

Inspection of St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy

Ridge Terrace, Bedlington, Northumberland NE22 6ED

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 January 2023

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

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a strong sense of community at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy. Pupils get along well with each other and with the staff. The tutor teaches personal development lessons to their form. This helps to build positive relationships, as pupils and staff discuss challenging topics. Pupils know that they have someone that they can speak to if they have any concerns.

Pupils feel safe at the school. Bullying sometimes happens. Staff, for the most part, deal with it effectively. Prejudice-based bullying is rare. There is a climate of respect and tolerance.

Pupils took time to adjust to when leaders put in place a new behaviour system. The majority of pupils acknowledge the consistency with which staff apply the behaviour policy. As a result of this, poor behaviour rarely interrupts lessons.

Staff and governors know this community very well. The improvement in the quality of education in the school reflects the ambition that governors have for the pupils.

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

School leaders have planned a curriculum which offers a broad range of subjects to give pupils a depth of understanding. Along with mathematics, English and science, the curriculum at key stage 3 gives pupils a rich experience of humanities, creative subjects and languages. At key stage 4, all pupils can study a range of subjects, which are collectively known as the English Baccalaureate. The curriculum at key stage 5 is more specialised, it caters well for the students who stay into the sixth form.

Leaders have thought very carefully about what pupils need to know to be successful in life beyond school. For example, in history, there are some challenging and complex themes, such as democracy and civil rights. In English, pupils study a very wide range of challenging and thought-provoking texts. In a minority of subjects at key stage 3, there is still some work to do to ensure that pupils learn the curriculum in sufficient depth.

The curriculum, including in the sixth form, allows pupils to build on what they have learned previously. Effective questioning during lessons helps teachers to check pupils' understanding. Some pupils struggle to retain knowledge over time. However, pupils can clearly explain how teachers support them to recall and apply what they learn. Staff encourage students in the sixth form to be mature and independent learners.

Leaders have developed the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have commissioned two external reviews of SEND provision. They have used this advice to improve pupil support plans and train

teachers. The families of pupils with SEND are involved in discussing their progress and support. This work has had a noticeable impact.

Leaders have created opportunities for reading to be at the heart of the curriculum. The rich curriculum in English plays an important part in supporting reading. There is a planned programme of reading to help weaker readers to catch up. This programme is having positive results.

The majority of pupils behave well. Lessons proceed calmly, and pupils engage well with their learning. However, there are a minority of pupils who are subject to regular school sanctions. Some of these pupils have repeat exclusions and need more support to modify and improve their behaviour.

Overall attendance at the school is strong. The attendance of pupils with SEND has improved as a result of a focus on this group and better support for them. However, for some pupils, rates of attendance are not high enough. Leaders have employed extra staff to support families and improve pupils' attendance. This extra investment is having an impact on some pupils.

Leaders have thought carefully about the content of the personal development curriculum. Teachers revisit healthy relationships and online safety in increasing depth as pupils move from key stage 3 to key stage 4. Pupils learn the fundamental British values of democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, and mutual respect and tolerance. However, they would benefit from understanding these issues in greater depth.

The careers programme is comprehensive. Year 10 work experience is planned to return after stopping during the pandemic. Very few pupils leave the school without a plan for the next phase of their education, employment or training. Younger pupils mainly take up the extra-curricular offer. Pupils at key stage 4 are less involved in these wider opportunities.

School leaders engage well with staff. Staff say senior leaders consider their workload and listen to their views. There is a proportionate approach to assessment which helps teachers to manage their time.

Governors have a very well-developed understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. They understand their statutory responsibilities and they have a strong grasp of equality and safeguarding. Leaders provide them with high-quality data and information about all aspects of school life. However, they also test this information by visiting the school regularly and seeing things for themselves.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff at the school have a good understanding of safeguarding because they are well trained. They understand the safeguarding risks to pupils in the local area.

Safeguarding concerns are reported quickly because there are effective systems in place to identify pupils who may be at risk. The school's work with external agencies to support safeguarding is timely and thorough. The school has safer recruitment practices in place.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and they know who to approach if they need help or support. The curriculum that pupils learn helps them to understand risks and how to stay safe. For example, pupils have a good understanding of online safety and healthy relationships.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Rates of attendance for some pupils are not high enough. This is affecting their learning and their chances of moving on to successful education and training beyond school. The school should evaluate the impact of the recent extra investment they have made in attendance strategies to ensure that this work has maximum impact and that pupils attend school more often than they have in the past.
- Younger pupils mainly take up the extra-curricular programme. Pupils in key stage 4 are less involved. The enrichment programme does not reach as many pupils as it could. The school should expand the range of opportunities to nurture and develop all pupils' talents and interests.
- In the personal development curriculum, pupils are taught about life in modern Britain. Leaders do not quality assure this curriculum as they do in other subjects. As a result, it is not clear how much pupils know and remember about this curriculum. The school should take steps to deepen the pupils' understanding of the British values of democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law and mutual respect and tolerance.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141814
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10255744
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	1,117
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	139
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Harrison
Headteacher	Kevin Shepherd
Website	www.st-benetbiscop.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 March 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust in May 2020.
- The school's religious character is Roman Catholic and is part of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The last section 48 inspection of the school was in June 2015. The timescales for reinspection have been extended because of COVID-19.
- A small number of pupils attend one of three unregistered alternative provisions used by the school.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 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.

- This was the third routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer, the director of education for the trust, the headteacher, other senior leaders and subject leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, geography, history and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The views of parents were considered through the responses to Ofsted's parent survey and through telephone conversations with some parents of pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors met with teachers at the early stages of their teaching careers.
- Inspectors met with staff and pupils to gather further information about personal development, behaviour and attendance, the sixth form and careers guidance.
- The views of staff were considered through meetings with teachers and wider support staff and through Ofsted's staff survey.
- The views of pupils were taken into account through Ofsted's pupil survey and by speaking with a wide range of pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding records, met with those responsible for leading safeguarding and spoke to pupils and staff about safeguarding.

Inspection team

Carl Sugden, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Featherstone	Ofsted Inspector
Moira Banks	Ofsted Inspector
Jamie Lawler	Ofsted Inspector
Gillian Hemming	Ofsted Inspector

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