

St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Moorhouse Lane, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9LR

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2014

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Inadequate | 4 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Quality of teaching | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | | Requires improvement | 3 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Until recently, pupils' progress from their starting points has not been good enough; particularly for more able pupils.
- Teaching over time has not been consistently good enough to ensure pupils leave Year 8 with above average standards.
- The gap between the attainment of pupils entitled to free school meals and their classmates, although narrowing, is too wide.
- The Year 7 catch-up grant is not targeted well enough at pupils who start Key Stage 3 just below the level expected for their age.
- Very occasionally, the rate of learning slows in classes where groups are given tasks to do together but only one person does much of the work.
- The good practice in marking and feedback seen in some classes is not yet seen in all.
- Middle leaders' observations of teaching or checking of pupils' books are not always cross-referenced to give a view of teaching or achievement over time. Sometimes teaching is judged to be good when books show pupils to be making steady rather than good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The standards pupils reach by the end of Key Stage 2 have improved well. Reading is a particular strength of the school.
- Teaching is improving and most seen during the inspection was good.
- Pupils with special educational needs or a disability make good progress because of the additional support and care they receive.
- The good behaviour identified at the last inspection has been sustained and built upon.
- Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy school and their good and improving attendance rates pay testament to this.
- Pastoral support in the school is first-rate. Pupils speak highly of the care from staff and especially the pastoral support officer.
- Dynamic leadership from the headteacher and transformation of the skills of the governing body are driving improvement rapidly in teaching and pupils' progress in lessons.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 part-lessons and made a number of short visits to classes, the dining hall and classrooms during wet break times. Three lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke informally to pupils in class and around the school and formally to two groups of pupils on day two.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, staff, members of the governing body and a representative of Northumberland local authority's school improvement service.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and development planning, records kept about pupils' progress, teachers' planning, governing body minutes, the school's policies and procedures relating to safeguarding and the promotion of good behaviour.
- The inspector took account of the 26 questionnaires from staff, 55 parental responses to the online survey (Parent View) and one letter from a parent.

Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lee Owston

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- St Benedict's is a smaller than average-sized middle-deemed secondary school. Most pupils are White British and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- An average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be entitled to free school meals, those who are looked after by Northumberland council and those whose parents are in the armed forces.
- The proportion of pupils with a disability or special educational needs who are supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly above.
- A much higher than average proportion of pupils joins or leaves the school at times other than the usual transfer times in Year 5 and Year 8.
- The school was judged to have serious weaknesses at the time of its last inspection just over a year ago in mid-November 2012. The school has been visited three times by one of Her Majesty's Inspector's since then and on each occasion was judged to be making reasonable progress in being removed from the category of serious weaknesses.
- In September 2013 a new executive-headteacher was appointed to the school and in October 2013, a new leader of mathematics.
- The school does not use any type of alternative provision for pupils.
- School staff are currently working with staff in a partner school, St Mary's Roman Catholic primary school in South Tyneside. This school was judged to be good following its inspection.
- The school exceeds the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expected for pupils attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 2.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Drive improvement in the quality of teaching further to enable pupils, including the more-able and those entitled to the pupil premium, to achieve their best by:
 - checking more regularly that teaching and the range of additional support, including one-to-one support and extra classes for pupils, are making a difference to pupils' achievement in lessons, so changes can be made quickly if strategies are not working well enough
 - making sure when teachers choose to do group work, all pupils understand their role in that group and what they are expected to achieve by the end of the activity
 - ensure the government's Year 7 catch-up grant is targeted specifically at the pupils who are below Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 so that they can catch-up with their peers quickly
 - embedding the good practice seen in teaching where well-planned activities and effective marking and feedback move pupils' learning on quickly from their starting points.
- Improve the impact of middle leaders' regular checking of pupils' books, their reviews of pupils' progress and observations of teaching by:
 - using evidence from book scrutiny and pupils progress data to inform judgements of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils progress in lessons over time.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievements in Key Stage 2 tests in 2013 represented improvement on the previous year, at both Level 4 and 5; particularly in reading where results were well above average. Despite this improvement, pupils' progress was not good enough because these pupils entered St Benedict's with above average levels in their Key Stage 1 tests.
- The gap between the average point score of Year 6 pupils entitled to free school meals and other pupils was too wide; more than a year behind. The gap is beginning to narrow in lessons through better teaching and strategies such as one to one support and small group work.
- 2013 Year 8 pupils' achievements and progress were in line with that expected for pupils of their age which again represented improvement on the previous year, but not better than expected; particularly for more able pupils, when taking their starting points into account.
- Actions taken for pupils with special educational needs or who have a disability are making a positive difference. Inspection evidence shows they are making good progress in lessons because teachers give them activities that meet their differing needs successfully and well-deployed teaching assistants are good at supporting and challenging them to achieve their best.
- Current pupil progress information, evidence from lesson observations and discussions with pupils indicates that improvements have been sustained and built upon in Key Stage 2. Pupils in Key Stage 3 are also making better progress in their learning; particularly in mathematics. However, the additional funding to help lower ability Year 7 pupils catch up with their peers is not targeted well enough on the actions needed to move this small group on quickly enough.
- The achievement and progress of pupils from minority ethnic communities are good.
- There has been improvement in the development of literacy skills across the curriculum, including speaking and listening skills. Reading is a strength and is taught well. Alongside regular guided reading sessions, pupils read widely and often. For example, pupils take a self-chosen book to every lesson so any minute spare can be spent reading. The variety of books seen and higher than average results in Year 6 reading tests highlight the impact of such work.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching over time has not been consistently good enough to eradicate past underachievement of groups, such as pupils eligible for free school meals, or to ensure pupils leave school with better-than-average attainment and progress by the end of Year 8.
- Robust actions taken by the previous and current headteacher are driving improvement in the quality of teaching and, as a result, most teaching seen during the inspection was good. It is too early to see the full impact of this improvement on the outcomes by Year 8 or in narrowing the gap for pupils entitled to free school meals fully.
- Consistent strengths in teaching are the good relationships between pupils and adults in class and the increasing pride pupils have in their work; evidenced in most books seen.
- Good teaching was characterised by teachers' high expectations of what pupils could achieve and the range of creative ways employed to 'hook' pupils into their lessons and trigger an enthusiasm for learning. For example, in a Year 8 physical education (PE) lesson, pupils thrived in rigorous 'boot camp' style circuit training, skipping, running or jumping whilst at the same time having fun, experiencing the impact of their efforts on their bodies and developing skills.
- Pupils learn at the right pace for them because teachers adapt what they are doing to support those in need of more help or give more challenge to those who are racing through the work.
- On a very small number of occasions in lessons observed during the inspection, when a teacher chose to develop pupils' learning through group work, they did not always make it clear what roles were given to which pupil or how everyone contributes to the task. This meant that some pupils were unsure of what their contribution was and as a result, their progress slowed.
- Marking is regular and feedback often helpful; particularly in mathematics books. Pupils say they

value the feedback and usually, but not always, have opportunities to act upon advice given.

- Pupils say they know their targets and where they are in relation to achieving them but do not always know what precisely they need to do to get to the next level. Actions have been taken by staff to tackle this by making sure the steps to improvement are visible in each classroom.
- Teachers are adept at linking what is being learned in lessons to homework. Some parents expressed concerns in the survey about homework. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said they get enough homework and the rate increases as pupils get older. Homework timetables have been developed to ensure pupils are not overloaded with homework every day.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The headteacher quickly implemented a new behaviour for learning policy. This has had an added impact on pupils' good attitudes and behaviour in class. It is contributing to improvements in teaching and in pupils' better progress in lessons.
- In virtually all lessons, pupils are enthusiastic and keen to learn. They arrive promptly, with the right equipment, neatly dressed and well prepared for their work.
- Very occasionally the behaviour for learning in lessons detracts from pupils making rapid progress when staff have not been as clear in their expectations of how pupils will work; particularly when teachers plan for pupils to work in small groups.
- Behaviour is good in the dining hall and as pupils move around school. Pupils are friendly and courteous to adults and visitors. They work well together in classes or shared times such as wet break-times. Serious incidents of poor behaviour are rare and well managed. No pupils have been permanently excluded and the number temporarily excluded is very low.
- The strong development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness helps to promote good behaviour and ensure pupils are part of a harmonious and caring school. Pupils speak highly of the new headteacher, her focus on helping them to try their best and the added spiritual dimension she has brought. One pupil eloquently reported, 'she helps us live out our faith, how to live our lives, how you can shine and be supportive of your friends.'
- High expectations of attendance and actions taken have resulted in improved attendance rates that are above average. Good work includes high profile campaigns such as 'lost days equal lost learning' and good partnership between the pastoral support officer and other agencies to ensure a quick response when pupils are at risk of missing too much school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they are safe. A high proportion of parents report this to be the case. Robust action is taken when incidents that may impact on pupils' safety occur. Pupils value the work of the pastoral support officer who they say is always there to talk to in times of need and who advocates powerfully on their behalf.
- Pupils feel well-taught about different types of bullying, particularly internet bullying. A minority of parents in the survey had concerns about bullying. Pupils do say that name calling sometimes takes place between pupils but they know it will be tackled quickly once a member of staff is told, and parents are always informed. When concerns are identified, work such as circle-time, assemblies or citizenship lessons helps to tackle issues head-on.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The turbulence in the school's leadership over the last six years has abated. The headteacher's uncompromising and decisive leadership has ensured no stone has been left unturned in her drive to improve the school. Building on improvements made by the previous headteacher, she quickly energised staff, governors and pupils alike in her ambition to ensure all pupils achieve as well as they can in all aspects of their school life; educationally, socially emotionally, and spiritually.
- Collective work of staff and governors is making a positive difference to pupils' progress in lessons but has not had time to eradicate the history of pupils' underachievement in previous years, or stamp out fully the gap between free school meal pupils and other learners.

