

Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Academy

Abbey Lane, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST2 8AU

Inspection dates 9–10 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Since converting to an academy in 2013 leaders at all levels have worked successfully to improve the quality of teaching and the outcomes for pupils. Consequently, the school is improving rapidly.
- From below typical starting points pupils make good progress throughout the school to reach at least average standards at the end of Year 6.
- The gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils and between girls and boys are narrowing rapidly, particularly in reading and writing.
- Teaching is good overall and outstanding in some aspects. A relentless focus on improving writing has been very successful.
- Children make a good start in the early years.
- Staff, governors, parents and pupils share a strong belief in the values of their school and the Newman Catholic Collegiate. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as is their behaviour in and out of class.
- Pupils are very happy at school. Warm and trusting relationships underpin the enjoyment of learning and pupils' sense of being safe and valued.
- Pupils are provided with many memorable learning experiences through a rich and inclusive curriculum. Everyone is included and respected.
- Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The teaching of mathematics is sometimes less stimulating and creative than it is in writing, reading and topic work.
- Not all teachers set high enough expectations for the quality of presentation of work or ensure that pupils respond to their comments.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes and when pupils were working in smaller groups. They heard pupils read in Years 2 and 6 and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books across all year groups. They particularly focused on English, mathematics, science and topic work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, members of staff, governors, a representative of the academy company and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from the 19 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire, responses to the academy's most recent parental questionnaires, and from talking to parents bringing their children to school.
- The views of staff were gained from 14 responses to the staff questionnaire and conversations with individual teachers.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents. This included information relating to safeguarding and child protection, development planning, subject planning, tracking information about pupils' progress, performance management systems and procedures for checking on the quality of teaching and learning.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Academy converted to an academy on 1 September 2013. When its predecessor school, Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to require improvement.
- The school is a member of the Newman Collegiate Academy Company, a chain consisting of eight Catholic primary schools and one secondary school.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion that come from minority ethnic backgrounds is small.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is high compared to the national average and includes over half of all pupils. The pupil premium provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children that are looked after by the local authority.
- The school provides early years provision in full-time Nursery and Reception classes.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, at the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching and learning and accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - increasing the expertise in teaching mathematics so that all teachers are effective in explaining mathematical knowledge, developing pupils' skills and confidently plan creative learning opportunities
 - ensuring that teachers consistently set high expectations for the presentation of work
 - ensuring that pupils consistently respond to teachers' marking comments.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal and Vice-Principal are a strong and effective team, bringing different skills and expertise to the school. Under their leadership the school has improved rapidly since becoming an academy. Teaching is consistently good, attendance is rising and excellent standards of behaviour and safety are the norm.
- Leaders know exactly what they need to do and how to go about driving improvement. For example, the Vice-Principal has initiated a guided reading strategy in every class with the result that reading standards are rising and pupils' progress is accelerating. She has led very effective training for all staff in how to teach guided reading. Other schools in the academy chain are sharing this good practice.
- Detailed systems to check on pupils' progress ensure that all staff are aware of which pupils need extra help. Subject leaders are involved in action plans for improvement and are now making a much stronger contribution to school improvement than previously. They collect and manage progress data, check on the quality of teaching and marking, and share the responsibility of ensuring the school improves further. Their current priorities are to remove remaining inconsistencies in teaching practice, implement new assessment systems and embed the new curriculum.
- A new special educational needs coordinator is reviewing the school's practice and bringing greater clarity to the school's systems so that provision, which is already good, will improve further.
- The early years is managed by a skilled practitioner who is new to the leadership role but is already having a good impact.
- Teachers' performance is well managed. All staff are proud to be part of this learning community and know that senior leaders are well placed to provide support or coaching if it is required.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide more staff in school so that there are numerous opportunities for targeted group work and individual attention for individuals. It is also used to ensure that all children can benefit from clubs, outings and other educational enrichment experiences.
- Sports funding has been highly effective in improving the levels of fitness of all pupils. It has encouraged them to take part in different sports and to focus on their own individual levels of fitness. Pupils enjoy the numerous opportunities to take part in clubs, competitive sport and experience new sports. Pupil 'sports leaders' tutor others and ensure that playtime is a vigorous, active and enjoyable experience. The collegiate employs a sports coordinator who works with physical education coordinators across the chain of schools and spends time in each school teaching, supporting and advising. He trains staff as well as pupils, and has introduced many new sports. There is an effective assessment system so that pupils can track their own improvement and progress as well as informing teachers about how to plan the next steps.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins the entire curriculum. The spiritual dimension is enhanced by assemblies, class prayers and areas for reflection and prayer in every classroom. Pupils are well aware of other faiths and learn about different religions through religious education. Pupils are encouraged to have an awareness and affinity with the natural environment and learn about stewardship of the earth's resources. Some of their writing about endangered species is deeply poignant. Practical experience of the outdoors is provided in the forest school work where pupils enjoy time in the meadow and woods, and learn about conservation and acquire practical skills. Leaders use the increasingly creative and stimulating curriculum to raise aspirations and inspire pupils to aim high. Pupils' art work was recently celebrated in a display at Keele University.
- British values of tolerance and respect are promoted through the ethos of the school and the wider curriculum. Pupils have an active school council and know their voice is heard and that they have a say in school development. Older pupils take on responsibilities with pride and every class spends time looking not only at their rights but also their responsibilities. Pupils in Year 6 are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding children are exemplary. The safety of the site and the child protection arrangements are rigorous. Pupils are aware of the dangers of extremism and staff have had training from the police on the 'Prevent' strategy so that they feel confident in recognising any signs of indoctrination.
- The Newman collegiate leaders have provided high-quality support which has enabled the school to improve rapidly all aspects of its work. The Principal has been proactive in seeking specific support when necessary. This has included training for governors and subject leaders. Teachers are enthusiastic about being part of a larger team and having colleagues in the academy chain to share ideas and strategies. Previously the school was well supported by the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The effectiveness of the governing body has increased significantly since the school converted to an

