

SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

BLESSED THOMAS HOLFORD CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Description of the College

Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College is a smaller than average sized college. The school has 780 pupils on roll, is oversubscribed and has specialist status in Maths and Computing. The college's intake is influenced by the presence of grammar and private schools in the local area. A proportion of pupils come from areas with high levels of social and economic deprivation. There are small but growing numbers of pupils from ethnic minorities. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is about the national average. There is a higher than average number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. 98% of pupils are Catholic with 2% from other Christian Traditions.

Overall effectiveness of the College

Grade 1

Blessed Thomas Holford is an outstanding Catholic college in which the vision set out in the statement of its values and purpose is evidently lived and experienced: 'We commit ourselves to the development of the whole person and the pursuit of excellence'. This is done within a culture of respect and tolerance, in which emphasis is given to praise and reward and where pupils and staff have a sense of pride and belonging to the College Community.

Improvement since the last inspection

Grade 1

All recommendations made at the last inspection have been fully met.

Leadership and Management of the Catholic Life and Ethos of the College

Grade 1

The Headteacher has a clear and inspiring vision of the Catholic mission of the college which addresses the needs of all the pupils and is 'committed to the development of the whole person and the pursuit of excellence'. A vision underpinned by the Christian belief that 'all are unique and equal in the eyes of God' and which motivates pupils to aspire to achieve high academic standards. It is a vision shared by the Senior Leadership and all the staff and in turn inspires self belief in pupils. Throughout their years in the college pupils are constantly encouraged and helped by a very supportive and professional staff. When asked what they liked best about the college they frequently mentioned the support and encouragement of the teachers who believe in them and in what they can achieve.

Attention is given to staff development including aspects on the Catholic nature and purpose of the college. The voluntary staff residential retreat was one example of this and was much appreciated by all who took part. The Newly Qualified Teachers speak highly of the induction process and of all the support and encouragement given to them. There is evidence of constant self-evaluation undertaken by the staff as a whole

and in departments and other aspects of college life. Teachers taking up new posts in other schools expressed real sorrow at leaving the college. The relationships between staff and pupils is an outstanding feature of the college and this includes not just teaching staff but all staff involved in the college in different ways – office staff, caretakers, dinner ladies and cleaners. There is a clear sense of family.

Pupils speak with real pride about being a member of the college. They appreciate the time and energy given by teachers in the various subjects of the curriculum and in the very many extra curricular activities available to them. They see the college as a safe place where there is little or no bullying and when this occurs they know that it is dealt with quickly and effectively. There is a strong and active Pupil Council in both the lower and upper school. They speak with pride of many of the aspects of school life on which they have had an influence. They raise money to fund various projects within the college. Pupils are involved in many activities for various charities and in fund raising for deserving causes, these include SVP, CAFOD, Fair Trade and other activities. There is a global, wider community dimension in the work undertaken for the Notre Dame School in Uganda, in the correspondence with schools in France, Germany and Poland.

The system of Pastoral care is an outstanding feature of the college. The Pastoral Office and the well staffed Learning Centre are evidence of this. The Learning Centre is well used by pupils with a great variety of needs. There are 15 well trained and experienced Teacher Assistants who help in the Centre and assist individual pupils in lessons. The Pupil Welfare Committee meets frequently to check that all the needs of pupils are cared for and this ensures that pupils are well known by staff. The system of Pastoral Care is very much a team effort and a particular outstanding feature is the communication between all staff in addressing the needs of pupils. There is a clear system of rewards and sanctions known and appreciated by staff and pupils. Great emphasis is placed on praise and rewards and these are celebrated in rewards evenings, in trips, in praise cards sent to parents. The spiritual and moral education of pupils is a very high priority of the college. It is clearly evidenced in the R.E., PSHE, Sex Education lessons, in assemblies, and in the work of different departments. The well produced displays around the school also add to and enhance the spiritual and moral education of the pupils.

There is an active Chaplaincy Team of nine members from Senior Leadership, R.E. and other departments. They plan and prepare the liturgical calendar for the year. They provide an excellent service in this regard. While considering seriously the need of a Lay Chaplain, we would urge caution in so far as the college needs someone who can work with and be part of the team.

