

# Venerable Bede Church of England [Aided] Secondary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133391
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	316110
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Margaret Farrow HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	911
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	The Venerable Stuart Bain
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dr Edward Yeates
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Tunstall Bank Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 0SX
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 5239745
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Venerable Bede Church of England (Aided) Secondary School is a relatively new school that was opened in 2002 with its first groups of 11 and 12-year-olds. It has continued to grow and is now similar in size to the average secondary school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is also average. The proportion deemed to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average, whilst the percentage with a statement of special educational need is average. A small minority of students who are looked after by the council currently attend the school. Nearly all students have English as their first language and come from White British backgrounds. The first group of 16-year-olds sat GCSE examinations in summer 2007.

The school holds the Investors in People Award and the Artsmark Silver Award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement, and in the standards reached by students in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4.

The school has been successful in achieving its aim of establishing strong, caring, Christian values, which is evident in the good relationships between adults and students across the school. This also supports students' good personal, spiritual, social and moral development. Students behave with consideration for others and are courteous to each other and adults. The system of 'vertical' tutor groups that include the whole age-range of students in school is valued by staff, students and parents alike and this enhances students' confidence and sense of well-being. Students who spoke to inspectors indicated that they enjoy school and this is confirmed by their good attendance, which is above the national average. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection survey believe the school provides a good standard of education for their children, although small proportions think that the school could take more account of their views and those of their children. A small number also believe that behaviour is not good and bullying is a problem. During the inspection, students' behaviour in classes and around the school was good and students say that, whilst bullying occasionally occurs, effective action is taken by staff.

The standards students attain are average overall. Test results at the end of Key Stage 3 are at least in line with national averages. Similarly, by the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE is broadly average. However, because these students start the school having attained standards above average, the progress they make is not good enough. This is particularly the case in mathematics, and when compared to the progress of similar students nationally. Following disappointments in the proportion of students achieving good grades in GCSE subjects such as mathematics, media studies and geography, strategies that have been introduced are beginning to make a difference to students currently in school. The better use of the school's tracking and assessment data shows that more students are making at least satisfactory progress in lessons and in the results in modular tests. This has come about through a comprehensive review of the school's performance and procedures and the development of more rigorous and focused actions to improve. Challenging targets have been set for 2008 and the early indications are that the school will go some way towards meeting them. There is good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are supported through a statement or through additional resources, and for the eight students in school who are in the care of the council. As a result, these students make satisfactory progress.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; some is good, but it is not consistently good enough to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can. Some students, particularly the more able and several lower ability students, underachieve because teaching is not always sufficiently challenging. Additionally, while the school has created a comprehensive database to assess and track students' progress, this information has not always been used well enough to spot slow progress or the underachievement of individual students, or in some subjects.

The curriculum has recently been developed to provide a clearer focus on basic skills for those who need it, and a good range of vocational opportunities is available for students from Year 10. Students appreciate these opportunities; they also enjoy the 'Bfree' learning centre that enables them to be supported in times of need. A wide range of extended school and 'wrap-around' activities enhances the good curriculum and adds to students' enjoyment and well-being. These include activities as diverse as an astronomy club and an allotment club. Students also appreciate opportunities to attend special events such as the rock club at a regional centre for music and the arts.

Following the disappointing 2007 results, governors took decisive action and developed a more streamlined and focused leadership team in order to make, departmental, faculty and middle managers more accountable for the quality of the curriculum and the achievement of students. The members of the leadership team have redoubled their efforts to secure the necessary improvements. They have invested heavily in developing staff, secured intensive support from the local authority, and have looked outward in the wider educational community to learn from the best. More accurate monitoring of the school's performance has informed and directed an appropriate set of actions for improvement. Governors have also refocused their own work and fulfil their role as 'critical friends' well. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. They offer good challenge and support to senior managers as well as staff. The recent improvements are already beginning to have a positive impact and indicate the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve standards and achievement in mathematics at Key Stage 4.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching in order to raise achievement across the school.
- Improve the use of data, and the tracking and assessment of students' progress to help ensure all are motivated, challenged and supported to achieve the best they can.
- Develop more effective mechanisms to ensure the views of students are fully taken into account.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

The standards attained by students are average overall. In 2007 the percentage achieving Level 5 or above in Key Stage 3 national tests in English was similar to the average; it was slightly above average in mathematics and well above in science, although mathematics and science results show a declining trend since 2005. At age 16, the proportion of students achieving five A\* to C grade GCSEs is also similar to the national average, but the proportion attaining five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics is well below average. The school knows that this was due in part to mistakes made in entering students for the correct examination. Senior leaders have developed more effective quality assurance procedures to make sure that this does not happen again.

