

# St Benedict's Catholic High School

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

**Inspection dates** 16–17 September 2014

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Leaders have made impressive improvements to the school in the last two years. The executive headteacher provides outstanding leadership; he is supported very ably by governors and the senior team.
- Procedures to keep students safe are outstanding. Students thrive in this friendly, inclusive and safe school.
- Students' good behaviour ensures lessons run smoothly and they learn well. They are polite and considerate in shared areas.
- Leaders and governors manage the performance of staff very effectively.
- Teaching has improved and is now good. It builds on students' prior learning effectively, so they make good gains in their knowledge and skills.
- Attainment at GCSE has risen significantly to above average. Students make good progress across the school.
- The sixth form is good. Students' achievement has risen as a result of good teaching and effective support from personal tutors, the Director of Learning and the Student Support Officer.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students make a strong contribution to the extremely positive culture of the school.
- Students are reflective and have respect for other faiths, backgrounds and cultures. Their understanding of ethical issues is excellent and they show in-depth understanding of democracy.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most able students do not achieve as well as they could at the highest grades because some teaching does not provide sufficient challenge.
- Students with special educational needs do not always make expected progress from their starting points because support in lessons is not specific enough.
- Students' non-qualification activity in the sixth form and their leadership skills are not developed as well as they could be.
- Improvements in middle leadership have not had time to develop fully.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in most subjects, all year groups and in the sixth form. They looked at students' work in lessons and scrutinised a range of books jointly with school leaders. They also observed assemblies and tutor sessions.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, governors, teachers and representatives of the local authority. They met with four different groups of students and spoke informally with many more students during lessons and break-times.
- Inspectors considered 59 questionnaires completed by staff, 23 responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and met with or telephoned seven parents at their request. They also took account of recent surveys of parents' and students' views conducted by school leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement planning. They analysed progress data, looked at a range of policies and checked safeguarding systems and procedures to promote students' well-being.

## Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Julie Rimmer

Additional Inspector

Linda Davies

Additional Inspector

Frank Cain

Additional Inspector

Mary Lanovy-Taylor

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Benedict's is a larger than average-sized high school serving Whitehaven and the surrounding area. The student intake is predominantly Catholic; students from other faiths are also welcomed.
- The proportions of students with special educational needs or disabilities supported through school action, school action plus or with statements are lower than average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided to this school for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- Very few students are from minority ethnic groups and virtually all speak English as their first language.
- The sixth form includes students who attended other schools in the area for their 11 to 16 education.
- Five students are educated off-site: two students are educated at the West Cumbria Achievement Zone, one attends the Wedgewood Centre for individual support every day, one is going through a managed move to a neighbouring school and one student is starring in a London West End play.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which are minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has a partnership with Millom School. The executive headteacher provides strategic leadership and management of both schools. Each school has a governing body and there is a joint 'Project Board' setting the headteacher's performance management objectives.
- The school is a strategic partner in the Western Lakes Teaching School Alliance and leaders contribute to the Cumbria Association of System Leaders and local leadership groups and consortia.

