

# St Benedict's Catholic High School

Red Lonning, Hensingham, Whitehaven, Cumbria, CA28 8UG

**Inspection dates** 5–6 March 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This school requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students, including those who are of middle ability and those who are eligible for pupil premium, do not make as much progress as they should from their relative starting points.
- Some teaching does not meet the needs of different groups of students because expectations of what students can do are too low, or activities lack challenge. Some teachers do not check students' understanding regularly during lessons.
- Teachers' questions do not always require students to give extended answers to explain their thinking or explore different viewpoints.
- Attendance, although improving, is below the national average.
- Teachers do not always insist that students present their work neatly or act upon feedback provided through marking. A small amount of marking is insufficiently helpful.
- The sixth form requires improvement because higher-attaining students do not make as much progress as their peers nationally.

### The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher and senior team have brought about swift improvement; they show a relentless drive to improve standards. The school has improved strongly under new leadership and its capacity to secure further improvement is clear.
- An increasing amount of teaching is lively, imaginative and helping students make better progress than in previous years.
- Students appreciate the high-quality pastoral support and guidance they receive.
- Governors are insightful, well informed and effective in driving improvement.
- Skilled subject and year leaders take an active role in monitoring and improving teaching and learning.
- Students behave well, enjoy learning and relish the opportunities they are given to contribute to the improvement of the school.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons across a range of subjects, of which four were joint observations carried out with senior leaders. They also observed assemblies and registration sessions that included students' private reading.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority. Students made a presentation to an inspector giving their evidence of how the school has developed recently.
- The inspectors considered 76 responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire (Parent View) prior to and during the inspection. They analysed 52 questionnaires completed by staff and took account of the school's own surveys of feedback from parents and students.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the school development plan, students' work, progress data, monitoring reports from the local authority, students' reading logs and records showing how the school cares for and protects students.

## Inspection team

Shirley Gornall, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter McKay

Additional Inspector

Naomi Taylor

Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.*

### Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized high school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is similar to the national average.
- Very few students are from minority ethnic groups and virtually all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is lower than average. The proportions who are supported at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs are much lower than average.
- Very few students join or leave the school other than at the usual times.
- Five students in Year 11 are educated off-site at West Cumbria Achievement Zone. A few students spend one day per week at The Lakes College, where they develop practical skills. They spend the remaining four days in school studying for a range of qualifications.
- The sixth form includes students who have attended other schools in the area for their 11-16 education.
- The school meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- When it was inspected in February 2012 the school was judged to require special measures. Two monitoring inspections took place to gauge the school's improvement and on the second of these it was judged to have made good progress.
- The executive headteacher is responsible for this school and for Millom School. Partnership between the two schools commenced in May 2012.

