

St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122366
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314280
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Land
Headteacher	Mr John O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2004
School address	Moor House Lane Ashington Northumberland NE63 9LR
Telephone number	01670 813658
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Age group	9-13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Benedict's is a voluntary aided middle school for pupils from 9 to 13 years of age. Because it is deemed secondary, it is smaller than average in size. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage, with very small numbers of pupils from other ethnic groups. There are very few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with a statement of special educational need. The school serves a diverse socio-economic area, with a number of pupils travelling to school from beyond the immediate area within which the school is sited. The school currently has Investors in People status, and also holds the Sportsmark award because it provides a minimum of two hours physical education and sport every week for all pupils at the school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Benedict's provides a satisfactory standard of education, with a number of good features. This is a very caring and supportive school, which aspires for all its pupils to attend regularly, achieve well, feel safe, be active, and be positive and attentive in all that it offers. The school succeeds in almost all of these aspects. Leadership and management are good, and the new headteacher has quickly identified important areas for improvement, especially in the teaching of mathematics in order to raise standards.

Pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8. The attainment on entry to the school in Year 5 varies year-on-year from below average to average. In the most recent national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, standards were average overall, but below in mathematics. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 7 and 8 so that by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 their standards are in line with the levels expected. Pupils with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress relative to their capabilities.

Teaching and learning across the curriculum are good. Teaching has many good features, most notable in the promotion of positive and caring relationships that help to motivate and interest the pupils, while also helping them to develop good quality personal skills and well-being. However, in a very small number of satisfactory lessons, teachers do not always plan and provide sufficiently well for the higher attainers. Pupils are motivated, keen to learn and are very good listeners. Support assistants work well with those pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers mark pupils work consistently, but the extent to which they identify the quality of work in terms of progress against learning targets is underdeveloped.

The curriculum is well balanced and provides a range of varied and suitable learning experiences for pupils at both key stages. An extensive range of activities, in and out of lessons, greatly enrich the curricular learning experiences of the pupils. By the time the pupils are ready to move on to high school, the curriculum has equipped them well to meet the demands of the next stage of their education. The school is a very cohesive community, underpinned by a common set of values and beliefs, which make for a very positive school ethos. The quality of care, guidance and support is good, which results in pupils feeling well supported and very well cared for. The tracking of pupils' progress is very detailed, but inconsistent across the three core subjects. However, work is in progress to introduce a more consistent and rigorous tracking system in the near future. Teachers enable pupils to develop a good awareness and appreciation of national and global communities, although opportunities to learn about the local community are more limited.

Although relatively new in post, the headteacher has quickly established a role at the heart of the school. Senior managers know the key areas for improvement and good progress has been made with the implementation of a new performance management policy, which is reinvigorating school planning, teaching and learning. The headteacher and other senior staff are supported well by all who work in the school, including the governing body. The ability of the senior management team to identify important improvement areas, together with the support and challenge from governors, gives the school a good capacity to improve in the future. Overall, the school achieves satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics.
- Develop more consistent methods for tracking pupils' progress across the school, especially in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, as an aid to informing future teaching and learning.
- Improve the quality of teachers' marking to provide better quality comments to all pupils on how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve further.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8. The attainment on entry to the school in Year 5 varies from year to year, with some groups below average and others more in line with the levels expected for their age. In the most recent national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment in the combined core of English, mathematics and science was average overall. Standards were above average in science, marginally above in English, and below in mathematics. This represents satisfactory overall progress in Years 5 and 6. The progress of pupils in Years 7 and 8 is satisfactory so that by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, their standards are mostly in line with the levels expected. Pupils with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress relative to their capabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils enjoy school life and are very proud of their school. Pupils' enthusiasm is evident in the way they engage with their teachers and each other in lessons, and in their participation in the extensive range of activities and clubs provided by the school. These extra-curricular activities, and pupil's awareness of the need for a balanced diet, contribute very well to their development of a healthier lifestyle. Attendance is well above the national average and is continuing to improve because the school is very successful at tackling the persistent absenteeism of a small minority of pupils. The behaviour of pupils is exemplary and a strong Christian ethos encourages good relationships across the school. Pupils feel very safe because they say there are very few incidents of bullying and any that do occur are dealt with immediately. They care for their environment and this is promoted across the curriculum. Pupils say that their views are sought and acted upon. For example, after consultation the school introduced bottled water to promote healthy lifestyles. The school council gives elected pupils the opportunity to take on responsibility and, with their peers, raise money for a range of local and national charities. Although these activities encourage pupils to play a part in some community-based activities, links with the wider community as an aid to developing the pupils' economic well-being are not, as yet, as well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning across the curriculum are good. Although teaching is good in the vast majority of lessons, senior leaders recognise the need to improve teaching and learning in the core subjects, especially mathematics, in order to raise standards in national tests. Pupils are motivated, keen to learn, and they make good progress because they show good personal skills, knowledge and understanding that help them to develop a better grasp of challenging lesson content. However, in a very small number of satisfactory lessons, teachers do not always plan and provide sufficiently well for the higher attainers. Pupils are very good listeners, which is reflected in their attentive manner to teachers and in their ability to get on with their work. The overwhelming majority of pupils are very keen to answer questions in lessons. Teachers' planning is detailed and consistent in style across the school. Teachers use learning objectives effectively to ensure that the pupils are aware of the lesson expectations, and in the best lessons remind the pupils of what they are trying to achieve in their work. Teaching assistants effectively support teachers by providing targeted support for those pupils with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers mark pupils work consistently, but the extent to which they identify the quality of work in terms of progress against learning targets is underdeveloped.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum and other activities is good, and contributes very positively to the good outcomes achieved by pupils' in their personal development and well-being. The good quality teaching seen across the curriculum results from the carefully planned range of subjects taught across the school. The school's emphasis on the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills, as a foundation for all other learning in school, is good, but is currently having a more beneficial effect on pupils' progress in English and science than in mathematics. Pupils are developing their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well. The vast majority of pupils confidently use a range of computer programs in dedicated ICT lessons. There are many opportunities for the pupils to experience learning out of school, including local study weeks and trips to London and France. These activities are helping the pupils to appreciate and understand different national and international communities, although there are fewer opportunities for developing links with the immediate community within which the school is sited. There is a varied and extensive range of lunch-time and after school activities, which are enthusiastically attended by large numbers of pupils. The involvement of the school in the extended schools' programme further enhances the range of learning experiences for the pupils. Overall, the school provides a curriculum that equips pupils well for the next stage of their education at high school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Pupils' welfare and well-being are given a high priority by all staff, which results in the pupils feeling well supported and very well cared for. Pupils appreciate, in particular, the access to, and help from, the learning mentor who makes herself readily available through the school's 'drop-in centre'. The school is keen to

