is clear when looking at the parallel work of different sets, but within individual groups it is not always so apparent. There are occasions when the vocabulary used for tasks can limit the progress of weaker pupils and also times where more thought could be given to the extension work for the most able.

While we comment elsewhere about the overall strategies being used to support disadvantaged pupils, within the lessons, the progress of these pupils was not observably different from that of the other pupils in class. It was also clear that staff were aware of these pupils and were actively supporting them.

There is evidence of quite extensive and successful work on study skills, which has enabled the pupils to have a strong understanding of their individual learning styles and how they can best work effectively. When pupils are given choices about the work they want to do, they are able to articulate the reasons for these choices thoughtfully in ways that show how they support their swift progress.

The school communicates clearly, regularly and effectively with parents, supporting the learning ethos of the school. The school is piloting highly innovative strategies such as parental marking to further build on the effectiveness of this cooperation.

During our visit no use of derogatory language or stereotypes by pupils was heard. Pupils were also adamant that any issues of this nature are challenged and dealt with robustly. The PSHE curriculum and assemblies have been carefully designed to provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of people and communities beyond their immediate experience.

Recommendation:

Continue to develop monitoring and tracking strategies to ensure the consistent application of all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment with a particular emphasis on marking, differentiation and challenge.

Personal Development, Behaviour & Welfare, including SMSC

Pupils are confident, self-assured learners, with positive attitudes and a strong work ethic. They work well both independently and collaboratively. They feel well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and the behaviour of pupils is exemplary.

Pupils report that bullying is rare and that any incidents are always dealt with effectively.

Pupils value their education and the overwhelming majority rarely miss school.

The attendance of PP pupils has been recognised, rightly, by the school as an area for improvement.

SMSC is embedded in the culture of the school, evident on the website, in documentation and in practice in classrooms and around the school.

Outcomes

Outcomes have been consistently high over many years at the college. Target setting is aspirational, with performance targets for staff and pupils set to achieve performance in the top 5% of schools nationally.

Outcomes for all pupils in 2016 were significantly above the national average with 84% achieving passes at GCSE Grade C or above in both English and Maths.

Attainment and progress is significantly above the performance of schools nationally for progress and attainment in English, Maths and the Ebacc.

The progress of all pupils, as measured by national performance tables, is more than half a grade higher in every subject than for pupils nationally, from the same starting point.

Outcomes for higher ability pupils were lower relatively than for other groups of pupils, albeit that attainment was very high. The attainment of middle ability pupils was high and their progress significantly above the national average. For lower ability pupils attainment was higher than their peers nationally and progress was exceptionally high, indicating that this cohort of pupils achieved over 1 grade higher in each GCSE subject, compared to pupils nationally from the same starting point.

The progress of SEN pupils was significantly above the national average in terms of progress. Once again this cohort of pupils achieved over 1 grade higher in each GCSE subject, compared to SEN pupils nationally from the same starting point.

The progress of Pupil Premium (PP) pupils was weaker and their attendance was considerably lower than for other pupils in the school. Their attainment, however, with almost two thirds of pupils achieving GCSE passes at Grades A*-C, is likely to be higher than the national average for all pupils.

The PP report on the website is not sharp enough in evaluating the impact, resulting from the PP expenditure for 2015-16. The report needs to be more evaluative and less descriptive when recording expenditure and impact for 2015-16.

There is no reporting of the Literacy and numeracy catch-up funding on the school's website.

Plans are in place to rectify this situation but they need to include monitoring and tracking of the strategies as well as a stronger evaluation of their impact.

Current data shows that Y11 are on track to achieve excellent outcomes for 2017.

Data analysis and tracking is comprehensive but the LMT need to ensure that it is used to best effect by departments to ensure strong outcomes for **ALL** pupils, esp PP & SEN.

Recommendations:

Give a greater focus to the outcomes for the most able pupils, ensuring that their progress is in line with the aspirational target to be in the top 5% of schools nationally.

Improve the reporting of PP effectiveness, ensuring that PP reporting is both evaluative and focussed on impact.

Develop further the analysis of the performance of PP pupils to dig underneath the causes. Analyse performance in line with national data for 2016, which will show the performance of PP pupils by ability on entry.

Ensure that the expenditure and impact of Y7 catch-up funding is reported internally and on the college website

Overall Effectiveness:

The comprehensive judgement of the review team is that St Richard's Catholic College continues to offer outstanding provision in all aspects of its work.