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

- Ensure the most able students make the progress they are capable of to achieve higher A\* and A grades at GCSE and in the sixth form by:
  - making sure the activities set for them are at an appropriate level to extend their knowledge and skills
  - providing more challenge through questioning and extended discussion.
- Make sure students with disabilities and those with special educational needs are supported to achieve their personal targets in lessons so they make at least expected progress from their starting points consistently across the school.
- Develop non-qualification activity in the sixth form to broaden students' experience and provide further opportunities for students to develop leadership skills with younger students.
- Continue to develop the effectiveness of middle leadership as planned.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher has provided outstanding leadership to tackle inadequacies and take the school from special measures to good in less than three years. His clear vision and direction ensure that all aspects continue to improve. The procedures to keep students safe and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are outstanding.
- The senior team has been reorganised to make the best use of expertise and skills. They make an excellent contribution to drive improvements forward.
- The rigour of procedures to check improvement and the increased expectations of both staff and students have transformed the school. There is a calm, harmonious and constructive atmosphere in lessons and around school. Students are keen to do their best.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a high priority in lessons, assemblies and additional activities and permeates the whole culture of the school. Students show immense respect for and understanding of differences, including of faith, culture and sexuality. They have a strong understanding of ethical issues and are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs. Their social skills are promoted well in lessons and shine through in the positive relationships apparent across the whole school.
- Middle leadership has improved as a result of good professional development and the establishment of clear lines of accountability. Directors of Learning and Standards and subject leaders know what is expected of them and their teams. There is still some variability in quality as some initiatives are at early stages and best practice is still being extended across the whole school. However, systems and procedures are clear and provide a strong foundation for further improvement.
- There are rigorous procedures to monitor students' progress and the quality of teaching at every level of leadership. Self-evaluation is reflective and accurate with key development areas identified clearly.
- The management of teachers' performance is effective in improving teaching and raising students' achievement. Staff feel valued because they receive good quality professional development and career enhancement. Newly qualified teachers are supported well, so they make a good start to their career.
- The needs and aspirations of students are addressed through the broad and balanced curriculum and flexible range of courses on offer. Off-site provision is used carefully and checked regularly to ensure quality. Students receive knowledgeable advice to inform their choice of courses and next steps. They successfully go on to a range of employment and higher education.
- The partnership arrangements with other schools enable staff to share good practice and benefit from school- to- school support and review. Partnership working through the Cumbria Association of System Leaders provides benefits to all the schools involved. The specific partnership with Millom School has successfully enabled the executive headteacher to provide strategic leadership across both. The local authority brokered the arrangement with Millom School in the first instance.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors are pleased with the school, a typical comment being, 'we are extremely impressed by the commitment of all staff and the positive ethos of the school'. There are good procedures to keep parents well informed and engage with them regularly.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body is well led and has been organised to make best use of governors' broad range of expertise. Governors have an in-depth understanding of the school's performance and priorities for further improvement, based on their excellent understanding of data and regular reports from staff. They provide good support to school leaders and also challenge where needed, always with students' outcomes at the forefront. They have worked extremely hard to secure improvements, including in teaching, and are passionately committed to further improvement.
  - Pay progression is carefully considered and only proceeds where there is clear evidence that it is warranted.
  - The partnership with Millom School enables governors to gain from the Millom Chair's expertise as a National Leader of Governance.
  - Governors monitor the spending and impact of additional pupil premium funding closely to ensure eligible students make gains in their achievement and personal development.
  - There are rigorous procedures to safeguard students and ensure their health and safety. All statutory requirements are met.

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

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students have good attitudes to learning; they arrive punctually to lessons and are cooperative and attentive. Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour and where there are disruptions, for example, when students are not inspired by the teaching, they are sorted out quickly.
- Behaviour around the school was impeccable during the inspection. Students show care and consideration for others in shared areas. They are well mannered and show respect for their teachers and other staff.
- Behaviour logs and students' views indicate that behaviour has improved considerably over time. Leaders' high expectations for behaviour led to an increase to begin with in fixed-term exclusions. The boundaries have now been established and students' behaviour has improved, so the use of fixed-term exclusion has fallen and permanent exclusions are rarely used. Students like the clear behaviour code and say that the school is calm and lessons are rarely interrupted.
- Students take pride in their school. They look smart, look after their books and take care of the school environment. Those who have leadership roles enjoy the responsibility and undertake their roles effectively. At the moment, leadership roles are limited to particular groups of students and could be extended further.
- Students who spoke with inspectors had a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including the complexities of social media and risks of cyber-bullying. Most students know that name-calling is hurtful, and do not do it. A small minority said that some name-calling goes on, but is usually picked up by teachers.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students' safety and well-being are a high priority for all staff. Support for personal development is excellent. The school provides a nurturing environment while maintaining high expectations of and for students.
- Students' understanding of risks to their own safety and to that of others, including for example, risks of gang activity or extremism is excellent. Students are well informed and sensible in their approach to keeping safe.
- Attendance has improved from below average to above average due to the rigorous checks and family support, where needed, from a dedicated attendance officer. All staff do their best to ensure students get to school and reach their potential.
- The attendance, safety and progress of students who attend off-site alternative provision are monitored carefully. Any absence is followed up immediately.
- There is excellent support for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and for those who have particular needs. Staff work very well with other agencies to ensure joined-up support. Those who are in the care of the local authority are exceptionally well supported, develop their personal skills and achieve to the best of their ability.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors commented on the school's 'welcoming atmosphere' and said their children were extremely happy in school. Typical comments included, 'my son can't wait to get to school every day' and 'teachers are willing to invest time in students who have needs'. The vast majority who responded to Parent View also think behaviour is well managed and bullying dealt with effectively.

