

Venerable Bede Church of England [Aided] Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133391
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	328700
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	911
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	The Venerable Stuart Bain
Headteacher	Dr Edward Yeates
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2007
School address	Tunstall Bank Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 0SX
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is about the same size as other secondary schools. It opened in 2002 with a Year 7 cohort. This cohort was the first to take GCSE examinations in 2007. Nearly all students are of White British heritage. Although Venerable Bede is a faith school it has also become the school of its community. Most students join the school from local primary schools although a few come from further afield. The school serves a mixed area. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is in-line with the national figure. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the proportion that have a statement of special educational need is average. The school has found it difficult to recruit and retain specialist teachers of mathematics. The school has Investors in People, Artsmark Silver and the QUISS standard.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

When Venerable Bede School was inspected in November 2007 it was given a notice to improve. Since that time the school, with effective support from the local authority (LA), has tackled its weaknesses and has continued to build on its strengths. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school now provides its students with a satisfactory standard of education.

Students' attainment on entry to the school is in-line with national averages. They make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 and by the end of the key stage their attainment is in-line with national figures, although there are inconsistencies between subjects and year groups. Students do not progress well enough in Years 7 and 8, particularly in English, because teachers do not have an accurate understanding of their starting points. The most able students and those of average ability are not sufficiently challenged. The outcomes of the school's first GCSE examinations in 2007 were disappointing, particularly in mathematics, and achievement was inadequate. Standards improved in 2008 and the proportion of students attaining five good grades at GCSE was the same as the national figure. Standards rose in mathematics although the proportion attaining A* to C grades remained slightly below the national average. More students attained A*-G grades than did so nationally and no students left the school without a qualification. By the end of their time in school students made satisfactory progress although too few students attained A* and A grades. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because they are well supported and receive work which meets their needs.

The school has worked hard to improve teachers' skills and there is more good teaching than was previously the case. However, learning is not as effective because many teachers do not use day-to-day assessment well enough to ensure that the work given to students meets their needs. The school does not have a system through which students could evaluate their own understanding and progress at key points during the lesson. New systems and procedures are not implemented consistently by all teachers or departments. Some teachers do not make the best use of their time or that of teaching assistants. It was rare to see staff in mainstream classes supporting small groups of students intensively to promote their understanding or challenge their thinking. The school has a robust system to record data about students' achievement and identify underachievement but this system is not used effectively by all teachers or departments.

The staff ensure that all students are fully included in the life of the school. Students enjoy school. Attendance is good and persistent non-attendance is declining. Some parents who responded to the questionnaire were concerned about poor behaviour and bullying but inspectors found no evidence to confirm these views. Behaviour during the inspection was usually satisfactory and sometimes good. Students said that they felt safe in school and that staff deal with any incidents effectively. Relationships between staff and students are good. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities. It takes care to ensure that all students are encouraged to take part and uses external funding brokered through the local authority to ensure that financial hardship is not a barrier to participation.

The school supports and cares for students well. The school has effective procedures to ensure that the views of all students are heard. Students are consulted about all aspects of school life including teaching and learning. As a result, most students respond thoughtfully in discussion.

Moral and social guidance is good. Students are provided with practical guidance and support to help them deal with problems in the local or wider community. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Students are given effective guidance at transition points and when choosing their GCSE options but day-to-day assessment is inadequate. Marking is generally poor. Although some teachers mark students work very well, in other classes some books have not been marked for considerable periods of time. Because teachers are not required to mark work each day, they do not know how well students are progressing and cannot adapt lesson planning to current needs.

