

St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy

Ridge Terrace, Bedlington, Northumberland NE22 6ED

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Outcomes are not yet good. Although progress is improving, pupils do not make consistently strong progress in a wide range of subjects.
- Outcomes in mathematics require improvement. Pupils' progress has been mixed over time and variability remains in the quality of teaching. Teachers do not consistently challenge the most able pupils.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has been slower than other pupils nationally. Although some differences are diminishing, they are not doing so rapidly enough.
- In some subjects, new assessment systems do not provide pupils with a clear picture of the actions they can take to make improved progress.
- Although improving, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains low.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders set high expectations and have strengthened leadership and the quality of teaching in a number of key areas, including the sixth form.
- Pupils are making good progress in key subjects, such as English, humanities and science. Good teaching in these areas leads to good rates of progress.
- Governors show a strong commitment to the school and its ongoing success. They know the school well and make regular visits to check standards and challenge leaders on progress.
- Pupils are courteous, considerate and well behaved young people who show a clear pride in their school community. Teachers are committed to their wider personal and social development.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve and sustain the rate of pupils' progress in mathematics by:
 - building on pupils' prior learning more rapidly
 - addressing the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- Improve the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils by:
 - complementing intervention work with a sustained focus by all teachers on the progress of disadvantaged pupils
 - intensifying actions to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils who join the school in Year 9
 - building further on recent improvements in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- Further improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - implementing new assessment systems clearly to give all teachers and pupils a clear understanding of progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and his senior team have established a culture of high expectation that is spreading across the school. Teachers feel more accountable for performance as leaders have introduced more robust systems for checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- Teachers are responding positively to this culture of high expectation. While challenge has increased, morale remains very positive as teachers feel supported and value their professional development which is influencing improvements in teaching.
- Leaders have a clear vision of building long-term improvement, combining developments at key stage 3 with focused interventions at key stage 4. They are adding greater challenge to the key stage 3 curriculum to prepare pupils more thoroughly for the increased demands of key stage 4.
- Leaders and governors have a comprehensive view of the school's performance and can identify strengths and areas for improvement. They have tackled many areas for improvement although this has not yet resulted in consistently strong outcomes for all pupils.
- Middle leaders have a stronger role in checking standards and work with senior leaders to check the quality of teaching and hold staff to account. Their work has contributed to greater consistency in the quality of teaching, although the school's assessment policy is not consistently implemented across departments.
- The leadership of the sixth form has improved. As a result of stronger guidance, close monitoring and better teaching, pupils are making better progress.
- An improving quality of teaching is evident in subjects such as English and science where clear leadership, effective planning and demanding curricula are leading to much stronger rates of pupils' progress. Progress in mathematics has remained more variable and slower. There remain occasions where the most able pupils are not adequately challenged.
- Leaders have introduced specific initiatives to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. There is evidence that disadvantaged pupils who join the school in Year 7 achieve better outcomes than those who join in Year 9. However, differences in the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils have not diminished rapidly enough.
- Leaders have designed new assessment flight paths with challenging targets to address the heightened demands of a more challenging curriculum, with regular points to check pupils' progress. While there are emerging signs that these systems are reflecting better rates of progress, there remains variability in their implementation and pupils do not consistently understand how to track their progress.

- Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. Leaders have ensured that pupils have access to a robust academic programme but this is enhanced by vocational options and access to specific programmes, such as employability skills. The respect code encourages the development of positive learning dispositions, including resilience and social skills, while the school's Catholic ethos promotes pupils' spiritual and moral awareness, offering insight into a range of other faiths.