encourage collective responsibility and ownership, and the school garden is an excellent example of how they achieve this. Group agreements, which are displayed in every classroom, are a successful way of involving pupils in the promotion of positive behaviour for learning. This varied and well planned support provision is helping the pupils to develop many personal skills, particularly their individual confidence in communicating with adults and other pupils in lessons, and in their behaviour around the school. Child protection measures and safeguarding procedures are fully in place and used appropriately by all adults working in the school. Health and safety checks are carried out on a regular basis, and always when out-of-school visits are planned. The parents are very supportive of the school and appreciate the good quality care and support that are provided. The tracking of pupils' progress is very detailed, but inconsistent across the three core subjects. However, work is in progress to introduce a more consistent and rigorous tracking system in the near future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The senior management team knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. The school improvement plan successfully highlights key priorities, including developing the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards, especially in mathematics. Good leadership and management exist at all levels, with the senior leadership team contributing very well to development planning and day-to-day operational matters throughout the school. Although relatively new in post, the headteacher has quickly established a role at the heart of the school. Good progress has been made with the implementation of a new performance management policy, which is reinvigorating school planning, teaching and learning. Other important policies underpin the value system that the school promotes, especially the one entitled 'equal value', which celebrates equality through the contribution of all who work in or attend the school, irrespective of age, gender or ethnicity. New management strategies have been introduced, which are effectively supporting leaders at all levels. For example, the chair of governors has recently joined the newly formed strategic leadership group, within which he provides effective challenge and support. Senior managers are supported by very effective middle managers, who consistently monitor and evaluate the work of their curricular areas; this is ensuring that staff work very cohesively as a team. The school is supported well by the governing body, which fulfils fully its range of regulatory roles and responsibilities. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

02 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School, Northumberland, NE63 9LR

You are aware that I recently visited St Benedict's with another inspector to see how well all of you are doing at school. We were very impressed by the way you conducted yourselves over the two days, and by the very confident manner you all displayed when we spoke with you and when we observed some of your lessons. We were also pleased with the response from those parents who took time to complete and return the pre-inspection questionnaire. Many included comments that we read very carefully so that we could get a better view of the school's work.

Overall, we feel that St Benedict's provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. There are many features of the school's provision that we feel are good, particularly in areas that help you to develop personal skills and attributes that you need now, later on when you move to high school, and eventually into adult life. All adults in the school provide you with good quality care and support, which are helping you to develop very positive attitudes towards the school, other pupils and staff. Staff and governors are working hard to improve standards through better quality lessons. We saw, first hand, the exemplary behaviour, enthusiasm and interest for all that the school provides; this was especially so in the varied and extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Your teachers are generally providing you with good quality lessons, although more could be done in some to ensure that the higher attainers are stretched further.

Your achievement and standards are satisfactory overall, but the progress that some of you make from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics, is not yet good enough. The school is aware of this problem and has set itself the task of making sure that all of you achieve in line with your capabilities. We are asking the school, therefore, to continue working on this issue and, in addition, raise standards in mathematics. To help the school improve even more, we are also asking it to be more consistent in the way that it tracks your progress, and in the quality of teacher comments that you get when your work is marked.

We feel that if the school tackles these areas, standards will rise and all of you will make the progress that you, your parents and teachers expect. You have to continue working hard, and raise your expectations and understanding of how well you are doing in your work, and what you need to do to improve further.

I wish you all the very best in your future education.

Brian Blake

Lead inspector

On behalf of the inspection team