

# Benton Dene School

Hailsham Avenue, Longbenton, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE12 8FD

## Inspection dates

28–29 March 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Benton Dene has undergone many changes since the last inspection. There is a new leadership team, the number of pupils has increased by almost 50% and pupils attending have a wider range of complex needs.
- Undaunted by these changes, new leaders quickly garnered an insightful understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are driving improvement in weaker areas with 'vim and vigour' and are working relentlessly to raise expectations of all so that pupils in Benton Dene get the best deal possible.
- Stronger arrangements to manage staff performance are contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching. Much is good and some is outstanding. As a result, pupils generally make at least good progress from their very low starting points. Occasionally staff step in too quickly, limiting opportunities for pupils to work things out for themselves.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary. Pupils are very safe and thrive emotionally, socially and personally in the inclusive and nurturing atmosphere. Such attributes, the inviting curriculum and focus on developing pupils' communication skills contribute to pupils' very good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning, and to their evident enjoyment of school.
- Improved systems assess regularly pupils' reading, writing, mathematical, communication, social and emotional skills. These are generally used well to plan work that moves pupils on successfully in their learning. Work is ongoing to develop robust assessment systems for other subjects.
- On occasions, most-able pupils are given work that does not stretch them sufficiently. Leaders are working with staff to tackle this and to ensure that pupils' academic progress has as strong a focus in lessons as their communication, social and emotional development.
- Attendance rates are super and above the average for primary schools nationally.
- The early years is good and exhibits the same strengths and areas that need more focus as the rest of the school. Children generally make good progress from their starting points and are well prepared for key stage 1.
- Governance is strong. Governors share leaders' passion to do the best for the pupils and they are fully involved in school life. Governors challenge leaders rigorously for the impact of their work and do so with aplomb. They check carefully to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as their peers.

## Full report

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

- Enable all pupils to make the best possible progress by ensuring that:
  - teachers match work precisely to pupils’ different starting points so they are consistently challenged to achieve their best, including in the early years and particularly for the most able pupils
  - staff develop pupils’ independence skills and abilities to work things out for themselves, and only support them when necessary
  - staff take full account of assessments of pupils’ academic progress alongside their social, communication and emotional assessments when planning lesson activities, and then help pupils to move briskly onto their work
  - the good practice in subject leadership already in school is shared more widely so that rigorous assessment systems can be developed in subjects beyond English and mathematics.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The insightful, determined headteacher is very well supported by the deputy headteacher and governors in their shared ambition. This is to make sure that pupils thrive during their time in Benton Dene, become 'the best they can be' in their learning, behaviour and personal qualities, and are well prepared for their future lives.
- Leaders have managed the many changes since the last inspection effectively. They have tackled the areas that required attention at that time and are driving improvement well. For example, partnerships with parents are excellent and fruitful. Parents are highly positive about the impact of the school's work. Home-to-school diaries, weekly newsletters, homework, workshops, coffee mornings and regular parents' evenings are just a few of the strategies developed to keep parents well informed about their children's development and achievements.
- Leaders have a very accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's work because of the forensic monitoring activities they carry out. Brisk action is taken to tackle weaker areas. For example, their checks on the quality of teaching inform individual support plans or future training needs. Teachers speak highly of the training and coaching they receive to help them improve their own practice and skills. They recognise the sharper performance management arrangements that hold them to account more robustly for the impact of their work on pupils' achievements and which inform their own professional development opportunities. Leaders make sure that the special educational needs funding they receive is well spent.
- Improved, regular assessments of pupils' progress in English and mathematics are used by leaders to set aspirational targets, and by teachers to plan work that generally moves pupils on well from their starting points. But this is not always the case. Occasionally work for most-able pupils is not demanding enough, or pupils move slowly from their 'self-chosen' tasks to planned activities during lessons. On occasions, pupils repeat work that they have already mastered, or staff step in too quickly and give pupils the answers and do not challenge pupils to work things out for themselves.
- Recent strategies developed to improve pupils' reading and writing, such as 'talk for writing' and 'inferential comprehension', are helping to tackle effectively the noticeable difference between pupils' progress in mathematics and English last year.
- Shrewd use of pupil premium funding, and checks to make sure that every disadvantaged pupil benefits from additional activities and support, ensure that these pupils achieve at least as well as their peers. Indeed last year, Year 6 pupils' achievements were above those of other pupils in school. The physical education and sport funding is equally well used. Pupils benefit from a range of sporting activities and experiences that add to their stated enjoyment of school, their physical fitness, and their team-building and competitive spirit. Governors check regularly to make sure that this funding is spent wisely.

