

St Benet Biscop Catholic Voluntary Aided High School

Ridge Terrace, Bedlington, Northumberland, NE22 6ED

Inspection dates 19–20 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Attainment by the end of Year 11 is above average and, notwithstanding a slight decline in 2012, GCSE results are set to improve further.
- Most students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and achieve well.
- Students behave well. They show positive attitudes to their work and are motivated to succeed. They try their best in lessons.
- Students feel safe and well cared for.
- Teaching is good. Lessons contain a variety of interesting activities, often requiring the students to work and learn independently. Teachers use questions effectively to develop students' understanding.
- The school is well led. Despite the recent turbulence caused by significant changes in key staff and in the school's identity, senior leaders have ensured that results have not suffered unduly and that teaching has improved.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The sixth form requires improvement. Although students get good results in applied A levels, in some other subjects they do not make sufficient progress. In particular, the number getting A* to B grades is too low.
- While GCSE results in some subjects are very good, in others they are regularly disappointing. Too few students get an A*/A grade.
- Some of the teaching could be better. The least effective lessons do not provide enough challenge for the most-able students.
- Some managers are not very good at monitoring their areas of responsibility or evaluating how effective they are.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 44 lessons. These included five joint observations with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students; with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body; and with school staff, including senior and middle managers. They also had telephone discussions with a parent, a representative of the local authority and with staff at alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a number of documents including the school’s self-evaluation summary, development plan and assessment information.
- They analysed 87 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire (Parent View) and 37 questionnaires returned by school staff.

Inspection team

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Full report

Information about this school

- St Benet Biscop Roman Catholic High School is larger than most secondary schools.
- Almost all students are White British.
- The proportion of the students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals, is broadly average.
- The proportion of students identified with special educational needs through school action is low.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- A small number of students receive all or part of their education with alternative providers. These are: Cramlington Learning Village; Northumberland College; Get U Started Training; and Choysez.
- St Benet Biscop has been a specialist school for business and enterprise since 2005.
- Since the previous inspection the school has undergone many changes. A new headteacher has been appointed along with a number of other senior leaders. Formerly a 13 to 19 school, it has started admitting some of its students into Year 7. It has entered into a hard federation with St Bede's Primary School, on the same site, for which it provides the executive headteacher.
- It meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement by:
 - accelerating the progress of the more-able students in order to increase the number who get A*/A grades at GCSE and A* to B grades at A level and AS level
 - helping the underperforming subject departments to be more effective.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - giving the most-able students suitably demanding work in all their lessons
 - ensuring all staff assess students' progress and mark their work as effectively as the best teachers
 - helping teachers to develop the least-able students' skills in writing.
- Improve leadership and management by enabling middle leaders and managers to:
 - check that policies are being implemented correctly
 - evaluate rigorously their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress. They attain above average standards by the end of Year 11. Results have been improving since the previous inspection and, despite a slight dip in 2012 when the school suffered significant disruption, inspection analysis indicates that further improvements are in evidence for students currently at the school.
- The variation in the performance of different subjects, highlighted in the previous inspection, persists. While results are consistently good in some subjects such as English, history, geography, science and drama, they are not as good in physical education, music and religious education. Too few students achieve A* or A grades at GCSE.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs, whose progress has been patchy in the past, are now making good progress. The improvement is due to changes in approach initiated by senior leaders. For example, staff now check progress in their literacy and numeracy skills more closely. However, some of these students, who are making good progress overall, are held back by poor writing skills and their inability to organise their folders of work. Subject teachers do not always provide enough help for them with this matter.
- Students who are eligible for the pupil premium improved their performance considerably in 2012 and now get better results than similar students in the country. They are on average about half a grade behind other students in the school in English and about three quarters of a grade behind in mathematics.
- Students attending alternative provision also make good progress, both academically and in their personal development. Of those in Year 11 last year, for example, all gained a meaningful qualification and almost all are still in education or in employment.
- The school enters students for some GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11. It has compelling evidence that this has contributed to rising results. The year when students were not entered early for mathematics coincided with a decline in results in that subject.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Students do not make enough progress in some subjects and the number achieving A* to B grades in AS and A levels is below average. There is little convincing evidence that entering some students early for A level has improved results.
- In class, students are motivated, work hard and learn well. Their keenness was epitomised in a Year 8 modern languages lesson in which, without prompting from the teacher, they enthusiastically made comparisons between Spanish and French vocabulary, and readily spoke with the teacher in French, asking questions such as, 'Répétez numéro cinq s'il vous plaît.'

