

Report of the Denominational (Canon 806 & Section 48)
Inspection of
(Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

**St. Benedict's Catholic School
Bury St. Edmunds**

DfE No: 935/4600
URN:124861

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Chair of Governors: Mr A. Herlihy

Headteacher: Mrs I. Senior

Denominational Inspector: Tom Reilly

Dates of Inspection.
30th June & 1st July 2022

Date and grade of previous inspection: July 2013. Grade 1

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

St. Benedict's is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive Catholic school of 952 students in the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia. It is currently a Local Authority Maintained school but is in the late stages of joining the "Our Lady of Walsingham Trust". The school serves the local community of Bury St. Edmunds as well as drawing students from the entire West Suffolk region, East Cambridgeshire, South Norfolk and West Essex. It serves the parishes of Brandon (with Mildenhall), Bury St. Edmunds, Clare, Diss, Haverhill, Newmarket, Stowmarket, Sudbury and Thetford. There are 4 main Catholic primary schools that feed into St. Benedict's school as well as 37 other primary schools across Suffolk, into Norfolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. In recent years, the school has been over-subscribed and in 2019 raised its pupil admission number by 15 to accommodate increased demand for places at the school. The percentage of pupils who are Catholic is 58%, pupils of other Christian denominations is 27% and pupils of other world faiths is 2%. 9% of pupils have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and 14% are Pupil Premium. 30% of staff are Catholic.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC SCHOOL.

Grade 1 Outstanding

St. Benedict's provides an outstanding Catholic education for its pupils. It is a fully inclusive school where the pupils and staff are supported, valued and given opportunities to be a significantly contributing body to the Catholic life of the school. Leaders ensure that the mission of the school is clear and underpins the work of the school. The school community is proud of its Catholic identity and character. It is well regarded in the town of Bury St. Edmund's and is oversubscribed in nearly every year group. The chaplaincy provision is excellent and makes a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school.

What the school needs to do to improve further?

- To develop systems within RE to ensure there is consistent quality feedback which enables pupils to respond effectively.
- To further improve the progress for all groups of pupils in RE at GCSE, by ensuring the very best teaching and practice across the RE department is shared and acted upon.
- For governors and the senior leadership to create a more systematic approach to self-evaluation of Catholic Life and Collective Worship through more formal monitoring procedures.

CATHOLIC LIFE:

Grade 1 Outstanding

Pupils derive great benefit from and make a significant contribution to the 'Catholic Life of the School'. Pupils take full advantage of the wide-ranging opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development. As a result, they are happy, confident and secure in their own spiritual journey. Pupils behave in a respectful and courteous manner in their encounters with each other and with staff, reflecting the commitment of school leaders to the promotion of high standards of behaviour. Large numbers of pupils contribute to the mission of the school through chaplaincy hubs, where pupils lead and contribute to aspects of Catholic life and collective worship such as prayer, liturgy, art, drama, music, stewardship, fundraising, service and publicity. The school offers excellent opportunities to grow spiritually and morally, and one parent wrote "My child is encouraged to participate in the Catholic life of the school

through the school council, chaplaincy hubs and fundraising activities". The school has been joined recently by seven Ukrainian pupils who have been made to feel very welcome in school. One of the Ukrainian pupils said that "this is the best school ever". Older students demonstrate their immense pride in serving and in contributing to the Catholic life of the school.

The mission of the school to be a community of "wisdom, compassion and resilience" is truly lived out in all aspects of the school, namely within the pastoral care of the school but also in the curriculum. The head teacher has been inspirational in holding the school community together particularly during the pandemic and was nominated for a "superhero award" by parents for her daily podcast during the whole of the Covid lockdown. The staff are overwhelmingly proud to be members of St. Benedict's school and see pastoral care as an important part of their role. The Catholic ethos and identity of the school community is visible through the centrality of religious icons and displays throughout the school and the chaplaincy provision is exemplary in supporting the Catholic life of the school. The pastoral systems in school are rooted in Gospel values with a great focus on restorative justice and forgiveness. The 'Relationship and Sex Education' provision is based on the model curriculum provided by the Catholic Education Service. The visiting priest spoke highly of feeling welcomed into the school and was very impressed with the behaviour and positive attitude of pupils.

The school's leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. Leaders and governors have a strong sense of vocation to provide a school that responds to the needs and strengths of both staff and pupils. Leaders are excellent role models and as one member of staff commented "They have an open-door policy to everyone". Staff morale is high, and they feel they are inducted well into the Catholic life of the school. During the pandemic, school leaders ensured that form tutors maintained contact with their pupils and pastoral leaders monitored the impact Covid was having on families. Governors monitor and challenge the leadership of the school with regards Catholic life and are keen to return to monitoring the school through more formal visits after the pandemic. Feedback from parents confirms their appreciation of how the school supported them during this time. The governors are committed to the Church's mission and to providing the best Catholic education possible. This is demonstrated in the way the school supports diocesan policies and has chosen to join the Our Lady of Walsingham Multi Academy Trust in September 2022.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

Grade 2 Good

Most pupils enjoy their religious education lessons. At A' level, pupils achieved an excellent progress score of an ALPS 2 in 2019. This demonstrated clear progress compared with the results in 2017. Pupil numbers at A' level remain healthy. The outcomes at GCSE give strong indications that progress is good, and the last set of public examinations suggested that pupils' progress was in line with the national average of pupils achieving a grade 9-4 for GCSE Religious Studies. The 'Centre-Assessed Grades' (2020) and 'Teacher-Assessed Grades' (2021) were consistent with the data for 2019. Attainment is generally good at the end of key stage 3, with most students reaching a "secure" level, with some students exceeding this.

