

Inspection of Benfield School

Benfield Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE6 4NU

Inspection dates: 3–4 March 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

There are many aspects of the school's work that are improving. A lot of the recent changes in the school are well overdue. Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 have underachieved for some time. There are signs that the quality of education that pupils receive is stronger now.

Pupils are happy in the school. They know their teachers want the best for them. Relationships between most pupils and teachers are positive. Changes to the school's curriculum of late are leading to more teachers thinking about how pupils learn. This is leading to teachers asking more of pupils in the classroom. Pupils say they feel safe and there is little bullying in the school. There are a considerable number of safeguarding leaders who are experienced and visible. However, pupils' behaviour in the classroom and corridors is variable. Pupils say this can disrupt their learning.

The large number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are fully integrated into the life of the school. These pupils receive very effective care and support.

There is a strong tradition of sport and creative arts in the school. Pupils and staff regularly participate in school productions such as 'We Will Rock You'.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Until recently, the curriculum in each subject was not carefully planned. Pupils jumped from one topic to the next without much thought from leaders about why or how each topic linked together. This, in part, has contributed to pupils' progress at the end of key stages 4 and 5 being well below the national average. For example, when leaving the school at the end of Year 11 or 13, pupils have achieved over half a grade below other pupils nationally for the past two years. During this time, pupils in Year 11 have achieved particularly poorly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

The appointments of a new headteacher and a new governing body within the past 18 months have brought a fresh outlook on matters. Together, they know the school well. New systems and ways of working are beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' behaviour, curriculum planning and leadership across the school. Even so, pupils' behaviour requires further improvement. Fixed-period and permanent exclusions are high. Staff and pupils report that too many lessons continue to be disrupted by low-level noise and chatter. Some teachers do not use the agreed behaviour sanctions when dealing with pupils who misbehave. This leads to a minority of pupils behaving well in some lessons but not in others.

The new headteacher has ensured that curriculum leaders and staff have thought carefully about what they want to teach pupils and when. There are now more opportunities for pupils to recap their prior learning. Similarly, pupils are

remembering more for longer because new concepts and ideas are more familiar to pupils. This is because new schemes of work ensure that learning is progressively harder and/or similar in content to pupils' earlier work.

The most able pupils in the school are capable of much more than they are currently being asked to do. Leaders know that more training is needed to ensure that staff use assessment effectively to gauge how well pupils are doing, particularly the most able pupils.

Pupils with SEND receive effective support in the classroom and the additional resource centre (ARC), known as the Cherrywood Centre. The special educational needs coordinator is knowledgeable and provides strong leadership. Staff have a thorough understanding of the starting points and additional needs of pupils with SEND. These pupils benefit from specialist staff support and resources to help them succeed. Pupils with SEND say they are happy in the school. They told inspectors that staff are helpful and supportive. At breaktimes, pupils with SEND, in the ARC, mix with other pupils in a pleasant and friendly manner.

Provision to develop pupils' personal development is a clear strength of the school. Leaders think really carefully about how they can introduce opportunities for pupils to become involved in new initiatives and projects. For example, the school has a thriving 'no bystanders' project whereby pupils pledge to learn about and reduce intolerance in the school. Furthermore, the school is an 'early-adopter' of the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum. This means pupils learn how to improve their well-being, look after their health and how to develop responsible relationships in preparation for adult life.

Post-16 students are now receiving more appropriate information relating to course choices in the sixth form. This, and more stringent entry requirements, mean that students study courses that are more closely matched to their ability and future career aspirations. Leaders know there is further work to do to ensure that students develop independence and improve their study skills to achieve well in the future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There are nine designated safeguarding leaders in the school. They and other staff are well trained and have a thorough understanding of the risks pupils face in 'NE6'. Leaders liaise closely with the police and NHS and social care professionals to ensure that pupils receive swift and effective care or support when needed.

Pupils say they feel safe in the school. They learn how to steer clear of potentially risky situations when using social media. Girls learn about period poverty. School leaders ensure that all girls have access to sanitary products.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over time, curriculum plans have lacked cohesion and assessment has not been used effectively to amend schemes of work or lesson planning when needed. Key stages 4 and 5 pupils have underachieved across a range of subjects for several years. Leaders should ensure that they continue to develop or amend existing curriculum plans so that pupils learn important content in a systematic and sequential way that contributes to them achieving much more over time. Furthermore, leaders should ensure that they train staff to use assessment policies more consistently and effectively, allowing staff to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Leaders should ensure that curriculum leaders and teachers plan sequences of lessons over time that more precisely meet the needs of pupils from their different starting points, particularly the most able.
- Fixed-term and permanent exclusions are high. Also, low-level disruption is too common. Some teachers do not follow consistently the school's agreed behaviour policy or sanctions. Some pupils are frustrated because they cannot learn as well as they might and some teachers are frustrated because they cannot teach as well as they could. Leaders must ensure that all teachers follow the behaviour sanctions as set out in the school's behaviour policy. At the same time, leaders and staff must insist that pupils follow instructions swiftly and reduce the number of times lessons are disrupted by low-level noise and chatter.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144271
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10121892
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	878
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	54
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Roger Alston
Headteacher	Richard Carr
Website	www.benfield-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Benfield School is part of Newcastle East Mixed Academy Trust (NEAT).
- A new headteacher took up post in September 2018.
- The board of trustees delegate some monitoring functions to a local governing board (LGB). A new chair of the LGB was appointed in April 2019. Nearly all members of the LGB were appointed within the past 18 months.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND or who have an education, health and care plan is much higher than the national average.
- The school has additionally resourced provision for pupils with social and communication difficulties and autism. It also has additional resourced provision for pupils with a physical or medical disability. All of these pupils are integrated into mainstream lessons.
- A higher than average number of pupils are added to or taken off the school's roll at times other than the normal admission date.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We undertook deep dives into mathematics, science, geography and modern foreign languages. To do this, we met with subject leaders and visited a sample of lessons in these subjects. We also scrutinised pupils' books and other kinds of work produced by pupils who were part of the classes we visited. In addition, we had discussions with teachers and a group of pupils from the lessons observed.
- We met senior and subject leaders, teachers, including those new to the profession, trustees, governors and the chief executive officer of the trust in addition to administrative and support staff.
- An inspector spoke on the telephone with staff from one alternative provider and an intermediary who brokers work placements for pupils from the school.
- We scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and with subject leaders.
- The lead inspector considered one letter from a parent.
- We held informal and formal discussions with many pupils and observed interactions during social times.
- We observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of evidence, including the school's planning documents, behaviour and attendance records, safeguarding files and recruitment checks.
- We took into account the 47 responses from parents and carers who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. There were six responses from pupils to the pupil survey and 44 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lee Elliott, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Michael Reeves	Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Clark	Ofsted Inspector
John Downs	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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