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

- Further accelerate progress and raise students' achievement so that the proportions of students making and exceeding expected progress compare favourably with national figures and the gap in attainment between those who are eligible for pupil premium and their peers closes.
- Ensure that higher-attaining students achieve more in the sixth form.
- Continue to improve students' attendance so that it is consistently at least in line with the national average.
- Raise the quality of teaching so that most is at least good and a greater proportion is outstanding by:
  - providing lessons that inspire and challenge students of all abilities
  - insisting that students take pride in the presentation of their written work
  - providing more opportunities for students to respond to searching questions and to build on each other's responses
  - checking regularly on students' understanding during lessons
  - ensuring that marking is consistently helpful and is acted upon by pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students enter the school with attainment that is similar to, and in some year groups higher than, that found nationally. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, rose to 60% in 2012. This figure was just above the national average. Fewer students than would have been expected achieved the highest grades given their starting points.
- The rates of progress made by students in English and mathematics, although improving, remain lower than found nationally. In 2012, fewer middle-ability students made the progress expected from their starting points than similar students nationally. The school has addressed this issue through staff training, more rigorous monitoring of teaching, catch-up sessions for students and the employment of learning mentors to assist students who require support with personal organisation and study skills.
- The attainment of students eligible for the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, is lower than that of their peers, as measured by average points scores.
- The vast majority of students attain five or more GCSE grades. The school's improvement on this measure reflects its improved curriculum that takes more account of students' interests and aspirations.
- The achievement of the small number of students with special educational needs supported at school action requires improvement. The coordination of special educational needs has been strengthened and staff receive good support and advice on how to boost the progress of these students.
- Achievement is strong in modern foreign languages and physical education. It has been weaker in some science courses. Inspection evidence indicates that improvements to the science curriculum and more effective science teaching are leading to better achievement.
- Achievement for students who access some or all of their education off site is monitored closely by the school. They make similar progress to that of their peers.
- The school makes judicious use of early entry for GCSE in English and mathematics. This policy is being reviewed in the light of national changes. Students have been encouraged to retake examinations if they have not secured their target grades.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. In 2012, students studying AS courses made good progress and attained well. However, achievement at A level was not as strong, particularly when considering the relatively low proportion of students securing A\* and A grades. Achievement in English, English literature, and art and design was good. Reliable student tracking indicates that students currently studying in the sixth form are making better progress towards achieving ambitious targets.
- There is a strong focus throughout school on improving students' literacy standards. Additional government funding for Year 7 students entering the school with low attainment is used effectively to provide a reading programme that has considerable impact on improving their reading ages. Sixth-formers read regularly with younger students. Most students enjoy private reading as part of their tutorial programme. Teachers encourage the correct usage of appropriate vocabulary during lessons. Some students find it difficult to give extended spoken answers in class. The presentation of students' work in exercise books is variable; some is consistently neat and accurate whereas some indicates a lack of care and poor attention to spelling and sentence structure.

**The quality of teaching requires improvement**

- Teaching has improved quickly and securely over the last year. One student noted in discussion that teachers 'work hard and are always looking for new ways to help us learn'. His opinions were echoed by many others. Good relationships between teachers and students are apparent throughout the school. Staffing has stabilised, leading to better continuity and consistency of learning.
- An increasing proportion of teaching is good and a small amount is outstanding. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated. There is a core of teaching that requires improvement in order for students' progress to accelerate. This teaching is characterised by work that does not meet the needs of all students. Planning typically indicates teachers' expectations of what all, most and some students are to achieve by the end of the lesson but in some instances this is not translated into different activities or levels of challenge for different groups of students.
- In the best lessons teachers ask probing questions that invite students to explain their reasoning. This was the case in an outstanding history lesson in which the teacher skilfully elicited students' understanding about the Reichstag fire and deepened their understanding of the reliability of historical sources. In some lessons improvement is required because teachers do not check students' understanding during lessons or because teachers accept limited verbal responses rather than expecting students to explain their thinking.
- Students say that they enjoy lessons which are relevant to their lives and those in which they can learn actively. This was powerfully demonstrated in an outstanding mathematics lesson in which a Year 8 class explored the correlation between weight and shoe size and constructed a scatter graph of their findings. Activities were carefully constructed so that students could learn independently. Their enthusiastic participation culminated in rapid progress. Similarly, in a very successful music lesson students were instantly captivated by the title 'How to be a Rock Star'. They enjoyed learning about triads and experimenting on keyboards as they emulated the style of contemporary artists. In some less successful lessons teachers miss opportunities to engage and inspire students, leading to slower progress being made.
- Most teachers mark students' work regularly and provide helpful advice about how to improve. In a few cases, perfunctory comments persist. In some subjects, including English, there is evidence of students acting on their teachers' feedback but this is patchy across the school and leads to some errors in spelling and sentence structure persisting and some work remaining incomplete.
- Teachers regularly provide reports on students' progress to their parents. The school's systems for recognising and supporting students in danger of underachieving have developed significantly. Teachers willingly give extra time to support students who need additional help.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students who spoke with inspectors regard behaviour in lessons and around the school site as good, and the vast majority of their parents who have responded to surveys agree. Students are polite, friendly and keen to succeed. The school operates smoothly and is a safe and harmonious community.
- Incidents of disruptive behaviour are rare. The school's previous policy of internal exclusion for poorly behaved students has been discontinued. Students with behavioural difficulties benefit from effective additional support. The incidence of exclusions is much lower than that found nationally.
- The school has worked hard to raise students' awareness of different forms of bullying and how they should deal with it. The pastoral programme and assemblies explore cyber-bullying, racism and homophobia. In discussions students stated that the school takes any form of discrimination or harassment seriously and this is confirmed by the school's behaviour records. Occasional incidents of bullying have been reported and the school's response has been swift and effective.
- The number of students who are persistently absent from school has reduced as a result of the