- Leaders are developing subject leaders' skills in monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in subjects beyond English and mathematics effectively. Subject leaders are more regularly involved in reviews of learning in lessons and pupils' workbooks. Work is ongoing to develop rigorous assessment systems to enable subject leaders to check more accurately pupils' progress over time. That being said, the curriculum is broad and is enriched well by many visits out of school and visitors to school. It is also very well planned to make sure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. The curriculum, excellent relationships, the nurturing atmosphere and value of each other contribute expertly to pupils' preparation for life after school, and to be active and thoughtful citizens in modern Britain today.
- Very carefully planned transitions into school help pupils to settle in and apply themselves to their learning. Parents speak movingly of the great improvements in their children's progress, confidence and self-esteem once they arrive at Benton Dene. Many pupils arrive in-year within different key stages, having often faced difficult times in their previous schools. They settle in quickly and want to please because of the care and support provided and the very positive relationships staff build up with pupils.

### **Governance**

- Governors share leaders' ambitions to ensure that pupils get the best deal possible so that they are well prepared for their lives beyond school. Governors are astute and reflect regularly on their own skills. They have increased the range of expertise within the governing body to ensure that they carry out their roles of challenge and support well. Governors have supported leaders successfully in the further development of the school and in helping leaders to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of pupils who have a wide range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Governors have a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they visit regularly and because information provided to them is clear and transparent. Governors challenge leaders robustly for the impact of their work. They check regularly the progress pupils make in their learning, behaviour, and social and emotional development. They pay particular attention to the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who are looked after by the local authority. This is to ensure they know that the additional funding for these pupils is well spent.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Rigorous recruitment procedures ensure that the staff employed are suitable to work with children. All staff have up-to-date child protection and safeguarding training that is in line with the most recent Department for Education's guidance. They have a good understanding of what to do when they have concerns and are vigilant in reporting any worries. This includes concerns about risks to pupils' safety from social media or the extremist behaviour of others. Leaders follow up concerns robustly and make timely referrals to key safeguarding agencies, such as the local authority's children with disabilities team, children's social care or designated lead for safeguarding, to ensure that the right action is taken to safeguard pupils at risk. Thorough risk assessments are in place for all activities out of school and regular checks of the school site make sure that the building is safe and secure.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- High-quality relationships between staff and pupils typify the learning atmosphere in all classes. Staff are good role models and their calm and courteous manner, coupled with a 'can do' attitude, rubs off on pupils, who settle down quickly to their work. Skilful, timely interventions from staff enable pupils experiencing a difficult time with their emotions or behaviour to be supported quietly back to their learning without fuss.
- Detailed checks of pupils' skills and abilities on entry to school, and during the year, ensure that staff have a good understanding of pupils' academic, communication, physical, social and emotional needs. They usually use this information well to set out individual learning activities that tackle the varied barriers to learning that pupils have. This enables pupils to apply themselves to their tasks successfully and make at least good progress from their very low starting points over time. Occasionally there is not enough focus on pupils' academic targets.
- Staff know the curriculum they teach well and are skilled in using a variety of communication approaches to engage pupils in their learning and in the development of their social and communication skills. These approaches help pupils to express their views and make choices. For pupils with an autistic spectrum diagnosis, the strategies reduce anxiety and help the day move on smoothly as they tackle the activities set out.
- Occasionally activities are not challenging enough for the most able pupils, especially when they repeat work previously mastered. Sometimes staff step in too quickly to help pupils complete their tasks. This limits pupils' abilities to work independently or tackle the work for themselves. It also means that it is hard for teachers to know if pupils have achieved their challenging targets for that day.
- Teachers carefully assess pupils' work in English and mathematics and then provide regular written or verbal feedback, in line with the school's marking, feedback and assessment policy. Signs and symbols as well as written comments are used, appropriate to the differing levels of understanding of each pupil. This helps pupils understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to achieve their next targets. Senior leaders are working with subject leaders to ensure that other subjects are equally supported and also enable challenging work to be set across the curriculum.
- Teaching assistants are generally, but not always, well deployed to support pupils' learning and development. Some are highly effective. For example, it was inspirational to see one work with a group of pupils on their reading tasks. Pupils were keen to learn, focused and energised. They succeeded well with their reading and comprehension activities because of the very high expectations the assistant had for their behaviour, what they must achieve and her good grasp of how to teach reading.

