

Inspection of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School

Culverden Down, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9SH

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2012.

The headteacher of this school is Jon Sparke. This school is part of The Tenax Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Sir Ian Bauckham, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Simon Curtis.

What is it like to attend this school?

Bennett Memorial is highly ambitious for its pupils. Staff deliver the sophisticated curriculum very effectively. As a result, all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve exceptionally well. Students benefit from a similarly ambitious curriculum in the sixth form. Here, they develop critical knowledge, understanding and skills, which prepares them extremely well for future study. Sixth-form students are excellent role models for younger pupils.

Pupils' conduct is exemplary, particularly in lessons. They are well mannered, polite and courteous to each other and to staff. Disruption to learning is incredibly rare. Pupils actively support each other's learning. This means that any misconceptions are used as opportunities to develop and deepen pupils' thinking.

There is an extensive range of opportunities to inspire and develop pupils' talents and interests. Opportunities to serve and volunteer are abundant because of the school's unshakeably clear and Christian character and ethos. These opportunities help pupils learn how to live out the school's values of hope, wisdom and love. Pupils learn to use debating skills highly proficiently and learn about democracy in detail. They have a deep understanding of fundamental British values and protected characteristics. Pupils are thoroughly prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

This is a highly inclusive school. Regardless of pupils' starting points, all pupils study the school's broad and challenging curriculum. Drawing from a diverse range of beliefs, backgrounds and abilities, the school is unashamedly ambitious for all. A very high proportion of pupils study the English Baccalaureate subjects successfully.

As a result of rigorous and ongoing training, all staff contribute to the continual refinement of the curriculum. This enables teachers to focus on the most effective strategies that help pupils to know more and remember more. The school's stated intention, to build an 'aspirational curriculum to provide powerful knowledge to pupils', is evident throughout. Knowledge and skills build over time so that pupils tackle increasingly challenging questions with fluency and confidence. In mathematics, 'retrieve, reactivate and review' homework tasks strengthen pupils' recall of key parts of the curriculum and help pupils to learn new knowledge and skills effectively. In all lessons, teachers check how well pupils understand and remember key knowledge systematically. They use this information to modify explanations and teaching activities and to inform their planning of future lessons effectively.

Reading is a particularly high priority for the school. All English lessons dedicate a considerable amount of time to developing pupils' reading, and pupils choose texts that both challenge and interest them. This cultivates a deep love of reading in pupils. The library is very well used and is a fulsome resource. Reading is prominent across the curriculum. For example, in science, extracts of texts and in-depth

academic articles develop pupils' key comprehension and interpretation skills. Vocabulary is paramount. Students in the sixth form develop increasingly technical language and terminology. One student, typical of many, said they and their peers 'have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge'.

Pupils understand and recognise the importance of the school's high expectations for their behaviour and conduct. As a result, lessons are calm and productive. A very small number of pupils receive tailored support to help them to improve their behaviour. This is highly effective. Rates of attendance are very strong. The school takes intelligent, effective and proportionate action to support any pupils whose attendance begins to fall.

The school has planned and organised the personal development 'co-curriculum' superbly. It complements the academic curriculum highly effectively. Pupils learn essential character traits such as resilience and persistence through a variety of different opportunities and activities. The school meticulously plans the 'Bennett journey' for pupils so that, from the minute they join, they know that they are a valued part of the school family. The 'guild system' underpins this. Pupils relish the opportunity to earn valuable guild points through carefully designed opportunities. 'Guild assemblies' celebrate pupils' achievements collaboratively. Many pupils aspire to take on positions of responsibility in the guilds, such as becoming guild prefects. Rewards, in the form of 'i-points', are highly valued by pupils. They cherish the gold, silver and bronze certificates they receive in recognition of their 'i-points' and earnestly work towards 'graduating' from Year 11 with merit or distinction.

Professional development for staff is systematic and of exceptional quality. Coaching and collaboration are well embedded. Through this, teachers continually refine their subject knowledge and teaching expertise. Trustees and governors have an accurate and critical strategic oversight of the school, which helps to maintain a focus on continual improvement. This has a direct impact on the quality of education. Staff are extremely proud to work at the school, and they know that leaders do all they can to support their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	136603
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10288002
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	1,894
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	385
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon Curtis
CEO of trust	Sir Ian Bauckham
Headteacher	Jon Sparke
Website	www.bennettmemorial.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 June 2012

Information about this school

- The current headteacher took up his post in September 2013.
- The chair of the local governing board took up her post in August 2022.
- The school currently uses four registered alternative providers.
- The most recent section 48 inspection of the school's religious character took place in September 2017. The date of the next section 48 inspection is likely to be in 2025.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the school.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the chair of the board of trustees, the chair of the board of governors and the CEO of the trust. She also conducted a telephone conversation with a representative of the diocese.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages and art. For each deep dive, 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.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 considered a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, published information about pupils' performance and minutes of trustees' meetings.
- Inspectors spoke to a wide range of pupils and observed their behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including free-text responses. They also took account of the responses to the staff and pupil surveys and gathered the views of parents, staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Ed Mather	His Majesty's Inspector
Phillip Blagg	His Majesty's Inspector
Ginny Rhodes	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Johnson	Ofsted Inspector

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