

# St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Moorhouse Lane, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9LR

**Inspection dates** 3–4 June 2015

<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		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- St Benedict's has improved rapidly because the executive headteacher has very substantially raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Achievement is good. Pupils' attainment is rising quickly because teaching has improved. Current attainment in Year 8 is above expectations for age.
- There is an outstanding atmosphere for learning throughout the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- Teaching is good. It constantly lifts pupils' attainment and accelerates rates of progress.
- Pupils are very keen to learn. They relate exceptionally well to the adults who work with them and take a real pride in their work. Behaviour around the school is outstanding.
- Attendance has risen sharply to above average. Persistent absence is low.
- The school's provision of care, guidance and support for pupils and their families is outstanding. Arrangements for keeping pupils safe and secure are outstanding.
- The executive headteacher, governors and managers at all levels are very effective in ensuring that teaching continues to improve. They monitor teaching and pupils' rates of progress very well.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, pupils are not always challenged to make the best possible progress, especially those of lower ability.
- Pupils have not yet learnt how to join letters together when writing words and sentences.
- Marking of pupils' work is of inconsistent quality. Some comments written in pupils' books are difficult for them to read. Teachers do not all fully meet the requirements of the school's marking policy.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, including three joint observations with the executive headteacher. They looked carefully at a wide range of pupils' written work, especially in Years 6 and 8.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, senior and middle managers, representatives of the governing body, members of staff, groups of pupils and representatives from the diocese and local authority.
- Inspectors looked at many documents, including records of pupils' attainment and progress throughout the school, development planning, safeguarding procedures, records of lesson observation and the school's self-evaluation.
- Inspectors took account of 44 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and a staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

John Paddick, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Patrick Hargreaves

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Benedict's Roman Catholic Middle School is of average size for a middle school.
- The current executive headteacher has been at the school since September 2013. She also leads St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School in Jarrow.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or have special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported through the pupil premium is average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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

- Raise the overall quality of learning from good to outstanding by:
  - ensuring that work is always at the right level to enable pupils of all abilities to achieve their best, especially those of lower ability
  - insisting pupils improve their handwriting so they routinely join up letters when writing words and sentences
  - ensuring marking is easy for pupils to read
  - improving the consistency of marking to reflect the requirements of the school's policy and to reflect best practice.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- Since the executive headteacher's appointment in September 2013, the school has improved rapidly. She has a very clear vision for the school and knows how to make a difference and substantially and quickly raise pupils' attainment. She has the respect of all staff and has created a culture of effective teamwork and excellent morale. Senior and middle leaders are all very effective members of the team. As a consequence, the school has quickly moved from requiring improvement to providing a good quality of education.
- Development planning focuses strongly on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. Intended improvements materialise because managers know what to look for and how to check that planned developments are actually taking place.
- The management of teaching is extremely effective in improving classroom practice. Members of staff are keen to learn how to improve their lessons and try new techniques that have been effective elsewhere. Performance management arrangements are robust and effective so all members of staff know what they need to do to improve their work. For example, the recent emphasis on the quality of marking is having a positive effect on pupils' learning. However, there is still scope to improve the consistently good teaching to outstanding and to ensure that the school's marking policy is consistently applied.
- Strong promotion of equal opportunities means that all groups of pupils do well, and when slippage in progress does occur, resources are put into place to close the gaps. For example, a relentless focus on the gap in performance between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally, through the effective use of pupil premium funding, is bringing groups ever closer together. There is no evidence of any type of discrimination.
- A good and carefully planned curriculum provides pupils with clear pathways to make good and sometimes outstanding progress in a wide range of subjects. Outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is skilfully embedded into the curriculum. The same is true for preparing the pupils for life in modern Britain. Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunity to play instruments, take part in visits and sporting groups and musical productions. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about a recent assembly that they conducted on the First World War.
- Excellent utilisation of the school's primary sports funding provides an extra specialist physical education teacher one day a week, which enables pupils to benefit from a greater range of physical activities and enhances their well-being.
- The school enjoys a particularly productive relationship with parents. Results from the online questionnaire (Parent View) show an overwhelming sense of satisfaction.
- Safeguarding is extremely effective and meets all requirements. Record keeping, site security and the checks on the identities of all adults who have access to pupils, are first-rate and ensure pupils and adults are safe.
- Good-quality guidance on the move to the next school from Year 8 means pupils are confident and ready to transfer. Careers guidance is extensive and covered in many subjects, but members of staff believe the programme would benefit from formal planning to ensure that everything is covered well.
- The school enjoys a productive relationship with officers from the local authority and diocese, who provide guidance and advice when appropriate.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance is very effective. Governors play a full part in ensuring that the school continues to improve. They help to formulate action-planning schedules and keep up to date in relation to the progress made. They know exactly how well the school is doing and fully understand their role in ensuring its future development.
  - As a group, governors have a good understanding of the quality of teaching. They challenge managers when appropriate, ensure that performance management arrangements are effective and that any salary progressions are fully merited.
  - Governors are keen, vigorous and effective as a group in helping to guide the school forwards. They have been instrumental in supporting the executive headteacher to make the improvements necessary to improve the quality of education the school provides.
  - The governing body has a very detailed knowledge of all that the school does, often from first-hand experience. Consequently, governors explain in detail what the school's assessment data say and know precisely how the school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding****Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Teachers and classroom assistants work exceptionally effectively as a team to establish very clearly articulated routines and expectations of pupils from the time they join Year 5. Consequently, pupils conduct themselves exceptionally well in lessons, when moving around the school and when having lunch and socialising.
- Pupils are eager to learn and fully respect all the adults who work with them. In class, they all play their part in ensuring that an excellent atmosphere for learning prevails so they can concentrate on their work and discuss it without distraction. There were no instances of low-level disruption observed during the inspection.
- Pupils are very keen to take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities the school provides and speak enthusiastically about them. These activities, particularly sporting and musical, play a vital role in enhancing pupils' personal development, especially in gaining confidence.
- Pupils' perceptions gained through interviews with inspectors, coupled with the online parental survey, confirm that the frequently impeccable conduct and excellent manners observed during the inspection are typical of the school on a day-to-day basis.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved markedly since the last inspection. Attendance is above average and persistent absence low. Pupils arrive punctually to school and respond to lesson bells immediately.

**Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say that they feel perfectly safe in school and enjoy their education. They fully recognise the efforts that members of staff make to solve any problems.
- Pupils fully understand how to keep themselves safe because the school has made every effort to help them to understand all types of potential risk to their welfare. They confirm that bullying is extremely rare and that members of staff would deal with it effectively should it arise. There have been no recent racist incidents or exclusions for unacceptable conduct.
- Child protection arrangements and the checks made on all adults who have access to pupils are organised exceptionally well and have a high profile in the daily life of the school. Site security is first-rate.

**The quality of teaching is good**

- The quality of teaching has substantially improved since the time of the last inspection in response to concerted efforts to raise the rates at which pupils make progress.
- Good teaching is now lifting achievement right across the curriculum, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's own records of teaching show that it is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. This accords well with inspection evidence. Teachers all insist that pupils set their work out neatly, but they do not routinely insist that pupils move on from printing to joining up letters when they write words and sentences.
- Scrutiny of pupils' books shows that teaching has been of good quality for at least the past year. Pupils confirm that teaching is good and they make good progress with new learning on a daily basis.
- In class, teachers and their assistants manage pupils' learning and behaviour well. They explain tasks clearly, so pupils know exactly what is expected from them. Work is usually at the right level to challenge pupils to achieve their best, but occasionally insufficient thought is given to how best to adapt it for lower-ability pupils.
- Teachers use the skills of their classroom assistants well, especially in the provision of extra help for those pupils with special educational needs. This extra skilled help generally enables these pupils to make the same good progress as other pupils. For example, several of the weakest readers in Year 6 have made very good progress to become fluent at word recognition and comprehension.
- There are many examples of lessons where teachers inspire pupils to produce work of an exceptional quality. Teachers always link work well to pupils' targets and move lessons forward at a good pace. Group

work, paired discussions, video clips and the skilled use of pictures and artefacts, all help to make learning come to life. There are many examples where pupils are challenged to move their learning forward quickly, for example in English, where Year 8 were expected to extract information from sources and make notes before giving a presentation to the whole class.

- Marking is generally of good quality and much better than at the time of the previous inspection. However, members of staff do not always follow the full requirements of the school's policy.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- Pupils join Year 5 from several local schools and have very different educational backgrounds. The school's assessments of pupils' skills show pupils' attainment on entry is broadly as expected for their age. During pupils' four years in the school, they make good progress and achieve well to reach standards that are above expectations by the end of Year 8.
- Over the last two years in Years 5 and 6, pupils have made good progress in writing and reading to reach above expected or average levels, while progress in mathematics has been average. National test results in Year 6 have risen substantially to the extent that they compared very favourably with the national picture in reading and writing in 2014, but less so in mathematics.
- Results for Year 6 in the 2014 national tests rose compared with 2013 and the gap between the performance of pupils supported by the pupil premium and other pupils closed substantially. Nevertheless, compared with other pupils in the school, pupils supported by the pupil premium were still six months behind other pupils in reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar and around a year behind in mathematics and writing. Compared with other pupils nationally, they were a month behind in reading, three months behind in writing and around a year behind in reading and spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Predictions for the 2015 results show that the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in mathematics is likely to be above average and the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils in the school and nationally will narrow even further or close.
- Pupils' progress accelerates sharply through Years 7 and 8. By Year 8, pupils' work is extensive and very well set out. It is frequently well above expectations for age.
- The most able pupils make good progress because teachers make every effort to challenge them fully. By Year 8, they apply trigonometrical ratios with confidence to diagrams to work out angles and distances in right-angled triangles. They use the Sine Rule to carry out calculations in scalene triangles. Pupils supported by pupil premium in Years 7 and 8 frequently reach the same standards as other pupils, especially if they have been at the school for the full four years.
- Good progress in other subjects means that attainment in geography, history, art, design and technology and science are all above expectations for age by the end of Year 8. Pupils frequently write at length to a good standard in these subjects.
- The school's excellent tracking system soon shows up any pupils who are not meeting the challenging targets the school sets for them. Effective extra support and soon enables these pupils to catch up. This particularly applies to pupils who have significant barriers to learning.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in response to the high-quality specialist help that they receive. Progress for this group of pupils is particularly spectacular in Years 5 and 6 where they benefit from a small class and plenty of individual help.

## 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>	122366
<b>Local authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	463770

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	196
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Louise Rule
<b>Headteacher</b>	Maria Elliott
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 February 2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	01670 813658
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