- The work of middle managers, including subject leaders, has been strengthened. They are more involved in monitoring the work of the school. Leaders know there is still more to do to make sure their work has a full impact on the quality of teaching and on pupils learning.
- For example, middle managers carry out lesson observations and check pupils' work books often. These are done as separate activities and so the outcomes of book scrutinies do not always inform the overall view of the impact of teaching. This means teaching in lessons is occasionally judged good when books show that learning requires improvement over time.
- The curriculum is good and has been developed well to ensure an appropriate emphasis on teaching key skills, including literacy, numeracy and information communication technology (ICT), in other subjects.
- The curriculum has been enriched well by a broad range of clubs and visits out of, and visitors to school. Such work adds to pupils' enjoyment of learning and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and achievements. Links to the church and the local community are strong and enhance pupils' spiritual and moral development well.
- Good use of the primary school sports fund is increasing pupils' skills in sport successfully through, for example, opportunities to work with sports specialists, involvement in competitive sports and a broader range of activities that they can take part in during or after school. Pupils, and particularly girls, report this is adding to their enjoyment of school and their physical wellbeing. Participation rates in physical activity are increasing across the school as a result.
- High quality, pastoral care is valued by pupils and which they say adds to their sense of safety and belonging. The school is an inclusive school where pupils say all are equally encouraged. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. However, because the achievement of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than their peers, providing for equality of opportunity is not yet good.
- Parents are generally positive about the school; one letter received provided strong testimony of a parent's positive views about the education and care of their child. A small proportion wants more regular information about their children's progress. The headteacher has identified the need to improve the communication with parents regarding their children's progress and is working with the governing body to tackle this.
- The headteacher has valued the advice of the local authority school improvement officers and this has helped to tighten up the quality of lesson observations and performance management arrangements in tackling underperformance of staff. The Diocese has brokered a good replacement for the previous headteacher. Good support from the partner school, St Mary's, has helped to drive the good improvements in mathematics across the school.
- One of Her Majesty's Inspectors made a further visit to the school in response to a safeguarding issue. Additional information was requested from the school and a series of interviews were held.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is good and has been transformed since the last inspection. New members and a raft of training have helped governors to develop the skills needed to hold leaders to account for their work and to ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met. Governors receive and demand information that enables them to have a very clear view of what is working well and what needs to be better. They check regularly how the quality of teaching is improving and have developed robust systems to ensure pay is linked to the improvements in pupils' progress and to make certain that underperformance is tackled rigorously. Governors bring a good mix of skills and expertise to their work and use their increasingly good knowledge and understanding of the school to check and challenge how groups of pupils are doing and how the pupil premium is being used. They are aware that the gap between pupils entitled to free school meals and other pupils is still too wide. Governors are working closely with the headteacher to hasten improvement in this area. For example, they have insisted that all staff have performance targets to improve outcomes for pupils entitled to free school meals and are checking the impact of teachers' actions regularly.

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

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| Unique reference number | 122366 |
| Local authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 425673 |

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

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| 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 | 213 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Lynn Norris |
| Executive Headteacher | Maria Elliott |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 November 2012 |
| Telephone number | 01670 813658 |
| Fax number | 01670 814840 |
| Email address | admin@st-benedicts.northumberland.sch.uk |

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