academy. Governors have received training from an outstanding Chair of Governors in another school and are now fully able to carry out their duties effectively without additional support. They understand progress data and so are able to check the school's performance with that of others. They ensure that good teaching is rewarded and underperformance is challenged. They know about the quality of teaching and the progress of individual pupils as well as that of groups because they visit the school regularly and receive reports on the quality of teaching and marking. The Principal's reports to governors are focused on the impact of actions taken. Governors suitably oversee the spending of pupil premium and sports funding to make sure the funds bring about the necessary improvements. They oversee developments in the curriculum and ensure that the ethos of the school promotes British values and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Governors stringently review child protection and safeguarding arrangements. They are totally committed to ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to be successful. Discrimination is not tolerated in any form.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils really enjoy school and are very enthusiastic about their lessons and what they are learning. In class they concentrate and work hard, and listen with all their attention to what teachers are saying. They respect their teachers and made comments such as, 'our teachers provide the best help they can', and 'our teachers are inspiring us to do well'.
- The relationships between pupils and adults are outstanding. Pupils say lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour. They respect their teachers and appreciate all the many interesting activities, trips and outings that are planned for them, such as recent visits to London and Keele University.
- Pupils are extremely polite, considerate and well-mannered. They look after each other. Older pupils are proud of their roles as monitors, sports and play leaders. They take pleasure in helping and supporting younger pupils.
- Playtimes are very well managed with sports leaders quickly setting up equipment and organising games so that everyone can enjoy vigorous active play to refresh them for the next session of learning. Lunchtime in the dining hall is a happy and friendly occasion. Pupils' good manners are shown in their quick response to requests and care in looking after each other.
- There are very few incidents of bullying and usually this is only friends falling out. Pupils know that unkind comments about people who are different or who come from different countries or have different faiths are totally unacceptable.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Teachers create a very positive climate for learning where children feel valued and secure.
- The school has a safeguarding team which includes the Principal, governors, a learning mentor and a family support worker. They oversee child protection arrangements very effectively. Leaders have excellent links with outside agencies and ensure that no child slips through the net.
- Because relationships are so strong, all pupils trust the adults around them and know that they will be listened to and helped with any problem.
- Pupils are well aware of rules for safety on the internet. They learn about the hazards of different types of drug and alcohol abuse and how to keep safe walking to and from school. They know rules about keeping away from fences at playtimes and understand why this is important. The books chosen for class reading are often ones which raise pupils' awareness and deepen their understanding about different cultures and faiths.
- Attendance is at least average overall and some pupils have a very high record of attendance. They know how important this is, with individuals commenting that 'we can't learn if we don't go to school'.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of work in pupils' books, their attitudes to learning seen in observations and the improving rates of progress of pupils show that teaching is consistently good and in some areas it is outstanding. It has improved significantly in the two years since the school converted to an academy.