**The quality of teaching is good**

- Good teaching is helping students gain new knowledge and skills and make good progress.
- Successful professional development has ensured that marking leads to improvements in students' work. An effective approach is used across the school so students have a good understanding of expectations. There is some excellent practice, for example in mathematics, where misconceptions are explained fully and tackled early on and additional challenge is provided when appropriate. Students mark each other's work effectively, using prompts and guidance from the teacher.
- Students take care of their books and do their best to keep their work well organised, neat and tidy.
- Teachers explain new learning and use questioning effectively in the majority of lessons. Where questioning is most effective, it deepens students' understanding, challenges them to expand on their responses or poses additional challenge. It is less effective sometimes when superficial answers are accepted or questioning is too narrow.
- Students work hard in lessons and are responsive. They learn very successfully where they are able to try out ideas and have time to think through their responses to challenging activities. For example, in English, Year 8 students produced imaginative and creative pieces of writing in the persona of 'rain'. In

mathematics, students enjoyed solving complex problems, having been given time to think in depth.

- Literacy skills are promoted well in all subjects. Reading skills, accurate grammar and punctuation, subject specific vocabulary and spelling are encouraged routinely. Work has been started to help students use mathematics skills in other subjects and this is already having an impact, for example, in science.
- Teaching is mostly pitched at the right level to make sure students make good progress. However, work is not always set at the right level to enable the most able students to reach the higher levels and grades of which they are capable.
- Support for students who are falling behind, those who are disabled or who have special educational needs is good. Learning mentors and support teachers provide good support to help students catch up. Reading recovery support is highly successful in helping students develop reading skills. Specific mathematics support has recently been introduced and is starting to have an impact. However there are occasions when individual education plans are not given sufficient attention in class lessons, so students are not supported as well as they could be.
- Students who are eligible for the pupil premium benefit from good support to raise their achievement and promote their well-being. The impact is seen clearly in their improved achievement over the last two years.
- Students who spoke with inspectors said they enjoy their lessons, especially where work is challenging and teachers make it interesting. Mathematics was frequently cited by students and parents as enjoyable and a subject where students now make good progress.
- Homework is given regularly and identified clearly in students' books. Students say homework is helpful and the vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View think it is appropriate.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors are pleased with teaching and the progress their children are making. Students say teaching has enormously improved over the last two years, saying for example, 'teachers know their subjects, they do their best to help you and behaviour is much better in lessons.'

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students' achievement has improved greatly under the strong direction of leaders and with better quality teaching.
- Students enter the school with broadly average attainment. The progress they make from their starting points has quickened and is now good in each year group.
- Unvalidated school data for 2014 show that attainment at GCSE improved significantly. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, including English and mathematics, was above the 2013 national average.
- Leaders do all they can to ensure equal opportunities for students. Gaps between disadvantaged students and others in school are closing. They foster good relations and tackle discrimination robustly. Students known to be eligible for free school meals were a grade behind others non disadvantaged students both in the school and nationally in English and mathematics in 2013. In 2014 attainment improved for all groups of students and the gap narrowed. Children who are looked after by the local authority are given good support to achieve the best they can.
- The most able students are making better progress than they have in the past. They do well in some subjects, but their overall performance at the higher grades at GCSE is still below expectations, given their prior attainment. Their progress varies between subjects, depending on the expectations of teachers.
- Students, including the most able, make particularly good progress in English, mathematics, languages, performing arts, art and design and history. In some subjects, students' progress is slower because expectations are lower and teaching is less effective in some teaching groups within the department. Students made slower progress in core science, product design, engineering, religious education and geography in 2013.
- Students with special educational needs and disabilities make good progress in additional support groups, for example, in reading recovery. However, although some teachers make excellent use of individual education plans to make sure students' needs are met fully in lessons, for example in English, this is not consistently the case, so students' progress is too variable overall.

**The sixth form provision****is good**

- Leadership is good. Some initiatives are recent but are beginning to have an impact on students' achievement.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students well. Students say they can pursue courses that enable them to realise their ambitions. However, non-qualification activity, for example to extend their leadership and teamwork skills, is limited.
- Students provide good role models for younger students. Their good behaviour and positive relationships set good examples for all. They are keen to extend their work with younger students, particularly in developing their own and others' leadership skills.
- Attendance and punctuality are good. Students show high levels of self-motivation during independent study periods.
- Teaching in the sixth form is integrated into subject departments for much of the post-16 offer and shows the same improvement as teaching in the main school. Teachers have benefited from good quality professional development.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved apace with the rest of the school. The proportion of students attaining A\* to C grades increased in 2014. The proportion of students attaining the highest A\* to B also increased but is still below the national average and remains a priority for improvement.
- Students are very well advised about courses and supported effectively as they move into the sixth form so retention rates are excellent. Good careers guidance ensures that virtually all students move successfully into some form of education, employment or training. The number progressing into higher education and higher level apprenticeships is increasing.

## 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>	444403

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<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>	1,117
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	270
<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>	5 March 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01946 692275
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