

# St Boniface's RC College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113558
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	378730
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Sadler

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	803
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	129
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steve Hole
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Eccles
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6–7 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	21 St Boniface Lane Manadon Park Plymouth PL5 3AG
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 40 lessons taught by 40 teachers and held meetings with staff, members of the governing body and groups of students. They observed the college's work, and looked at documentation including that relating to students' attainment and progress, strategic planning and the safeguarding of students. They analysed questionnaires completed by staff, students and by 61 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Attainment in 2011 to see if students' outcomes are improving.
- The impact of action taken to raise attainment and achievement in, especially, English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching and assessment to see if they are having a good impact on students' learning and progress.
- The impact of leadership and management on improving outcomes for students, including in the sixth form.

## Information about the school

Students at the college, which is of average size, come from the city and surrounding area. Most are of the Roman Catholic faith, but students from all faith backgrounds are welcomed. Students also have a wide range of ethnic heritage, although most are White British. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Their needs relate mainly to moderate learning difficulties, or to disabilities on the autistic spectrum.

The sixth form provides courses in partnership with a number of other schools and colleges. There are a small number of girls on the sixth form roll. The college makes specialist provision in science and mathematics.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

The college provides its students with a good education. There is clear evidence that good improvements are taking place. Attainment is rising, both at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. Because of improved teaching, students are making good progress. Previous good behaviour and a thorough understanding by students of personal safety have been maintained. Students say they are happy in the college, including the sixth form, which is reflected in their high attendance. Care, guidance and support for students is a strength, seen, for example, in the particularly good progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the fact that the number of former students not in education, employment or training is very low. Most students have high aspirations but some, notably those of average attainment, lack confidence in what they are capable of achieving.

The college makes excellent use of its wide-ranging partnerships with other schools and colleges, with local businesses, the church, and with the local authority. These enable it to offer a good range of curriculum opportunities designed to meet the needs of individual students. The science and mathematics specialism is used well to provide a high quality curriculum in these areas and to support the development of these subjects in local primary schools. Astute use of the expertise of local authority staff has improved provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as in aspects of leadership such as the training of the governing body.

College leaders set demanding targets for students and for staff at all levels. These are understood well by all members of the college community. Progress in meeting these targets is monitored in increasingly sophisticated and effective ways which are enabling teachers to refine their planning to meet students' needs. Currently, this approach is used more effectively in some subjects such as science and mathematics than in others such as English and modern foreign languages. As a result, there remains some variation in the quality of teaching and hence, in students' attainment and progress across the college. However, in almost all lessons, students' good attitudes and behaviour helps them to make progress. Teachers' good subject knowledge, the clarity of the tasks set and effective support from teaching assistants means that in most cases this progress is good.

The college has experienced a period of transition since the last inspection. In 2009, college leaders commissioned a review by external consultants which identified weaknesses in a number of key areas, including teaching and students' progress. The

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effective headteacher has built a strong team of senior leaders who have addressed these matters with vigour. These strengths are now extending to middle leadership, which is currently stronger in some subject areas than in others. Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and accurate, and have been successful in identifying and rectifying weaknesses in teaching. Data are now analysed thoroughly and used to track students' progress in order to identify slower progress by individuals or groups, which is then rectified. Strategic plans, long and short term, have been drawn up and measurable success criteria have been established in order to measure progress. The effective governing body has given strong support to senior leaders through this process of change and has successfully challenged them, for example to raise students' attainment in religious education. Good arrangements have been put in place to ensure students' safety and matters such as child protection are given high priority. These features demonstrate the college's good capacity for further improvement. Leaders, managers and the governing body all rightly aspire to provide education of outstanding quality in the future.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- In order to further raise attainment and improve students' progress:
  - ensure that effective use is made of assessment to plan work that meets individual students' needs, notably in English and modern foreign languages
  - strengthen subject leadership so that it is as effective in all subject areas as is already the case in some such as science and mathematics
  - for some students of average attainment, improve their confidence in what they are capable of achieving.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Students' attainment in GCSE and other examinations at the end of Year 11 is average. It is rising, initial data showing it to be higher in 2011 than in 2010. Work seen in lessons and in the college's tracking of students' progress confirmed that attainment continues to rise throughout the college. For example, a Year 11 physics class, mostly given demanding targets around grade B on the basis of earlier performance, are now on track to attain grades A\* or A. Such evidence shows that students are making good progress, although this remains better in some subjects than others. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make especially good progress with many attaining grade C or above in GCSE examinations. These students also attain well and make good progress in other courses such as BTEC. Scrutiny of work and data shows that no group of students achieve less well than others, although the college's current priority to further raise attainment at the highest levels is the correct one.