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has many strengths. Most lessons consist of a good variety of interesting activities, carefully sequenced to enable students to learn what was intended and make good progress. Teachers manage students' behaviour well; for example, they deal with any unwanted noise quickly and effectively. They have good relationships with the class and make judicious use of praise and encouragement to keep students motivated and to boost their self-confidence.
- In many lessons the teacher gets students to work independently. In English, for example, students are encouraged to develop their own responses to literary texts with minimal prompting from the teacher. Students thrive when engaged in practical work, especially when it is placed in a real-life context. In an outstanding Year 13 information and communication technology class, for example, they worked in groups with great enthusiasm preparing promotional materials for real local businesses.
- Teachers use questioning very effectively to help students think about their work and to develop their understanding. For example, they often ask students to explain or justify their answer or to clarify it by giving examples. In an outstanding history lesson, the teacher helped a group who

were struggling to interpret a cartoon about the Cuban missile crisis, not by telling them what it meant but by asking questions about, for instance, the expressions on the faces of Kennedy and Khrushchev; and then by getting them to agree that they had solved the problem themselves and had not relied on the teacher for the answer.

- While some teachers constantly assess how well individuals are learning in lessons, and use information about students' progress to plan what they need to learn next, others do this less well. Similarly, while some teachers mark students' work regularly and provide helpful guidance on how to improve it, others provide little support in this way. Even when work is marked thoroughly, students do not always understand or learn from the pointers the teacher gives them, for example, sometimes the student cannot read or understand the teacher's comments.
- In many lessons all the students do the same tasks. This sometimes means that the most able are given work that is too easy.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well in class. They report that learning is very rarely disrupted by misbehaviour. Occasionally, when the content of a lesson fails to engage their interest, they are slow to get started on their work and spend too long chatting.
- Students are courteous to adults and enjoy socialising with each other. When they move around the difficult scattered school site, often having to venture outside in inclement weather to get to their next lesson, they do so sensibly and are punctual to class.
- For the most part, they respond well to the school's discipline code and recognise that it has led to improvements in behaviour, though several comment that the rules are petty and are not enforced consistently by staff.
- Students feel safe in the school and cared for well. They report that bullying is rare and when it occurs is dealt with promptly and effectively by staff. They are well supervised throughout the day.
- Attendance, above average in the previous inspection, has risen further, though not as fast as it has across the country. Last year it was about average. The school's records indicate a decline this year.

The leadership and management are good

- Under the clear and determined direction of the new headteacher, ably assisted by a new leadership team, the school has stabilised after the disruption of recent changes. The improving trend in examination results, interrupted briefly during this period, has been re-established.
- Senior leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well. They have identified accurately the priorities for improvement, and their plans to tackle these are suitably clear, concise and ambitious.
- Teaching is evaluated regularly and for the most part accurately. This has led to a steady improvement in its quality. Where teaching is not effective the school has provided an appropriate balance of pressure and support to bring about improvement. Although the headteacher recognises that the arrangements for managing teachers' performance could be improved, for example, by making the objectives for individual teachers more precise, on the whole they work well.
- Staff who have responsibility for subjects or other aspects of the school's work are not as effective. Although some subject leaders have secured regular improvements in performance, others have enjoyed less success. Some do not monitor their areas closely; they have not noticed when students' work has not been marked properly, for example. Some do not know how to use information about students' progress to evaluate how effective their area is. For example, some managers do not have a clear view of how well students in the sixth form are performing, or to what extent early entry for some A levels is making a difference.

- The school promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination effectively. Senior leaders intervened, for example, supplementing basic resources with pupil premium funding, to ensure that students with special educational needs are given the support and the curriculum they need to enable them to make good progress.
- The curriculum is good and improving. It benefits from the school's specialism, for instance, through links with local businesses. Plans to widen the range of subjects in the sixth form to meet the needs of the less-academic students are appropriate and demonstrate senior leaders' determination to improve this area of the school's work.
- The local authority has an accurate and up-to-date knowledge of the school. It provides an appropriate level of support, which the school greatly values. In particular, it has contributed to senior leaders' skills in creating effective procedures for gaining an accurate view of the school's performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors bring a range of useful expertise to the role. They are well informed about the school, for example about examination results, the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of performance management, the way good teaching is rewarded and underperformance is tackled, and the progress of students eligible for the pupil premium. They carry out a comprehensive programme of visits to find out about different aspects of school life and prepare useful reports for the rest of the governing body. They challenge the headteacher when necessary; for example, they pointed out that the school development plan does not specify how the impact of new initiatives will be judged. They undertake useful professional development when necessary, for example, they have made arrangements for the induction of an inexperienced recruit to the newly formed federated governing body.

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

Unique reference number	122367
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	400206

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,109
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Hardy
Headteacher	Con Todd
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2010
Telephone number	01670 822795
Fax number	01670 829427
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