

Inspection of a good school: St Benedict's Catholic School

Beetons Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 6RH

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 April 2022

Outcome

St Benedict's Catholic School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils say that their school is a happy place where they feel safe and accepted. They know that their teachers look after them and provide them with the support they need.

Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to their work. It is important for them to be the best they can be. They are also respectful, kind and compassionate towards each other, their teachers and visitors to the school. Older students are mature and self-assured, and support younger pupils in and out of the classroom.

Pupils interact well with each other and with their teachers. They help each other in class. They listen carefully and appreciate others' hard work. Instances of low-level disruption are very rare. Bullying hardly exists. Should it happen, it is dealt with swiftly.

Pupils flourish as a result of the school's powerful caring ethos. Pupils are open minded and confident. They embrace diversity, respect difference and understand other world religions. Pupils say, 'It is a school where it is okay to be different.'

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

Leaders provide an ambitious curriculum. Pupils learn a broad range of subjects. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and understand how pupils learn. They think carefully about the knowledge they want pupils to gain in each area of the curriculum. Learning is broken down into manageable small stages. Each stage of learning builds on what has come before. This enables pupils to acquire knowledge quickly. Leaders are aware of where the curriculum needs further development. They are acting effectively to improve these areas.

In the sixth form, students confidently present their ideas. They discuss and debate, which helps refine their thinking and develop their knowledge. Sixth-form students view the world critically. They understand how important it is to use evidence to support their thinking. This will equip them well in the future.

Teachers ensure that pupils revisit what they have already learned. This helps pupils to remember better and apply their learning in more complex ways. Teachers ask important questions that enable pupils to practise and develop their learning. Teachers also make regular checks on what pupils do and do not know. They quickly spot mistakes and misunderstandings. They carefully show pupils how to get better, which helps them to learn more over time.

Leaders identify pupils who are falling behind with their reading. They receive intensive, specialist support that helps them to develop important reading skills and fluency. As a result, pupils catch up quickly.

Leaders identify precisely the needs of those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They work well with teachers so that teachers understand how best to help pupils with SEND. They adapt their teaching to ensure that pupils learn well. They engage outside agencies to provide additional help. Learning support assistants are well trained to provide specialist help to particular pupils. Leaders regularly review how well pupils with SEND are learning. They update provision in response to this.

A small number of pupils access off-site alternative provision. Leaders make sure that these are appropriate programmes and that pupils are well supported and safeguarded in these provisions.

Leaders provide a wealth of extra-curricular activities in which all pupils participate. For example, pupils develop their sporting prowess as well as their board-game strategies. They learn new languages, and some take up knitting.

Leaders prioritise very important values in their work with pupils. Pupils understand therefore how their behaviour may affect others. They learn how to make amends when things go wrong. Pupils are taught to care and to give. Older students look out for younger pupils and help them to learn better. Pupils come together to raise money for their community and for those less fortunate people overseas. Former students who now work in a range of professional settings remain in contact with the school. They have become inspirational role models to pupils. They provide sixth-form students with essential advice and crucial work experience to prepare them for their professional lives.

Leaders and governors have a thorough understanding of what the school does well and how the school should move forward. Governors oversee school systems and provide valuable advice to leaders when needed, most notably about safeguarding and the quality of education provided in the school. At times, governors' monitoring of leaders' work is less rigorous. This means that governors are not as well informed as they should be, and are not checking on leaders' actions and decisions.

Staff speak highly of school leaders. They feel well supported and say that their workload is reasonable.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that governance oversight of leaders' work may usefully serve as the focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure very reliable safeguarding systems. All staff fully understand how to refer concerns. They know that leaders follow up issues promptly. Leaders draw on a range of outside agencies to give the right support to pupils. Pupils are fully aware of the potential risks of going online. They also understand how beneficial the internet can be. Pupils learn how to keep safe when not in school. They know whom to speak to should they need help.

Leaders make sure that meticulous checks are made on new employees to the school. All new staff receive safeguarding training before they start employment.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Governors' oversight of some areas of school life is not as well informed as it should be. As a result of this, they are not holding leaders to account, for example in the areas of pupil mobility and relationships and sex education. Governors must ensure that they have sufficient oversight of the full range of leaders' work, and know how leaders' actions and decisions create the best possible opportunities for pupils.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View 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	124861
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10200122
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
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	924
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mr Andrew Herlihy
Headteacher	Mrs Imogen Senior
Website	www.st-benedicts.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 and 29 September 2016

Information about this school

- St Benedict's Catholic School is an average-sized secondary school.
- Just over half the pupils are White British. One fifth of pupils are White Other.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average. The proportion of pupils in receipt of an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below average.
- The school makes use of alternative provision for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders. Inspectors also held discussions with members of the governing body to gather their views.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into languages, English, mathematics and geography. These included discussions with subject leaders, visits to lessons, meetings with staff and pupils and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised school documents, policies and records, including those of pre-employment checks of staff. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss their work to keep pupils safe. Inspectors checked on staff members' understanding of child protection and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors considered 185 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, 58 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 192 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, together with 203 free-text responses from parents and carers.

Inspection team

Adam Cooke, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Karen Kerridge

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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