Students behave well, especially in lessons, so the learning of others is not held back by poor behaviour. They report that some bullying occurs, although it is generally

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dealt with effectively. They feel safe and know how to stay so, for example when using the internet, although they say they would like more regular updating, given the rapid changes in this technology. Students have a good awareness of health issues and respond well to guidance on diet and exercise. Older students told inspectors they would like more guidance on sexual health issues. Students make a good contribution to the community by taking responsibility and through working in the local and church communities. The latter makes an important contribution to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students in Years 7 to 11 get exposure to a range of cultural opportunities. For older students, this experience is more dependent on their choice of subjects. Development of the skills students will need later in life is good. They develop good skills of teamwork and independence. They are adept at using skills of numeracy and information and communication technology. Literacy skills are more patchy, with oral presentation, for example to a group of peers, a relative weakness when students are less confident.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

The college can provide good evidence that teaching has improved in the last few years. Teachers plan interesting tasks that motivate students, for example in geography, Year 8 students prepared a presentation on the production, marketing and consumption of a product with real-time interventions by the teacher, such as 'The cost of oil has risen sharply. What impact will this have on your product?' They made excellent progress and worked with great enthusiasm. In science, very low-attaining students in Year 7 observed cheek cells through good quality microscopes.

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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In spite of their very low levels of literacy, they were able to identify and explain key features of the cells, in part because of the excellent adaptation of teaching materials undertaken by the teacher. Assessment is increasingly sophisticated. For example, in the sixth form, rather than being given a single 'target grade', students are given tables showing their chances of attaining a certain grade from their own GCSE performance. This encourages a competitive element in that a student can aim, say, for a grade A knowing it is attained by a certain percentage of students starting at the same point. These strengths are not consistently apparent across all subjects. A few teachers, notably in English and modern foreign languages, remain less adept at ways of using assessment to plan work that sharply meets the needs of students.

The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities. The science and mathematics specialism has given rise to courses in subjects such as forensics and astronomy. Students speak highly of the quality and range of the opportunities for sport and exercise both in and beyond the college day. There is a wide range of other additional activities, including drama, music and residential opportunities such as faith retreats. Outstanding links with other schools and colleges broaden the range of opportunities for study still further for those in Year 10 and above. A relative weakness in the curriculum is the limited provision of modern foreign languages.

Care, guidance and support are strong. Students who may be vulnerable are supported very well, for example in enabling individuals to attend a drug rehabilitation programme. Students are given good advice and support when moving from one stage of education to the next. The small number of girls in the sixth form spoke very highly of the support they receive. Teaching assistants know their students well and their good support extends to care as well as assistance in learning. This support is available to a wide range of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and students at an early stage of learning English.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body provide good strategic direction for the college. Their main objective is to raise attainment and improve students' progress through improved teaching and learning. This is being achieved through a more rigorous approach to the management of staff performance. The majority of staff endorse this model of improvement. Recent effective appointments