Governance

- Governors and trust directors are passionate in their commitment to the school. They have good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the expertise to hold leaders to account. They make regular visits to check the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make.
- Governors have supported the headteacher in his vision to establish stronger continuity with primary schools, with the majority of pupils now joining the school in Year 7. Some governors sit jointly on St Benet Biscop's governing body and those of feeder primary schools, enhancing transition from one school to the other.
- Governors have worked robustly with school leaders to secure improvements in leadership and the quality of teaching. They have supported leaders to address underperformance and in holding teachers to account through the stronger implementation of performance management procedures.
- Governors hold leaders to account for the use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium, but the collective action of governors and leaders has not enabled differences in progress and attendance for disadvantaged pupils to diminish rapidly enough.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders are committed to their duties to keep children safe. The actions taken to check the suitability of adults working at the school are extremely thorough and records are assiduously maintained. Staff training is up to date, and teachers are mindful of pupils' well-being and pursue any concerns about pupils' welfare rigorously. Pupils have a good awareness of how to stay safe and were able to discuss the actions they could take to stay safe online, including the threats caused by sexting. A safeguarding governor with specific expertise in this area works diligently with leaders to check safeguarding practices while external consultants add further assurances.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is good and enables the majority of pupils to make good progress. Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive and this mutual respect supports effective learning.
- The quality of teaching is strong in a number of subjects, including English and science. In English, teachers plan thoroughly and push pupils to explain their reasoning. In science, teachers use strong subject knowledge to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding, and explain complex concepts in interesting and accessible ways.

- Although improving, teaching in mathematics has been more variable and resulted in weaker progress at key stage 4 and at key stage 5. There are signs that teaching is beginning to promote deeper understanding of processes and methods. However, misconceptions are not consistently addressed and feedback does not always support progress.
- Leaders have introduced robust systems to challenge and support weaker teaching. Changes to leadership and staffing are leading to a more sustained improvement.
- The school promotes an active love of reading. Pupils read well and are able to discuss their reading enthusiastically. The teaching of literacy is becoming more embedded across the curriculum, although numeracy is less well developed.
- Time in lessons is generally used effectively. Pupils settle to their learning quickly and are swift to respond when moving between tasks or pausing to reflect on their progress. On some occasions, the most able pupils are not moved on to challenges swiftly enough.
- Teachers set homework in line with the school's home learning policy. Pupils respond positively to homework tasks which they believe support and extend their learning.
- Targeted interventions, including the inspiring futures programme and employability skills, are being used to support progress and attainment for disadvantaged pupils at key stage 4. At key stage 3, link lessons give disadvantaged pupils and those who need to catch up additional support with literacy. While these interventions are beginning to improve progress, their impact has been limited as differences in progress have not significantly diminished. In mainstream lessons, it is not always clear how teachers address the needs of disadvantaged pupils.
- There is variability in teachers' use of the school's marking and assessment policy to support progress. While pupils are aware of the principles behind their flight paths, they do not consistently understand how assessment in lessons relates to their targets.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school actively promotes values of courtesy and respect, and develops pupils' sense of responsibility to the school and wider community. Pupils are proud of their school community and take pride in their appearance.
- The school's work on developing a set of learning dispositions under their respect code enables pupils to demonstrate a positive approach to learning in many lessons. They are able and willing to articulate their thoughts in lessons and quickly settle to tasks, responding crisply to teachers' questions and requests for attention.
- The school's core studies programme, combined with its advocacy of respect, supports pupils' emotional and social welfare. Pupils state that the school takes action to help them to stay safe in school and in the wider community.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms, on corridors and around the site is consistently polite, and they show consideration for one another and other adults. They show extremely positive attitudes to learning in classrooms and incidents of low-level disruption are extremely rare.
- Leaders set high standards of behaviour that they rigorously enforce. Their intolerance of mobile phone use on site is consistently enforced and as a result pupils do not disrupt learning or behaviour around the site through inappropriate use of their phones.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and there is little derogatory language. Pupils are confident that their teachers reliably and swiftly address any of the rare incidents of bullying effectively.
- Leaders have intensified actions to improve attendance. Levels of overall attendance are rising and are similar to those seen nationally. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has declined. Through more focused support and intervention, the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils improved markedly in 2016, although they remain more likely to be absent and regularly absent than other pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also more likely to be absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- While progress is improving in a number of areas, pupils do not make consistently strong progress in a wide range of subjects. In 2016, the sustained improvements in the progress and attainment of pupils in English and science were offset by the slower progress pupils made in mathematics and history.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics has been variable over time. While staff movement has created challenges for leaders, the improvements of 2015 were not sustained in 2016 and improvements have not been embedded.
- While some differences are diminishing in the progress of disadvantaged pupils, they continue to make slower progress than other pupils nationally. New initiatives are beginning to address their needs more fully but direct teaching in the classroom has not addressed their underperformance rapidly enough. While there is evidence that disadvantaged pupils who join the school in Year 7 make much better progress than those who join in Year 9, the large group of middle-ability disadvantaged pupils make slower progress.
- The increased rigour and challenge evident in many lessons were not always evident in progress over time in books. Pupils did not always demonstrate sustained progress over time and in some cases opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding were limited.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are beginning to make improved rates of progress. For example, the proportions achieving the highest grades in sciences is increasing although higher-level attainment is weaker in mathematics.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made improved progress in 2015. In 2016, the picture was more mixed with those of lower ability making good progress and those of middle ability making slower progress.
- Pupils are increasingly better prepared for the next stage of their education, although weaker progress in mathematics and slower progress for disadvantaged pupils limits this preparedness for some pupils.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The leadership and management of the sixth form have improved the 16 to 19 study programme. Leaders have acted decisively to address areas for improvement and as a result students make much better progress.
- Leaders now monitor academic progress more rigorously and intervene more rapidly to address underperformance. As a result, students' progress overall has consistently improved over the last three years and current progress indicates further progress for 2017. Academic attainment has improved, with students achieving increasing proportions of higher grades, although figures remain below those seen nationally.
- Leaders have taken steps to develop the wider skills of sixth-form students. Through their roles as peer mentors, and charity and enterprise leaders, they take a more active role in the school community and act as role models to younger pupils. Pupils access a broad enrichment programme, including careers-related work experience.
- The quality of teaching is improving but rates of progress have not been consistent across all subjects or for all students. Improvements in English and business have been offset by declining progress in mathematics and geography, while middle-ability students make much better progress than the most able at A level. The most able are not consistently challenged.
- Students without GCSE grades A* to C in English and mathematics made well above national progress towards achieving a grade C in 2016.
- Careers advice and guidance are improving. Stronger links exist with local universities and employers, and increasing proportions of students are progressing to higher education.
- Retention rates have generally improved since the last inspection, despite a dip in 2016, and are now in line with national averages, reflecting the improving guidance that students receive. However, disadvantaged students have lower rates of retention.
- The school met the government's interim minimum standards in 2015.