**Personal development and welfare**

- Work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils arrive in school with an increasingly wide range of communication, social, emotional or physical needs. Many arrive in-year, often having faced difficult times in their previous schools. High-quality relationships and individual care and support help pupils to flourish emotionally, socially and personally. Pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem, and develop the highly positive attitudes to learning evident across the school.
- Work to enable pupils to understand the ideals that lie at the heart of British values is embedded across the curriculum. In lessons, circle time and assemblies, they learn about cultures, faiths and religions across Britain and the world. This work contributes to pupils' very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, themes from the book, 'A person's a person no matter how small', stimulated significant thought and activities on valuing and respecting differences in others.
- Pupils reported that they feel very safe and said that they would go to any adult if they had a concern because they trust them. Pupils explained convincingly about how name-calling or bullying are very rare. Indeed, they could not relate a recent incident. This is confirmed by the records that leaders keep.
- Staff are highly effective in ensuring that the school environment is very safe and pupils are safe on visits out of school. Pupils are taught well about risks and how to manage them. Work on road safety, 'keeping safe at home', 'growing up' sessions from the school nurse, e-safety and personal safety work from a national charity are threaded across the curriculum. These are just a few examples of the range of work undertaken to help pupils recognise unsafe situations and build their resilience and skills in responding to them.
- The improved school council and regular opportunities for pupils to express their views have a meaningful impact on their sense of belonging to, and their improvements in, the school. For example, pupils are involved in the recruitment of staff. The headteacher reports that their assessments virtually always concur with those of the recruitment team. The school council organised a recent Children in Need charity event, encouraging other pupils to wear spotty clothing and have crazy spotty hair.

**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' attitudes to learning are strong because of the high expectations teachers have of their conduct and behaviour in class and around school. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the praise of staff. They are very well supported to manage their complex behaviours and to overcome any resulting barriers to learning. Pupils conduct themselves sensibly as they move around the school site.

- The highly effective way that staff manage the complex behaviours of pupils can be seen throughout the school day. They can also be seen in the detailed records leaders keep on incidents of poor behaviour, or incidents where staff have needed to carry out their positive handling training. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. The number of times pupils require positive handling are low. Rates fall well as pupils learn to understand and manage their anxiety or emotional outbursts. Since the last inspection, there have been no permanent exclusions and only one temporary exclusion.
- It is clear that pupils enjoy school because attendance rates are above the average of those found in mainstream primary schools. Persistent absence rates are slightly above average. This is because of a small number of pupils with very complex medical needs. These pupils and families are well supported to return to class as soon as possible.
- High attendance rates are not just down to pupils' enjoyment – they are also a result of very timely action when pupils do not turn up to school. Good partnerships with other agencies and careful support to families in times of crisis help to ensure that pupils come to school and benefit from all that is on offer.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for their complex needs. Their skills and abilities on entry are well below average. Good-quality teaching, high-quality relationships and targeted support enable pupils to make significant gains in their social, emotional and communication development and their learning over time. Observations of learning, reviews of pupils' workbooks and leaders' assessments of their work show that pupils in school are making generally good progress from their very low starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Occasionally, activities do not stretch the most able sufficiently.
- Until recently, progress in mathematics has been stronger than in English. Weaknesses in English are being put right by the use of a wider range of strategies and activities. Daily, focused reading sessions and the very structured approach to teaching phonics, as well as higher expectations of what pupils can do, lie at the heart of this good improvement.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is at least similar to that of their peers. Last year, achievements of disadvantaged Year 6 pupils were above those of their classmates. However, across class groups, numbers of disadvantaged pupils are very small, so it is difficult to extrapolate a common theme. Progress is at least good but varies overall. Carefully planned additional activities and support make sure that all disadvantaged pupils catch up to where they should be if they are at risk of falling behind. Activities are closely checked by leaders and governors to ensure that they are making a positive difference and to ensure that the pupil premium is being spent well.
- The work in pupils' many books show that they are all taught a broad range of subjects and record their work carefully. They apply themselves to their learning and achieve well against their learning goals. Sometimes progress is impressive, as seen in some recent geography work on vulcanisation. The good progress pupils make in art can be seen in work around the school but also in the sketchbooks that pupils use.