Scrutiny of students' work, teacher assessments and modular course results of students now in school all show that more are making better progress. The current Year 9 and Year 11 students are predicted to improve the school's results when they take the national tests or examinations in 2008. However, taking the school as a whole, the progress of a significant number of students has not been good enough and inspectors agree with the school's judgement that students' achievement is inadequate.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students' good behaviour makes a strong contribution to creating a positive climate for learning. Many show a good level of interest in their learning, especially where teaching is good. Students say they feel safe in school and are in no doubt that any problems and concerns will be dealt with effectively. In discussion, students were confident they could identify an adult in whom they would be happy to confide. They also felt that bullying was not a big issue because, 'everyone gets on so well'. The majority adopt healthy lifestyles through sensible eating and taking plenty of exercise, and they know how to stay safe. The school has sought partnerships with overseas schools and universities. This has enabled students to build successful relationships with people from other cultures. Worship and celebrations are an important part of the life of the school and add to students' good spiritual and social development. Students' contribution to improving the school is satisfactory, and they feel that they could offer much more than is currently asked of them. Some expressed disappointment that the student council was not more effective in introducing improvements and felt that their views were not taken sufficiently into account. Good links with local business, Connexions, the youth service and community groups help students develop confidence and team skills that prepare them well for adult life. Nearly all 16-year-old students leaving school in 2007 entered education, employment or training.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Whilst the quality of teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good, senior leaders are aware of the need to increase the proportion of good lessons in order to raise the achievement of all students. They have recently introduced procedures that will allow staff to develop their teaching by learning from each other, but it is too soon for the impact to be seen in lessons.

Teachers generally have good subject knowledge. In good lessons they use this knowledge well to plan helpful sequences of activities. They hold high expectations of students and provide sufficient challenge to move them on to their next stage of learning. Such lessons often proceed at brisk pace and result in students showing excitement or enthusiasm. Students concentrate well and can work successfully either independently or in groups.

Where teaching and learning are satisfactory there is less challenge, with repetition of some previous work or too much undemanding questioning on new topics, which does not develop students' understanding effectively. In such lessons the pace of learning is slower and work is not always matched to the individual needs of students; consequently many students are not challenged to do their best.

Constructive marking of students' work is a feature of lessons in which learning was good but this is not always the case and therefore marking does not always inform students clearly enough of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.

## Curriculum and other activities

### Grade: 2

A good and wide choice of options is available in Year 10, including a number of vocational pathways. Students in Year 10 like the choices available and feel that the curriculum offered meets their needs and interests. They speak enthusiastically about their courses. In contrast, the curriculum offered in Year 11 has less choice, due to historic constraints, and is satisfactory. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. It includes a key skills lesson in Year 7, as preparation for option choices in Years 10 and 11. Some students currently in these year groups also have the chance to take part in 'study plus', which is designed to maximise their chances of achieving grades A\* to C in English and mathematics at GCSE. Students see art, drama, citizenship and religious education, as strengths in the curriculum. Specific curriculum arrangements made to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those at risk of being disaffected with school are good. The curriculum is enhanced well by themed days, such as those for enterprise, which are supported by local business partnerships, and 'health days' at which partners from a range of agencies outside of school work with both students and parents. Students enjoy these events.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

Child protection procedures are in place and arrangements for safeguarding students are well established. Staff have a good understanding of students' pastoral needs, and trusting supportive relationships make students feel safe in school. The school's arrangements for mixed-age tutor groups create good relationships between older and younger students, providing effective support to students, especially when they are new to the school. The school has good links with parents, carers and external agencies to support vulnerable students effectively. Whilst care and support to students are good, the academic guidance given to students, to help them improve standards, is inconsistent and the good practice in some departments and some lessons is not followed across the school. Partly as a result, not all students make the progress of which they are capable.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management has recently improved as a result of actions taken to address the causes of this year's disappointing examination results. The headteacher re-established a clear direction for the school; it includes a sharper focus on students' achievement and is understood and shared by staff. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, and staff and governors now have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. More rigorous systems have been introduced to ensure leaders at all levels are accountable for their areas of responsibility. Most middle managers and staff have responded well to the new challenges and are committed to raising standards. Steps have also been taken to improve the quality and accuracy of information about students' progress. It is too early to see the full impact of these initiatives on achievement. Inconsistencies remain in the performance of some departments and in the quality of teaching and learning. The school welcomes the help of external agencies to support its work, in particular to promote the well-being and safety of all learners and to tackle the areas that need improvement. The school is overcoming its

difficulties but more needs to be done. In light of the legacy of underachievement, the school provides inadequate 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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

29 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Venerable Bede Church of England [Aided] Secondary School, Sunderland, SR2 0SX

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we recently visited your school. We were impressed with your friendliness and cooperation. We were grateful to all of you who spoke to us, and also to those of your parents who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire. The majority of parents who responded consider the school provides a good education for you. A small proportion however think that behaviour in school is not good and that bullying is a problem. We saw that your behaviour was good throughout our visit, both in classes and when moving around the school. Those of you who spoke to us indicated that bullying incidents are rare and, when they do occur, the school takes quick action. Some of you think that the school could take more account of your views and some parents think that too.

In many respects, the school is making good provision for you. Staff take good care of you and provide a safe and secure environment. There are good opportunities to enable you to develop social, spiritual, moral, cultural and personal skills. The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 10 and you say you appreciate the vocational courses now available in Year 10. Year 11 students wish that this could have been available for them. Many of you also appreciate the wide range of out-of-school activities available.

That being said, we have found that the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Although some of it is good, not all is of sufficient quality to ensure that you all achieve the best you can. We think some of you can make better progress and achieve higher standards, particularly in mathematics, and we have given the school a Notice to Improve. As a result, another inspector will visit you again in about six to eight months' time to check how well the school is making progress against the recommendations we have made. These include: improving standards and achievement in mathematics at Key Stage 4; increasing the proportion of good teaching; and improving the use of the data from the tracking and assessment of your work to ensure you are all able to achieve the best you can. We also want the school to continue to improve the ways in which your views are taken into account.

Thank you again for your welcome and, on behalf of the team, I wish you well during your time in school and beyond.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector