

St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122366
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359237
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Hancock HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Desmond Duffy
Headteacher	Mrs Lucy Croft
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Telephone number	01670 813658
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 18 part-lessons which involved a total of 14 teachers and held meetings with members of the governing body and staff. The inspectors met and talked with pupils in lessons and around the school. They observed the school's work and analysed 89 questionnaires completed by parents and carers and others from pupils and staff. Pupils' work and school documentation, such as safeguarding information and records of pupils' progress, were examined.

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

- The extent of recent improvement in the school's overall effectiveness.
- Learning and progress in English and mathematics, particularly by boys who have underachieved in the past.
- The effectiveness of assessment practice, target-setting, and tracking systems to raise pupils' achievement.

Information about the school

St Benedict's is a small middle school located in the south-east part of Northumberland. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average. Nearly all students speak English as their first language and there are very few from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The school is subject to reorganisation proposals and an acting headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in January 2010.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Benedict's is a satisfactory school which has recently improved. For example, the school took effective action to rectify a dip in national test results following the previous inspection. As a result, attainment in English and mathematics has improved this year. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher are making sure the school continues to move forward and there is a secure trend of improvement. They are effectively supported by the governing body, and leadership, management, and therefore the capacity to improve is satisfactory. The school knows there is more to be done and is rightly making more frequent monitoring of outcomes and holding leaders to account a high priority. Accurate self-evaluation ensures the key strengths and areas for development are well known. Resources are being well used and value for money is satisfactory.

Achievement, learning and progress are satisfactory and boys, who have underachieved in recent years, are now also making satisfactory progress. Pupils say they enjoy learning most in lessons when work is well matched to their individual needs and interests. The climate for learning is enhanced by their positive attitudes, good behaviour and well above average attendance. The school has made improving attainment a top priority and inspection evidence confirms school data that learning and progress are quickly improving. Standards of attainment in English and mathematics were close to average in national tests at Key Stage 2 in 2010 and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress.

Teaching is satisfactory and inspection evidence confirms the proportion of good and better teaching is rapidly increasing. The school knows that making all teaching and learning good and better is central to gaining higher standards and achievement. Assessment practice is improving and the systems used to set targets and track pupils' progress are more effective. There is still work to be done to make practice consistently good. Pupils have a strong sense of spiritual, moral, social and cultural responsibility which makes a significant contribution to the positive ethos of the school, and strategies to promote community cohesion are good.

The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles is good and the care, guidance and support they receive are strong features of the school's work. There are good safeguarding procedures in place and students say they feel safe. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted and partnerships to promote learning are strong as a result of good relationships between parents and carers, local schools and extended services.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure school improvement continues at a good pace by:
 - frequently monitoring outcomes and taking prompt action to rectify any shortfall.
- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - building upon current strategies to improve learning and achievement.
- Make all teaching and assessment good and better by:
 - sharing best practice.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils display positive attitudes to learning, behave well and listen carefully to their teachers. They answer questions confidently and particularly enjoy learning when the work captures their individual interests. For example in a Year 8 English lesson, good progress was made in a short period of time learning how writers convey moods and feelings. Learning and progress are satisfactory because attainment is average from broadly average starting points for most pupils. Inspection evidence confirms that all the different groups of pupils make satisfactory progress, including boys who are learning more rapidly and making better progress in English and mathematics. The school knows increasing the rate of progress in all subjects by using more challenging targets is a high priority.

Senior leaders are making the right improvements to aim to ensure high quality learning is always consistently delivered by monitoring lessons and tracking pupils' progress more frequently. As a result, attainment is rising including for boys. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because well-timed intervention and individual learning programmes are supporting their learning well. Pupils have a good understanding of issues related to their safety and their good behaviour in lessons and around the school is a strong feature of the positive climate for learning. They make a good contribution to the school and the wider community, for example through the work of the school council and links with a local care home. High-participation levels in a range of sports activities contribute strongly to pupils' good understanding of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for their future lives and economic well-being and their understanding of the world of work is effectively developed through activities such as the business enterprise week.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and inspection evidence confirms the proportion of good teaching is quickly rising. The best teaching uses challenging tasks and well-established routines. Clearly understood targets develop pupils' understanding at a good pace and intervention is sensitive to the needs of all groups of pupils. When the teaching is less effective, planning does not always reflect a thorough understanding of pupils' previous learning and activities are insufficiently well matched to all their needs. The school is sharing best practice more widely to speed up the pace of school improvement.

Improvements in assessment practice are the result of teachers checking progress more frequently. The best practice provides clear steps for improvement and targets are clearly understood by pupils. Effective action is being taken to make practice more consistent and ensure it is always good. The curriculum is good because it increasingly meets pupil's requirements and interests and is enhanced by staffing arrangements which make sure pupils are taught by specialists wherever possible. Enrichment activities are valued, for example visits to local castles and Roman museums. Work with partners to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is a strong feature of the good care, guidance and support pupils receive. Pupils settle in quickly in their first year due to the good transfer arrangements.

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

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Clear vision and effective action by senior leaders are making sure the areas which require most improvement are being tackled. There is a sharp focus on raising attainment which is reflected in the school's priorities and is evident in rising levels of attainment and better progress by pupils. The pace of improvement is constrained because there is no substantive headteacher and this contributes to capacity to improve being only satisfactory. The governing body is effectively supporting and challenging the school and the key strengths and areas for improvement are known as a result of recent self-evaluation.

Safeguarding arrangements are good as a consequence of more effective monitoring of quality assurance and risk assessment systems. All forms of discrimination and barriers to learning are being tackled and the promotion of equality of opportunity is good. The personal development of pupils is good and the school is taking effective action to address gaps in the achievement between different groups of pupils. Partnerships make a positive contribution to the good curriculum, for example through the work with the sports partnership and business enterprise on alternative curriculum weeks. The school engages with parents and carers well and their views are taken into account. The school successfully promotes community cohesion and has developed local, national and international links well, for example through the Catholic community.

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

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

The responses from the vast majority of parents and carers agree that the school is well led and managed, and keeps their children safe. They were pleased with their child's experience and said the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns. The small number of concerns reported by parents and carers were investigated during the inspection. Evidence confirmed that the school is taking effective action to make sure all pupils achieve as well as they can.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School 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 89 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 236 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	49	39	44	5	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	56	63	32	36	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	47	53	38	43	3	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	45	51	38	43	4	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	50	56	35	39	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	49	55	35	39	3	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	44	45	51	3	3	0	0
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)	43	48	41	46	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	50	56	35	39	1	1	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	51	36	40	4	4	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	52	36	40	2	2	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	58	65	25	28	4	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	58	65	26	29	3	3	1	1

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School, Ashington, NE63 9LR

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleagues. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- St Benedict's is a satisfactory school which has recently improved.
- You achieve well and you are making better progress.
- The proportion of good and better teaching is rising quickly.
- You feel safe and the care, guidance and support you receive are good.
- The senior leadership team and governors are making the right improvements to help you achieve even more.

Your teachers and the staff want to make the school even better. To help them do this, we have asked if they would:

- ensure school improvement continues at a good pace
- raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress by building upon current strategies to improve learning and achievement
- make all teaching and assessment of your work good and better.

I know the staff would appreciate your help and I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock

Her Majesty's Inspector

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