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of middle leaders, notably in mathematics and science, have successfully reinvigorated the process of change. Monitoring and evaluation are regular, accurate and are used to inform strategic plans. The governing body, in spite of unexpected upheavals such as the untimely passing of the former chair, has remained focused on its core tasks of supporting the college and holding senior leaders to account. Safeguarding of students is given a high priority and all requirements are met. The security of the grounds, for example, is much improved. Equality of opportunity is promoted well, as is demonstrated by the even achievement of all groups of students, and discrimination and racist behaviour are not tolerated. The governing body and senior leaders acknowledge that their duty to promote community cohesion has been given a lower priority. As a result, while students generally have a good understanding of, and show tolerance towards, those of a different faith or culture, this aspect is satisfactory. Partnership working is excellent and the effective way in which local authority services are used, for instance in conducting a recent safety audit, is a good example of this. The college makes every effort to communicate well with parents and carers, but the relatively large distances some live from the college and other barriers mean that this is not universally recognised by the parent and carer body.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

As with the rest of the college, the sixth form is improving. Attainment, while average, is rising steadily. Students leave as well-rounded young adults who achieve success at university and in other walks of life. The college has put in place a curriculum that better meets the needs of students, for instance through the provision of vocational courses. Changes in leadership have increased the emphasis on good teaching and, in particular, better use of assessment. Students say they

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greatly enjoy college life, as is reflected in their high attendance. The college has introduced a system where a single mentor is provided to support and advise them and their parents and carers. A minority of students and their parents or carers are yet to be convinced of the value of this approach and prefer consultation with subject specialist staff. In the great majority of sixth-form teaching seen, students made at least good progress in a calm, professional atmosphere. Leaders and managers have successfully promoted a more rigorous approach to the improvement of teaching and other aspects of sixth-form provision, and this is beginning to have a positive impact on students' outcomes.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned the inspectors' questionnaire was well below average. Of those that responded, almost all agreed their child was safe at college and the very large majority agreed they enjoyed being there. Most felt their child's individual needs were met and that he/she was prepared well for the future. Inspection evidence supports these positive views.

A small minority of parents and carers expressed reservations about the quality of information they received about their child's progress. Inspection evidence found that the recently introduced mentoring system was not yet fully understood by all students and their parents or carers, and that further steps should be taken to ensure that this does not remain the case. Other small minorities expressed concern over the management of unacceptable behaviour and the leadership and management of the college. Inspectors found during this inspection that they could not endorse these areas of concern.

A few parents and carers raised individual matters with inspectors. These were fully investigated and inspectors were satisfied that these matters were being handled appropriately by the governing body or by senior leaders.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Boniface's College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 61 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 803 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	30	38	62	3	5	2	3
The school keeps my child safe	24	39	35	57	2	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	26	30	49	13	21	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	30	32	52	8	13	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	19	31	29	48	9	15	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	23	31	51	13	21	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	23	33	54	12	20	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	33	31	51	6	10	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	31	34	56	6	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	26	26	43	14	23	3	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	20	30	49	9	15	4	7
The school is led and managed effectively	12	20	35	57	6	10	7	11
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	28	33	54	9	15	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



20 October 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of St Boniface's RC College, Plymouth PL5 3AG**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited the college recently. Special thanks to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us and give us your views.

St Boniface's is a good college. It is also improving. Recent leavers have attained average results in their GCSE, A Level and other examinations. Your work and the teachers' records show that your progress is good. Those of you who receive extra help for your learning are making especially good progress. We found you behave well, although there is a small amount of bullying. You know how to stay healthy and safe. We were impressed by your high attendance, including in the sixth form, which shows you enjoy coming to college.

Teaching is good and is improving. Teachers expect a lot of you and you respond well. Most teachers plan work that is matched well to what you need to learn next, but we found that this varies from subject to subject and have asked the college to make this more consistent. The college offers a good range of courses and has excellent partnerships with other schools and colleges. There are also plenty of out-of-school activities, such as sport and through the links with the church. You are cared for very well and told us you get good advice for the choices you need to make for the future.

The headteacher and other senior leaders form a strong team and are supported well by the governing body. They know what needs to be improved and are passionate about doing so, especially when it comes to teaching. You can help by taking opportunities to discuss what you believe to be the strengths and weaknesses of the college. We are confident that you have the maturity to do so effectively.

Yours sincerely

Paul Sadler  
Lead inspector

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