effective work of the school's staff in conjunction with families. Attendance is improving but is below average. Students are punctual to school and to lessons.

- Students feel motivated by the school's new rewards system. There is a sense of healthy competition between forms to earn points. There are also numerous opportunities for students to develop cooperative values to support the wider community, including through a well established link with Tanzanian students.
- Students relish the opportunities they have to influence decision making in the school. Members of the student leadership group present their views about the school's improvement with confidence and maturity.

## **The leadership and management are good**

- The executive headteacher has brought vision, direction and energy to the school. He has developed the skills of senior leaders and subject leaders so that the school's improvement is no longer reliant on external support. Several leaders have taken up post in the last year and are working as part of a cohesive team. Leaders at all levels are committed to the school and passionate about making a difference for the benefit of their students.
- The school's management and communication systems have been developed so that there is a shared understanding of priorities, objectives and the progress that is being made in order to realise them. Lines of accountability are clear. One member of staff stated, 'We know what we have to do and we feel appreciated for our contribution.' The morale of staff is high, as indicated by the very positive response to a recent survey of their opinions. The views of staff, parents and students are regularly sought and listened to.
- Rigorous quality assurance processes have been developed. Frequent checks on all aspects of the schools' work underpin its accurate self-evaluation.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is strong. A coaching programme delivered by senior leaders from Millom School galvanised improvement in the school's journey through special measures. The school's leaders have the skills and confidence to raise the quality of teaching further. Teachers' work is regularly observed, by peers as well as by leaders. There are weekly discussions about good practice. Teachers from different departments work together so that effective approaches are shared.
- Arrangements for teachers' performance management have been overhauled. There are robust arrangements in place to ensure a correlation between students' achievement and teachers' salary progression.
- School leaders are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity. They recognise that the gap in performance between students eligible for the pupil premium and their peers is too wide. They are taking rigorous action to close the gap by providing learning mentors to students who require additional support, running catch-up classes and basic skills coaching and subsidising some trips and activities. The school's tracking of students' progress indicates that these initiatives are having a positive impact and the attainment gap is narrowing.
- The school's curriculum has been reviewed and courses developed at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to suit a broader variety of students' needs and aspirations.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered across the curriculum. Recently a symbolic religious icon has been used as a stimulus for work in a range of subjects, prompting students' curiosity and reflection. Students are proud of the school's Fairtrade status. They discuss ethics in business studies and explore the environmental consequences of human decisions in science and geography.
- The school's procedures for safeguarding students are robust and meet government requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors bring a range of expertise and experience to their roles. They are ambitious for the school's success and have developed, with the active support of the local authority, a highly

effective partnership with Millom School that has built leadership capacity and improved the quality of teaching. Links have been forged between governors and subject departments to strengthen governors' understanding of the school's work. The head boy and head girl are associate governors. They communicate the views of students to the governing body and keep students informed about the decisions governors make. The Chair of the Governing Body from Millom School provides effective support as a National Leader of Governance. Governors have reviewed the school's policies and supported the executive headteacher in strengthening procedures for teachers' performance management. Governors have an accurate view of the quality of teaching in the school.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112398
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	409680

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,233
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	156
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Willie Slavin
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Ian Smith
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 February 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01946 692275
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