- Teachers plan work for different ability levels so that pupils are making good progress, whatever their starting points. There is a good focus on pupils explaining their answers to deepen their understanding from early years up to Year 6.
- Across the school teachers plan imaginative activities that excite and motivate pupils to succeed. A previous weakness in writing has been addressed by strategies in which pupils focus on many different kinds of writing such as diaries, poetry, recounts and biographies. They are challenged constantly to improve their vocabulary, practise 'speaking' for writing, and have frequent opportunities to write at length. Stimulating displays, the effective use of dictionaries and good advice in marking is widening pupils' awareness of the importance of having a rich and varied vocabulary, and results in some powerful and imaginative writing.
- Daily guided reading sessions are very effective in helping pupils to look deeper into the text they are studying. Older pupils keep a reading record in which they complete different tasks to show their progress in gaining mastery over different kinds of texts. Class libraries are stocked with an enticing supply of books which pupils are encouraged to borrow and read regularly.
- The teaching of mathematics is effective but sometimes the range of strategies used by teachers is less creative and stimulating than is the case in English and topic work. Explaining mathematical knowledge and developing pupils' mathematical skills could be further improved by enhancing teachers' subject expertise.
- Nevertheless, pupils make good progress in mathematics and generally take pride in their work.
- Teaching assistants and extra teachers working with individuals or targeted groups have a close partnership with class teachers. They make a strong contribution to the learning and progress of all pupils and particularly disadvantaged pupils and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Teachers mark work regularly and conscientiously so that mistakes are identified and good advice is given about how pupils can improve their work. There are many examples in work books of pupils responding to comments and adding to, or improving, their answers, but this is not consistent in all classes.
- Most teachers set high expectations for the quantity and quality of presentation of pupils' work but this is inconsistent. The work in a minority of classes is untidy; this leads to more mistakes and slows the process of learning.

The achievement of pupils is good

- In 2014, pupils made good progress in Year 6 to reach broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics from below average starting points at the end of Year 1. A higher proportion of pupils than is found nationally made good progress in reading and mathematics. Progress in writing was slower. In the current year standards are on track to rise further with good progress evident in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level in phonics (the sounds that letters make) at the end of Years 1 and 2, is at least average. Phonic standards are rising this year as a result of expert teaching and staff training.
- Standards have risen over the last two years at the end of Year 2 so that pupils are now reaching national standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The gap in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is narrowing. In 2014, disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 2 lagged behind other pupils in the school by five terms in mathematics and writing, but there was no gap in their achievement in reading. Compared to other pupils nationally, they were behind by three terms in mathematics, two terms in writing but there was no gap in reading. This year school data, confirmed by inspection findings, show that the gap has narrowed in writing but not yet in mathematics, although the gap over time is narrowing in mathematics. Teachers and governors are putting high-quality resources and extra staffing into narrowing this gap as quickly as possible. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is tracked in every year group and the school carefully checks their progress every half term.
- The most able pupils are supported by extra challenges provided by teachers and teaching assistants. The work in their books shows that they write confidently in different genres including fiction and non-fiction. They respond well to regular 'learning challenges' which encourage investigation and individual research. More able pupils attend the local high school for specialist teaching in English and mathematics. Nevertheless, the school is aware of the importance of working to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher National Curriculum Level 5 at the end of Year 6 and is working to achieve this.
- Work in mathematics is secure. Pupils understand and use the language for mathematics well and have good mental arithmetic skills.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make the same good progress as other pupils because they receive good support according to their individual needs. Some of these pupils achieved well above similar pupils nationally and made stronger progress.
- Generally boys have not achieved as well as girls in the past. However, numbers are small and there is no fixed pattern of underachievement. This year boys are catching up.
- Pupils achieve well not only in English and mathematics but also in singing, sport and the creative arts.

The early years provision

is good

- Most children start in the Nursery with skills that are below those that are typical for three-year-olds. This is particularly the case with personal and emotional development, communication and language, numeracy and literacy. They settle quickly into the stimulating and enticing environment and make good progress in all areas of learning.
- Children's attitudes to learning and to each other are very positive and they behave well. They work and play well together and maintain concentration on their tasks for a sustained period of time. They respect each other, adults and their learning environment.
- Teaching is good because adults move learning along by asking probing questions, setting new challenges and building children's confidence in their own ability to be successful. Teachers encourage children to practice speaking and listening in order to improve their communication skills. By the end of the Reception Year nearly all children are able to make a good start in Year 1. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is above average.
- Working patterns vary. Sometimes children work together in large groups, for example, numeracy, singing and 'dough disco', sometimes groups of two or three do focused work with an adult. Often children choose to work individually practising writing alphabet letters and enjoying the many books available in the Nursery and Reception classes. Writing in the Reception class about the seaside and the clash of waves on the sand was impressive.
- Children are fascinated by the stimulating outdoor learning area and are curious and interested in finding out about the world and themselves. The school has a 'forest school' area where pupils develop skills in movement such as running and navigating bridges and enlarge their understanding of the natural world.
- Children are very safe and are looked after well in the early years classes.
- The new leader is committed to making the setting the best it can be. Impressive plans are in place for further development.

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	140141
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	462548

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Jones
Principal	Debbie Sims
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01782 234646
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