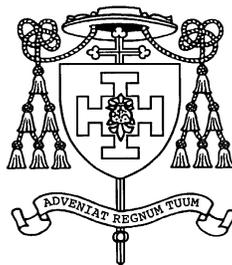


THE DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY



St John Plessington Catholic College, Bebington

URN 105109
DfES No 344 4605

15th & 16th November 2007

**Report on the
Inspection of Denominational Education**

**Lead Inspector : Mr J Toye
Link Inspector : Rev J Gallagher, SDB**

St John Plessington Catholic College is a Voluntary Aided 11-18 co-educational comprehensive school in the Trusteeship of the Diocese of Shrewsbury and maintained by Wirral Local Authority. There are 1,308 students on role with 228 in the Sixth Form. 98% of students are white British, 99.5% have English as their first language, 33.5% are eligible for free school meals; 5.7% joined the school later than the beginning of Year 7. The college's social deprivation indicator is twice the national expectation (0.4%). There is a higher proportion of students with SEN than would be expected nationally (20% with SEN including statements). Most students transfer from the designated diocesan partner primary schools with a significant number coming from a wide range of primary schools across the Wirral. Just over 80% of students are Catholic, approximately 15% of students are of other Christian denominations, 5% are of other faiths. According to NFER CAT data the top ability end is significantly lower than the national average as a result of the selective nature of education on the Wirral.

Overall effectiveness.

Grade 1

St John Plessington Catholic College is outstanding in its leadership and management, its collective worship and prayer, the teaching and learning and standards achieved in Religious Education and in its strong sense of community.

Improvement since the last inspection.

Grade 1

All recommendations have been fully met.

Leadership and management of the Catholic life and ethos of the College

Grade 1

The Headteacher has a very clear, strong vision of the Catholic mission of the college and has in place robust but sensitive management strategies which ensure that the vision is lived out in all aspects of the life and ethos of the college. This sense of the Catholic mission of the college is supported and shared by a highly dedicated Senior Leadership Team. It is fully appreciated, shared and supported by all staff. The focus is entirely on the holistic development of the students and on enabling them to achieve to the best of their ability. This aim is clearly set out in the Mission Statement: 'value and celebrate the achievements of all; support all our school community'. Students, new teachers and all staff recognise that a strong feature of the ethos of the college is the fact that they feel fully supported. Students say that they can approach any teacher and other staff and say that they gain confidence in the calm, safe environment of the college. Members of staff speak highly of the help and support of colleagues. Both students and staff speak of a strong sense of 'community', 'family'. The appreciation and understanding of the Catholic dimension of education is promoted in staff in-service and in the induction of new teachers.

There is a well developed overall pastoral care system which involves many members of staff with different roles and responsibilities working closely and purposefully together: Senior Leadership, Heads of Learning, Learning Coaches, Assistant Headteachers, those with oversight of the Assisi Centre and Special Learning Centre as well as the Chaplain. There are a variety of meetings in which staff review the care and achievement of individual students by sharing knowledge and understanding of their needs and capabilities – 'no one falls through the net'. This cohesive, tight knit collaborative approach to the pastoral care of students is an outstanding feature of the college. A unique feature of the pastoral care is the work of the Learning Coaches attached to each year group who have time to meet and talk to students and who assist them by drawing up with them a personal Achievement Plan. Parents receive copies of these each term. Other outstanding features of this overall care for students are The Assisi Centre and the Special Learning Centre. The dedication of staff in these centres and the well set out accommodation are impressive and provide a safe, calm environment in which students can learn and are enabled to re-integrate into the life of the college. This is further enhanced by the work of a large number of Learning Assistants and by the availability of the Chaplain.

There is a clear system of rewards and sanctions which is known and appreciated by students and staff. Emphasis is placed on rewarding and praising work well done, attendance, good behaviour and effort. Care is taken to ensure that the work and effort of all students is recognised and rewarded. This is acknowledged and celebrated in many ways, for example by sending Praise Postcards home and in

Award Assemblies and Evenings. The spiritual and moral development of students is a high priority in the college. This is evidenced in Religious Education and other curriculum areas, in Collective Worship, in Academic Review time in each form, in the work of the Chaplain and in the artistic displays throughout the college. It is evident in the good behaviour of students as they move around the college and in the respect they show to staff and other students. The retreats organised for each year group contribute greatly to the spiritual, moral and social development of students. Students say that they enjoy and gain much from such experiences.

The Student Council is well structured and is effective. Students proudly speak of a number of improvements in the life of the college in which they have been influential. Students are encouraged and enabled to take on a number of responsibilities in the college. Sixth formers and others act as 'buddies' and peer mentors to individual younger students or help in different forms and classes. They have an hour a week in which they undertake some form of Community Service in the college or primary schools. There is a good deal of work done for charities and people in need. Students undertake this in different ways and by organising special events during the college year in which students of all years eagerly participate.