The quality of teaching is good, and teachers use their subject knowledge to present complex topics in ways which are accessible and engaging for pupils. This means that most pupils make good progress in lessons. The best lessons demonstrated skilful targeted questioning, use of a variety of resources and activities, differentiation and a high level of engagement. Resources were also carefully planned, and one pupil said her "teacher's carefully designed revision resources had helped her through her exams". Displays in RE classrooms are vibrant and informative showing reference to what is being currently taught and key words that pupils will use in religious education. Most pupils respond to key assessment tasks and there is evidence of regular marking in most exercise books. The area the RE department needs to improve upon is to ensure this is consistently done.

Leaders and governors ensure the curriculum fulfils the content and time requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. This means that 10% of curriculum time is provided for Religious Education at key stage 3 and 4 and 5% at key stage 5. Leaders are ambitious to improve outcomes in Religious Education and monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education well and they have identified key areas that need to be improved. The curriculum at key stage 3 covers the main world religions and the pupils say they enjoy this. Sixth form pupils follow a 'Core RE' programme that is also influenced by the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The budget for Religious Education is appropriate and staff in the department are provided with various opportunities for professional development.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

Grade 1 Outstanding

Acts of worship engage all pupils' interest and inspire them in thought and heartfelt response. There is a palpable enthusiasm for Collective Worship, reflected in the quality of prayerful silence and response to community prayers. Pupils respond reverently and respectfully to daily opportunities to experience and participate in form time prayer, and pupils also write their own prayers during this time. One pupil said, "Morning prayer helps me to start my day in a peaceful manner". Pupils are fully active in the prayer life of the school and through the chaplaincy hubs there are opportunities for pupils to plan and deliver prayer and liturgies. In the assemblies and form time prayers that took place during the inspection, pupils were fully engaged and responsive. The school is well supported by the Deanery Clergy and the priest who led the St. Peter and St. Paul Feast Day Mass spoke very highly of the pupils' reverence and response. Pupils attend weekly voluntary Mass in large numbers and the school chapel is regularly used.

The quality of provision for collective worship is outstanding, mainly due to the inspirational leadership of the lay chaplain. He supports and encourages staff and pupils to participate and lead in Mass, assemblies, retreats and mission days. Even on the Duke of Edinburgh expedition he arranged for Mass to be said on the site. The school hosted a Mission week during the year which pupils said helped them with their own faith journeys and their response to God. The Chaplaincy team also arranged to pray the rosary for the people of Ukraine and again, pupils attended in large numbers. The Chaplaincy calendar ensures assemblies reflect the liturgical year of the Catholic Church and that important feast days/special events are celebrated at Mass or other liturgies. Opportunities for Reconciliation take place during Advent and Lent and students receiving Confirmation are supported and celebrated. Staff briefing always starts with a prayer which sets the tone for the day.

Strategic leadership of the prayer life of the school is provided by the headteacher and the chaplain. Assemblies, Form time prayer and Mass are all monitored and evaluated by the leadership team and the chaplain; however, more formal monitoring would be beneficial. Prayer and "Thought for the Day" was provided online through the interruptions of the pandemic and was a great support to staff and pupils. Leaders and the chaplain model quality collective worship, and support middle leaders in delivering assemblies. The school's motto is "Prayer and work" and they are at the centre of St. Benedict's school. The leaders and chaplain ensure that the highest priority is given to prayer in order to support their daily work.

The diocesan inspector wishes to thank the headteacher, staff, pupils, governors and the whole community for their very warm and friendly welcome and their valuable input into the life of St. Benedict's school.



EAST ANGLIA DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' SERVICE
Deputy Director of Schools' Service: Mr Flavio Vettese
The White House, 21 Upgate,
Poringland, NR14 7SH
Tel: 01508 495509

Letter to pupils explaining the findings from the Diocesan Inspection

1st July 2022

Dear Pupils

Diocesan Inspection of St. Benedict's Catholic School

Thank you very much for making me so welcome to your school on Thursday 30th June and Friday 1st July. Thank you too, to the pupils who met with me to give their views about the school. I was very interested to hear how you all feel safe and happy, and how you enjoy your Religious Education lessons.

Here are some of the things I especially liked:

- The welcoming character of your school where you feel valued and cared for
- I enjoyed the positive way you conducted yourselves around school and were polite and courteous to me and each other
- I really enjoyed the year 7 & 8 assembly I attended and how some of you volunteered to participate in the assembly
- I was very impressed hearing some of the prayers you wrote and read out during form time
- I was also very pleased to hear about your fundraising activities and the charities that you support

I have asked your Religious Education teachers to work on improving the progress you make in Religious Education, in order that more of you reach and exceed your target grades. I have also asked them to ensure that they give you time in lessons so more of you respond to the feedback that your teachers give you in your books. Finally, I asked them to monitor the Catholic life and Collective worship of the school more formally to help to improve your school even further.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely
Mr Tom Reilly
Diocesan Inspector