Governors are well informed and active. They are involved in the life of the college. They take seriously the duty of developing the Catholic life of the college. This is evidenced in their provision of excellent accommodation for the R.E. department and of the provision of the Notre Dame Prayer room which is well used by pupils at lunch breaks and other times.

Though we did not meet any parents there was clear evidence of their appreciation in the very many responses sent in for the Ofsted Inspection and in the responses given

to us by the pupils who were adamant that their parents were happy with the college and the care and encouragement provided by the staff.

There are good links with local parishes and much appreciation for the time given by the priests who come into the college. Due to the falling numbers of priests planning is under way for providing suitable liturgical services.

Collective Worship.

Grade 1.

Acts of Collective Worship observed were very well prepared, stimulating, reflective, prayerful and orderly. There was good use of PowerPoint and music and although led by staff, there was participation by the students and pupils were attentive. Pupils appreciate the thoughtful reflection and messages which are provided during these assemblies. There is a rota for staff leading assemblies. Throughout the year there are Masses for year groups and whole school Masses. The special liturgical seasons are celebrated. All of this gives evidence of the careful planning of the Chaplaincy Team. Form Time is a productive period in which there is time for relevant reflection and prayer as well as the giving of notices in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. The R.E. department has prepared useful resources, including prayers by the pupils, for use in Form Time. Good use is made of the College Prayer which pupils know and which is clearly displayed in the pupils' diaries.

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education. Grade 1.

Standards in Religious Education have continued to improve since the last inspection and the most recent results have exceeded even the aspirational target grades for the year group. At 82% A*-C they are significantly higher than the national average of 58%, much higher than very many schools and above the overall college results. The same is true of the A*-G grades which at 100% are also above national and similar results. Measured against the ability and attainment of the pupils when they arrived in Year 7 this represents substantial achievement in the value that the college adds to the pupils' standards and attainment. The results in the Key Stage 3 tests also show a significant upward improvement over the same period.

In all lessons all pupils make significant progress in knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject. This includes the gifted and talented pupils and those with special needs. Their learning matches the quality of teaching and achievement and standards are outstanding.

Teaching and Learning in Religious Education.

Grade 1

In all lessons observed teaching and learning were outstanding. This is a remarkable achievement on the part of the teachers and the pupils. Every teacher has very good subject knowledge. The preparation of the lessons in terms of both planning and resources was excellent. All lessons had clear, relevant and differentiated learning objectives which were shared with the pupils and underpinned all of the learning. Lessons started very promptly and the pace of them was very good. Classroom management, which was firm but relaxed, was excellent. In all lessons the teachers encouraged a variety of learning methods which suited the various needs of individual

pupils. The use of ICT to enhance achievement was a particular strength. They had very high expectations of every individual and excellent use was made of giving the pupils time to reflect and to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers made constant reference to the learning objectives for the lessons and there was a variety of assessment methods throughout. The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils and between pupils themselves is a strength of the college. All classrooms had high quality displays which enhanced learning.

The pupils responded well to the challenges set. They applied themselves for the whole duration of the lesson and the vast majority completed homework on time. They stated that they enjoyed R.E. and readily shared their opinions with their peers. They were all aware of the levels that they were working at, what their targets were for examinations and what they needed to do to improve. The use of targets is enhancing attainment.

Leadership and Management of the RE Department Grade 1

The Head of Department has a very strong and clear vision for its development. This is centred on the college's mission statement and is shared by every teacher. It is centred, quite correctly, on the fullest possible development for every individual pupil. This shared vision has enabled the formation of a very strong team which works well and communication between them is very good. The fruits of this are seen in the most recent test results. Teachers now set and focus on aspirational targets for pupils and there are high expectations for all to achieve well. The department is very effectively managed in a way that ensures the very best use of good accommodation, teachers, resources and time.

Recommendations for improvement

We make no specific recommendations for improvement but simply encourage the Headteacher, the Senior Leadership, Staff and Governors to continue to develop and evaluate the excellent work being done.