The school knows its own and the local community well and it has good international links. This allows students to make a real contribution to the lives of people who are less fortunate than themselves. The school is aware that students do not live in a diverse local community but it does all it can to overcome any negative views or perceptions. The inclusion of a number of 'differently abled' students does much to help students accept differences between people. One 'differently abled' girl said that in her previous school other students 'knew she was there but ignored her'. At Venerable Bede she feels part of the school.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The relatively new senior team have clear roles and responsibilities. They have tackled weaknesses successfully and are committed to ensuring that the school improves further. Governance is good. A sub-committee monitors the work of the senior team providing challenge where necessary. Middle management is inadequate. The senior team have, rightly, devolved some of the day-to-day responsibility for ensuring that staff comply with new systems and expectations to middle leaders. Evidence from the inspection shows that many middle leaders have not taken on this responsibility rigorously enough and have not ensured that all staff are working effectively. However, given the improvements which have been made since November 2007 and the strengths which are evident in some aspects of the school's work the school now has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Value for money is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers have an accurate understanding of students' prior attainment.
- Use information gained from day-to-day and longer term assessments to plan work which meets the needs of all students and challenges the most able.
- Improve the effectiveness of middle leaders to ensure that agreed initiatives are implemented consistently in all classes and departments and that the few remaining weaknesses are eradicated.

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

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are in-line with national averages. When students join the school their attainment is average. They do not achieve well enough in Years 7 and 8 and, although standards are broadly in-line with national figures by the end of Year 9, there are fluctuations between subjects and from year-to-year. Too few students make the expected two levels progress in English. The outcomes of the school's first GCSE examinations in 2007 were disappointing and students' achievement was inadequate. The school took effective action

and outcomes improved. In 2008, the proportion of students attaining five good grades at GCSE, including those achieving higher grades in English and mathematics, increased significantly and was in-line with the national figure. Nearly all students gained at least five A* to G passes and, commendably, none left without at least one qualification. However, the school missed its ambitious targets at both Key Stages by a small margin and the proportion of students attaining A and A* grades was low. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. The school's Christian ethos and the presence of the school chaplain help students to reflect on their own beliefs and their place in the world. This support reaches out into the wider school community and is a particular strength when students or families are at their most vulnerable. Students are encouraged to contribute to the wider community. They have 'adopted' a local charity for the homeless and, although they are not allowed to work directly with beneficiaries, they provide ongoing support through fundraising. They also support charities further afield. This work does much to increase their self knowledge and their understanding of society. Most students say they enjoy coming to school. Attendance is good because the school tackles persistent non-attendance and the causes of disaffection. Students have positive attitudes towards learning and good relationships with their teachers and other staff. Students are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles. They have good opportunities to participate in sport and special care is taken to ensure that those students with physical disabilities find a sport they like. Students stay on site at lunchtime. This ensures that they are safe and that they eat healthy meals. A new dining hall has been built and a very good range of meals and drinks are available. Students adopt safe practices. Coats and bulky belongings are placed in lockers and students move around the school sensibly. Students report that any bullying or behavioural incidents are dealt with promptly and to their satisfaction. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is improving and there is more good teaching than at the time of the last inspection. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Teaching is engaging and promotes positive attitudes and behaviour. However, although teachers receive information about students' previous and predicted levels of attainment they do not use this information to plan work and activities which meet the needs of all groups within the class. Students in Years 7 and 8 do not progress well enough in English and mathematics because teachers do not have an accurate understanding of their prior attainment. As a result, they expect too little of the most able students and those of average ability. Although teachers and teaching assistants provide help for individuals, they do not routinely work with small groups to promote understanding or challenge the most able. The school has introduced a range of strategies designed to improve learning but these are not implemented consistently in all departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets statutory requirements and provides a range of interesting options. The needs of the most vulnerable students or those requiring additional support are met. There is an expanding range of vocational courses and opportunities. The curriculum is enhanced by strong partnerships with other local providers, enrichment days, visits and visitors. Links with the local community are developing and local residents have taught students to knit and shared their memories of the Second World War. The school is justifiably proud of its extended school provision. These additional opportunities contribute positively to students' enjoyment and enable them to extend their skills and interests. Work experience programmes for Year 11, careers guidance and enterprise education help prepare students for the world of work. Consequently, very few Year 11 students leave the school without plans for further education, training or employment. Citizenship lessons and personal, social and health education contribute effectively to students' ability to live happy and successful future lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Students are well cared for and supported. All staff contribute to students personal development and offer support when needed. The care and support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to the most vulnerable students is exemplary. 'Room 14' offers a unique blend of support, guidance and care. It provides respite, small group teaching, support for individuals and social activities. Students who have no real need of the opportunities the room provides go there to join their friends at break or lunchtimes so that the room is seen as a positive place to be. The school takes full advantage of opportunities available through the local authority to promote students' social and moral development and they respond to local and national problems swiftly. For example, recent work on knife crime has ensured that students are well informed about potential risks. Community police are based on the school site and are able to form productive relationships with students. The school works very effectively with a number of other agencies and this work promotes students' health and well-being. Academic guidance is weak. Teachers do not use information from day-to-day or longer term assessments effectively and some teachers do not mark students' work regularly enough to ensure that students receive accurate feedback about their progress or help where it is needed. The school has implemented all the most recent safeguarding guidance and arrangements for health and safety are very effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The Principal has steered the school through a period of rapid growth and change and has ensured that the school has a strong ethos and sense of identity. The relatively new senior leadership team have a good blend of skills and expertise. They have clear roles and responsibilities and work well together. The senior team have tackled some long standing weakness and built upon existing strengths. School self-evaluation is accurate, if a little too generous, and the school sets challenging targets. The senior team have, rightly, devolved some of the responsibility for the day-to-day monitoring of teaching and learning to middle managers. However, although the senior team have

