

Inspection of Bowes Hutchinson's CofE (Aided) School

Bowes, Barnard Castle, County Durham DL12 9LG

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 14 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This small school plays an important role in the local community. Pupils enjoy attending and are happy and safe here. Staff describe being part of the 'big Bowes family'. Parents recognise the school as a nurturing and caring space, where their children are valued. Children in the early years get off to a strong start. At social times, pupils of all ages play harmoniously together. They enjoy exploring on the 'Gruffalo trail' in the outdoor space.

The school has not done enough to maintain a good quality of education over time. Systems to check standards have not been strong enough, including at governance level. The previous turbulence in leadership contributed to this decline. However, parents are reassured by recent improvements and the stability brought about by newly appointed leadership. Parents share their optimism about these improvements and feel the school is 'turning a corner'.

The ethos of the school is strongly underpinned by pupils' faith. Pupils benefit from strong links with the church and regular collective worship is a meaningful experience for them. Pupils learn about the role they play in this community. During the inspection, pupils enjoyed attending and offering contributions to Harvest Festival.

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

New leaders have ensured that the right systems are in place to help pupils learn to read well and develop secure mathematical understanding. The impact of these changes is starting to be seen. Pupils can use their phonic knowledge to read independently. Older pupils develop their confidence through structured reading practice. As a result, pupils are displaying increased enthusiasm for reading. Pupils of all ages enjoy mathematics and talk about what they have learned. They can use sound reasoning to solve problems.

The school has begun to strengthen the wider curriculum. Some subjects are further developed than others. In some subjects, the school has not considered fully how pupils in mixed-age classes can build on their prior learning. At times, this can mean that the curriculum for older pupils is not ambitious enough.

Leaders have prioritised the subject knowledge of staff, many of whom have attended a range of recent curriculum training. Teachers' explanations are clear. In most cases, they identify pupils' misconceptions quickly and make sure these are addressed. This is particularly strong in the early years. Staff in the early years adapt the curriculum effectively, so that children get off to a strong start. However, the school has not designed the curriculum carefully enough, so that pupils can remember what they have learned over time. This means that some pupils struggle to link new learning with what they have learned before.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported in this small school. Teachers have a good understanding of their needs. Teachers ensure that these pupils have the help they need to learn alongside their peers.

The school has introduced rigorous assessment processes in phonics and mathematics, so that staff can identify gaps for pupils and address them quickly. Similar assessment systems are not in place across some of the wider curriculum. This means it is difficult for staff to be clear about exactly what pupils know. In the early years, however, assessment is more secure. Adults are clear about what children can do and this information is used to inform next steps.

Pupils behave well across the school. Adults make their expectations clear and pupils enjoy meeting these. Pupils treat each other kindly. They show maturity in their interactions. Older pupils enjoy being role models for younger children. Pupils explain that bullying does not happen because it 'wouldn't be right'. They would feel confident to challenge bullying if they saw it. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong, they model tolerance and respect. However, they do not learn about some key messages that will prepare them for later life, including fundamental British values and some protected characteristics.

Pupils and parents alike value the opportunities that are offered outside the classroom. They appreciate the range of extra-curricular clubs, including gardening, sports and baking. There is a strong emphasis on active and healthy lifestyles. Pupils regularly access a wide range of sporting opportunities through festivals and competitions. Staff arrange trips and visits that are well matched to pupils' learning and interests. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about outdoor adventure residential trips and the cultural visit to London.

Over time, monitoring systems have not been robust enough to identify and address areas where standards have slipped. This is changing. Leaders are motivated and tackling aspects which need to be improved. Staff feel well supported and echo the optimism of parents about recent changes. Staff explain how efforts are being made to manage their workload. They are proud to work at this school and serve this community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the curriculum is not ambitious enough for older pupils in mixed-age classes. It does not take account of their starting points and build on their prior knowledge. This means that pupils struggle to remember what they have learned over time. The school should ensure that the curriculum is ambitious

and logically organised across all subject areas to prepare pupils for the next stage of learning.

- The school has not developed clear assessment systems in subjects other than English and mathematics. This means that teachers are not able to identify gaps in pupils' learning and take prompt action to address these. The school should ensure that assessment processes are in place across the curriculum and that staff are confident in how these can be used to inform future learning.
- The curriculum for personal development does not provide explicit teaching opportunities around British values and protected characteristics. This means that pupils are not prepared well for life in modern Britain. The school should ensure that the curriculum provides pupils with regular opportunities to learn about these key messages.
- Recently introduced systems for monitoring the quality of provision across the school are in the very early stages of development. This means that some leaders, including governors, do not have a full picture of the areas for development within the school. The school should ensure that monitoring procedures quickly identify any gaps in provision to enable leaders to take action to address them.

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 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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	114237
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10242435
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Peter Nicholls
Headteacher	Julie Gibson
Website	www.boweshutchinsonsschool.org.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	12 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Bowes Hutchinson's school is part of the Bowes Cotherstone Federation along with Cotherstone Primary School. The two schools share an executive headteacher and a governing body.
- The school received a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist schools (SIAMS) in 2019.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This is the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. They met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair. They also spoke with representatives from the diocese and from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and computing. As part of the deep dives, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during lessons and at social times.
- Inspectors spoke to parents during the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including minutes of local governing body meetings, the school's self-evaluation and development plan.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online staff questionnaire. They also considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Katie Spurr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jenny Parker

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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