- While pupils' work in all subjects is checked by teachers, they do not always check if progress is as good as it could be. For example, in science, the resources and level of difficulty of work for a higher year group in magnetism were similar to those for a lower year group.
- Staff use a nationally available system to identify, assess and then support the social, emotional and communication needs of pupils who have an autistic spectrum diagnosis. This sits alongside the assessments staff make on pupils' progress in their academic subjects. Leaders are currently taking action to ensure that staff do not lose sight of pupils' academic progress when using this system, and to have better assessment information on pupils' progress for subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next steps through the good progress they make in their learning over time and very carefully planned transitions into school, from class to class and to their secondary schools. 'Themed weeks' such as 'British values' reinforce the work that is ongoing to help pupils understand issues such as democracy, tolerance and respect, and to value differences. Weeks like the 'world of work' and 'STEM week' raise aspirations and provide enticing practical experiences in a range of careers including those in science, engineering and technology.

### Early years provision

**Good**

- Carefully planned pre-admission work, including home visits and detailed assessments of children's needs, interests and abilities help children to settle in quickly and get off to a good start. They make generally good progress in their learning and development and are prepared well for their next steps into key stage 1.
  - Staff get to know their children and families well and develop very strong and valued relationships with them. There are many opportunities for parents to be part of the early years community, to gain a good insight into their children's achievements and to help them support their children's learning at home. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's approach, the accessibility of staff and the good gains their children make, emotionally, socially and educationally during their time in the provision.
  - Children entering Benton Dene have skills and knowledge and abilities well below age-related expectations. Teachers use the national early years assessment requirements alongside their own assessments (particularly for children who have an autistic spectrum diagnosis) to identify children's starting points. They then use this information to plan activities to help children achieve well and then to track their achievements over time carefully. Learning journals showcase the good range of activities that children take part in, enjoy and in which they succeed.
  - The headteacher has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and has set about improving weaker areas quickly. For example, the activities planned in the outdoor provision are now as inviting as those indoors. She also makes sure that the additional funding for disadvantaged children is well spent because these children achieve as well as their peers.
- Teaching is good and teachers use what they know well to stimulate children's interest



and excitement. Adults keep a watchful eye on children to make sure that time is used productively and to entice reluctant children to communicate and to take part. For example, one adult on noticing a child moving around the class, quickly captured his attention. She then encouraged him to join in with the 'five little monkeys' rhyme, successfully developing his listening and number skills at the same time.

- Numbers of children in the Nursery and Reception are low. Work is generally planned to meet each child's needs and interests, no matter their age. Those with speech and language difficulties are provided with high-quality support from the speech and language therapist. The successful relationships she develops with the children enable them to practise their skills and engage enthusiastically in their learning and play.
- A range of opportunities are provided to develop children's communication skills and early literacy and numeracy skills, as seen in their learning journals and activities in class. While the small number of most-able children are able to work with early years children from the partner primary school, activities in lessons do not always stretch them from their starting points sufficiently.
- Staff are vigilant in ensuring that children are safe and well cared for. They are well trained and ensure that the welfare requirements for the early years are met fully. High staff-to-child ratios enable all children to be 'in line of sight' of adults, and they are quickly attended to in times of need and encouraged to take full part in all that is on offer.

## School details

Unique reference number	108655
Local authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	10003539

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	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Christine Jack
Headteacher	Mrs Alison McAllister-Williams
Telephone number	0191 643 2730
Website	<a href="http://bentondeneschool.schooljotter2.com">http://bentondeneschool.schooljotter2.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:bentondene.school@northtyneside.gov.uk">bentondene.school@northtyneside.gov.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	18 October 2012

## Information about this school

- Benton Dene School meets the Department for Education’s requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is a smaller than average-sized primary school but more average-sized when compared with special schools nationally. It is co-located with a mainstream primary school and they share many facilities. The number of pupils on roll has increased by nearly half since the last inspection.
- Around half of the pupils are known to be entitled to free school meals. This is above average. The proportion from minority ethnic communities is well below average.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties or social, emotional and mental health difficulties as well as an increasing proportion who have an autistic spectrum diagnosis.

- The Dene communication centre for Nursery-aged pupils is located on the large school site. It is local authority provision and was not included in this inspection.
- Benton Dene is the lead school for School Direct (on-the-job teacher training) across the North Tyneside special school partnership. It plays a role in developing the skills and experiences of new entrants to the teaching profession who aim to work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the school. Lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors spoke to five representatives of the governing body including the vice-chair and the chair of the governing body. A discussion was held with the local authority's school improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils in lessons and around the school during both days, and held a formal discussion with representatives from the school council on day two.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including information relating to the school's safeguarding procedures, school improvement planning and the progress pupils are currently making across the school. Minutes from governing body meetings and the headteacher's reports to governors were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors took account of the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own recent survey of parents' views.

## Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Zoe Westley

Ofsted Inspector

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