School details

Unique reference number	141814
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10019368

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,093
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	168
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mrs Ann Hardy
Headteacher	Mr Con Todd
Telephone number	01670 822 795
Website	www.st-benetbiscop.org.uk
Email address	admin@st-benetbiscop.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is an above average sized secondary school.
- The school converted to academy status on 5 March 2015.

- The school is becoming a predominantly 11 to 18 school, with the majority of pupils joining in Year 7 and a smaller proportion joining from middle schools in Year 9. Pupils on the roll of a local middle school are educated at St Benet Biscop in Years 7 and 8.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out observations of learning across a wide range of lessons, a number of which were jointly undertaken with senior leaders.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, lunchtimes and at playtimes.
- Inspectors examined the quality of work in books, in folders and in displays around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders. Inspectors also talked to a wider group of staff. The lead inspector met the chair of the board of directors and five members of the governing body. The lead inspector also met the school improvement partner and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met groups of pupils in key stages 3 and 4. They also talked less formally to pupils in lessons and around the school site about aspects of their learning, behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors looked at the school's work and considered documents including the school's own evaluation of its work, the school improvement plan, curriculum plans and information relating to pupils' achievement and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took into account 60 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 10 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 40 responses to the staff questionnaire. The lead inspector talked to one parent on the telephone.

Inspection team

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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