Much is done to ensure an easy, non-threatening transition of primary pupils into the larger, more complex world of the college and so secure a more confident, settled and successful start to Key Stage 3. Teachers and others visit the partner primaries. Primary pupils and teachers spend time in the college. Induction Days and Evenings are organised. Students and parents appreciate the work done in this regard. Relationships with partner primary schools are very good. Relationships with parishes and local clergy are also very good. The Headteacher and other staff meet with clergy over a meal on several occasions during the year. The Headteacher attends meetings with clergy and others in the Diocesan Pastoral Area.

Parents are well informed of their children's progress. They receive nine reports each year: three from Learning Coaches (the Achievement Plan) and six subject reports (one each half term). They are contacted on other occasions when members of staff deem it necessary and helpful. Students say that their parents are happy with what the college does for them. Parent Days are well attended.

The Governing Body plays a significant and supportive role. The members are dedicated and generous with their time. They are strong in their support of the Catholic life and ethos of the college. While offering strong support, they are also 'critical friends' to the Headteacher and Senior Leadership.

Collective Worship

Grade 1

The Acts of Collective Worship are outstanding. They are very well prepared and led by both teachers and students. They are well paced and have a clear focus which engages the attention of all students and to which they positively respond. There is a variety of content and delivery: prayer, reflective readings, music, drama, role play and Power Point presentations, all of which are apt and relevant to the theme. Students show great respect as they enter and leave the hall. Academic Review time in each form is well used. There is a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and good relationships between tutors and students. There is provision for reflective prayer in which tutors and students willingly participate. There are many examples which demonstrate that prayer is integral to the life of the college. A recent innovation is the introduction of meditation periods in the chapel which are well attended. Helpful resources on a weekly theme for reflection and prayer are provided for tutors and others by the Chaplain and Religious Education Department. There is a Liturgy Group which plans and prepares various celebrations throughout the year. There is a weekly voluntary Mass and Mass on Holy Days. There is the Welcome Mass for Year 7 and Leavers' Masses for Years 11 and 13. Students remembered with appreciation their active participation in the Year 7 Mass.

The chapel is well used by individuals and various groups. The presence and availability of the Chaplain is valued by students and staff and contributes significantly to the spiritual life of the school.

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education.

Grade 1

At A* - C the GCSE results in Religious Education are 57% and are below the college average of 66%. At A* - G they are well above both the college and the national averages. When taking account of the large number of students entered for the examination and considering the value added to their learning then these results are outstanding. There is also an upward trend in the results over recent years. The AS and A2 pass rates are both 100%. At Key Stage 3 there is also an upward trend in test results. The Department now uses the diocesan level indicators which give more accurate results than in previous years because they are standardised. The number of students achieving level 7, for example, has risen considerably from 2% last year to 7% this year. All students of all abilities, including Y13 General Religious Education, are making very significant progress in their gains in knowledge, skills and understanding in all lessons. A Y9 lesson, for example, with very low ability students, was outstanding and the students clearly made very good progress in their learning and in their social skills. Pupils with special educational needs are ably assisted in their learning by teaching assistants.

Teaching and Learning in Religious Education.

Grade 1

All lessons observed were always good and many were outstanding. All teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are totally committed to both the subject and to the attainment and personal development of their students. The preparation of lessons in terms of planning and of content is conscientious and exemplary. Classroom management is excellent. The pace of learning in all lessons was good. The quality of relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves is a strength of the college. Teachers and students display mutual respect and the behaviour of students in lessons is faultless. A noticeable feature of this college is that teaching clearly addresses the learning styles of different types of learners and work is differentiated both by task and by outcome. A mark of the high expectations of teachers is that they are disappointed if their lesson is judged to be good and not outstanding. The students' response to lessons reflects exactly the quality of teaching. It was always good and often outstanding. They responded well to tasks set, listened intently, when necessary, were engaged in learning, remained on task, were very well motivated and expressed the view that they enjoyed learning in religious education. All students were fully aware of their target grades in all lessons and were willing to undertake the necessary steps to improve their attainment. The excellent displays in classrooms create a good learning environment and enhance learning.

Leadership and Management of the Religious Education Department.

Grade 1

The Head of Department has a very strong and clear vision for the development of this Department. It is centred on all students achieving their maximum potential both academically and personally. All of the teachers subscribe to this vision and the Department has, therefore, formed a strong team. The management of the Department is outstanding. This is evident in many aspects of its work. Lesson planning follows a consistent format, always states learning objectives which are shared with students in every lesson. The good use of whiteboards is evident in every lesson and the work is very well planned. The teaching includes work to suit different learning styles and work has been done in order for these things to happen. There is clear evidence of differentiation by task in all lessons. Target setting is embedded in the work of the Department and is of a very high quality. The marking by all teachers indicates to students what they have to do to improve their attainment. The monitoring by both the Head of Department and the line-manager, who is an Assistant Head, is of a very high quality. The leadership and management of the Religious Education Department is, therefore, outstanding

Recommendation

The Religious Education Department should explore alternative courses for the small number of students for whom the full GCSE course may not be appropriate.

Capacity for improvement

There are very effective systems in place to ensure continuous development of the Catholic mission and aims of the college.