demonstrated the capacity to bring about further improvement, many middle managers are not as effective. Evidence from the inspection confirms that middle leaders have not carried out their responsibilities rigorously enough. They have not ensured that new initiatives are applied consistently or that teachers receive sufficient guidance to help them improve further. As a result, weaknesses within departments have not been eradicated swiftly enough. Governance is good. The governing body has established clear lines of accountability and a sub-committee checks up on the progress the school is making and holds the leadership team to account. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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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	3

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

Dear Students

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

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school with Mrs Sewell, Mrs O'Leary and Mr Henderson. As you know, your school was given a notice to improve when it was inspected in November 2007. I am pleased to tell you that we think that the school is now giving you a satisfactory education and that some aspects of the school's work are good.

The results of national test and examinations in 2008 show that by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 you are achieving about as well as other students in the country. More students attained five good grades at GCSE in 2008 than did so in the previous year and everyone achieved at least one qualification. Teaching is improving. In the best lessons you make good progress because teachers know your current levels of attainment and give you work which will help you to improve. Teachers work with small groups during the lesson and mark your work carefully telling you how to improve. However, not all lessons are as good as this so, although you make satisfactory progress by the end of your time in school, you do not achieve equally well in all classes or in all subjects. You do not make enough progress in English and mathematics in Years 7 and 8 because some teachers do not understand how much you have achieved by the end of Key Stage 2. This means that you are given work which is much too easy and teachers do not expect enough of you. You then have to work very hard in other Years to catch up.

The school supports and cares for you very well and the curriculum is good. We were pleased to see that everyone at your school is included in activities and events. Some of your parents were very concerned about behaviour and bullying. The behaviour we saw during the inspection was at least satisfactory and sometimes good. We were pleased when students told us that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively by the school. We particularly enjoyed the presentation by the 'differently abled'. We also enjoyed talking to the students who met with us at lunchtime and those who talked to us as we walked around the school. We thought that Room 14 was amazing. We were pleased to see that nearly all of you attend school regularly and that you have good attitudes in lessons.

We have asked Dr Yeates to make some changes so that the school can improve even more. We would like your teachers to understand exactly what you can do by the end of Key Stage 2 so they can help you make good progress in Years 7 and 8. We think your books should be marked regularly and we would like teachers to use information about your current attainment to plan work which would help you improve further. Heads of department will have to check up on the work of teachers and tell them what to improve. You have a part to play. Some of you do not make enough effort during lessons, you do not complete your work and the work is untidy and badly presented. You need to tell the staff if you need more help or if the work is not challenging enough.

We really enjoyed our visit to your school and we wish you well for the future. Best wishes
Mrs C E Graham HMI (on behalf of the inspection team.)