

Venerable Bede Church of England [Aided] Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	133391
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	381502
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2012
Lead inspector	Tom Grieveson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	778
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	The Venerable Stuart Bain
Headteacher	Gill Booth
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2009
School address	Tunstall Bank Sunderland SR2 0SX
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Robert Pritchard

Additional inspector

David Selby

Additional inspector

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Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 35 lessons, taught by the same number of teachers. A further eight targeted observations were made to look specifically at provision for more-able students, those with disabilities and special educational needs and groups of lower-attaining students. Several observations were conducted jointly with senior school staff. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of the senior and middle leadership teams. There have been insufficient responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) so this information was not available when planning the inspection. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the self-evaluation documentation, assessment and tracking data and development plans. A scrutiny of students' work was also undertaken. Inspectors analysed the 209 inspection questionnaires returned by parents and carers and others submitted by students and staff.

Information about the school

The school is smaller in size than other secondary schools. Nearly all students are of White British heritage. The majority of students come from the immediate area and transfer from local primary schools, although a few do come from further afield. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average and increasing. Relatively few students have been designated as 'school action' for special educational needs, although an above-average proportion are identified at 'school action plus' or have a statement of special educational needs. Amongst its awards, the school has Investors in People status and the Artsmark. The school meets the current floor standard. There has been a significant change to those personnel in senior and middle leadership positions, including the headteacher, since the previous inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The school provides its students with a good education. Senior leaders are driving change and improvement effectively. Achievement is good. GCSE examination results have risen sharply in the last two years to above average. This shift in outcomes has been underpinned by significant investment to develop the quality of teaching; establishing a curriculum which fully reflects the needs and aspirations of the students; changes of personnel in key middle leadership positions; and through training and the delegation of responsibility to those already in post.
- The overwhelming majority of students behave well. Clear behavioural expectations are recognised and understood. A successful emphasis on developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is reflected in lessons where students are industrious, show positive attitudes and work well together. Around school, students accept responsibility for their own conduct and demonstrate their awareness of the needs and safety of others. Robust actions have led to above-average attendance levels and steadily declining exclusion rates.
- Effective training has increased teachers' skills and knowledge of how to promote effective learning so that teaching is predominantly good. The school's assessment data is used widely when lessons are being planned and ensures that students' needs are met directly in almost all circumstances. Where teaching remains satisfactory, prior learning information is not used well enough to ensure that all students are challenged sufficiently. Some marking of students' work is excellent and affords accurate feedback which aids improvement. This practice is not consistent across all subjects, however, because, on occasions, marking is cursory and limited in scope.
- The school's leaders have a secure understanding of where improvement is required. Monitoring arrangements are robust, ensuring that development plans are well-focused and timely. Careful recruitment has strengthened the senior

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team and core subject departments. The effective impact of the leaders' work demonstrates strong capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that, when all teachers mark students' work, feedback is clear about what has been achieved and how improvements can be made.
- Ensure that, when all teachers are preparing lessons, they take full account of the school's assessment information so that activities meet the learning needs of all students fully.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Inspectors' evaluation of students' learning and performance in lessons confirms that the overwhelming majority, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, are making good progress and achieving well. Teachers' good awareness of students' prior learning and carefully targeted interventions are being successful in supporting those groups of students whose past performance has been of concern. Students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and the most able, are now making strong gains. Those parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed high satisfaction with this aspect of the school's work.

Student outcomes have risen markedly in the last two years. The proportion of students gaining five or more good grades in their GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, is above average. Broader measures of students' GCSE performance show significantly above-average results. In 2011, all students on leaving school entered employment, education or training.

The school is taking robust action to address some long-standing weaknesses in mathematics and this is proving to be successful. Well-focused action planning, including changes to curriculum provision and training for staff, is enabling new leaders in mathematics to overcome past difficulties in subject performance. More widely, senior leaders have recognised the importance of strengthening the development of students' literacy skills and actions are showing a positive impact on rates of progress. The actions include additional support and a range of targeted approaches for younger students whose attainment on entry to the school has declined in the last two years and as part of thorough preparation for those taking GCSE examinations.

The school's assessment and tracking system gives all teachers a clear picture of how each student is progressing towards their challenging targets. Further work to refine procedures is continuing.

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Quality of teaching

Strategies to improve teaching are proving to be effective so that most is good and some is outstanding. No inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection.

At its best, teaching is motivational so that students are enthused and want to learn. The remodelled curriculum provides better student choice and also underpins teachers' heightened expectations of students' capabilities. The teachers' considered use of assessment information when planning lessons results in a well-judged match of activities so that learning is promoted successfully for all groups of students. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to generate probing questions which make students think, express their opinions and justify their views. The pace of lessons is maintained throughout so that the climate for learning is industrious and concentration levels are high. This approach also does much to develop students' oracy and literacy skills. Teaching assistants are used productively to support students so they can make contributions to lessons and engage with tasks confidently. Those with disabilities and special educational needs benefit particularly well from this intervention by teaching assistants. Effective teaching contributes substantially to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In such lessons, students' sense of enjoyment is evident, particularly when engaging with others in shared tasks. They explore sensitive issues well, bringing their own experiences to bear, but being respectful of the views of others.

Satisfactory teaching reflects limited challenge for all groups of learners because not enough account has been taken of their prior learning. Teachers tend to dominate these lessons, with insufficient time for students to work independently. Opportunities for students to engage collaboratively with others is limited and this restricts students from sharing their ideas, extending their learning or practising their literacy skills.

There are excellent examples of teachers' marking in students' books. Clear and precise analysis of what has been learned and carefully targeted steps showing how to improve underpin students' awareness of their performance firmly. This is, however, not consistently evident in all subjects and undermines students' confidence about where and how to develop their work. Inspection questionnaire responses from parents, carers and students show high satisfaction with the quality of teaching.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' confirm that behaviour is good and has improved well in the last few years. In discussion, they reflect a confidence in staff to manage any difficulties and express assurances about their safety and welfare. Students consider that the school deals effectively with any bullying that occurs. The 'Bully Buddies Scheme', which includes a peer anti-bullying group, is proving to be successful in providing support to individual students and families. Students talk with pride about their involvement

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as peer mentors. The impact of this work is reflected in a continuous reduction in the low number of bullying-related incidents.

Attendance is above average and exclusions show a downward trend. The school has effectively confronted unacceptably high absence levels in the past through its own well-thought-out strategies. Students arrive punctually to lessons.

Relationships are positive in lessons and around the school. Almost all students show responsibility for their own conduct and an awareness of the safety and welfare of others. Break and lunchtimes are calm and well-ordered. Behaviour in lessons is good, which contributes to the strong climate for learning. Students are keen to learn and engage in activities productively. They work well together, sharing ideas, with many willing to offer their views and opinions.

Parental questionnaire returns show a higher concern about behavioural matters compared to other aspects of the school's work, although relatively few parents and carers provided written comments to amplify their views. Inspectors found that behaviour management arrangements, introduced by the current leaders, have established clear rules and boundaries so that the overwhelming majority of students conform to the school's expectations.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders exemplify a secure focus on raising students' achievement through well-designed strategies to improve teaching and learning, personalising the curriculum and by ensuring that students are well supported. The very effective leadership of the headteacher, with good support from senior leaders, has ensured there is a clear understanding of where improvement is required. Development plans are precisely targeted and actions to bring about change are proving to be effective. Accountability for students' outcomes is rigorous. There is a clear line-of-sight in performance management arrangements between the school's targets and teachers' responsibilities. The substantial investment in staff training is showing in the high proportion of teaching judged as good. This investment is underpinned by a secure knowledge of teachers' capabilities so that training is focused accurately. While the governing body is supportive and appreciative of the efforts of senior leaders and staff, it is expectant about the school's performance and challenging in its interrogation of the information provided. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

The good curriculum has undergone marked change. It is successfully meeting students' needs and aspirations and integrates well with what is offered by partner organisations. It is successfully promoting equality of opportunity for all students. Its breadth and content ensure that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is delivered effectively. These factors are combining well to create a strong climate for learning.

The headteacher, in particular, has worked strenuously to gain the trust and

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confidence of the community. Parental inspection questionnaire returns show high satisfaction ratings with much of the school's work.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 January 2012

Dear Students

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

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for your welcome and openness during the recent inspection of your school. Our particular thanks go to those groups of students who met with us in meetings and around the school.

We have judged your school to be providing you with a good education. Those of you who completed the inspection questionnaire appear to agree with us. Attainment has risen well in the last two years and the large majority of students are making good progress and achieving well. Senior leaders and the staff have worked hard to ensure that teaching is predominantly good and, in most lessons, you are challenged to work hard and think for yourselves. In some lessons, however, not enough account has been taken of your prior learning when the lessons have been planned – this results in students not being challenged enough to improve. Although teachers' marking is generally good, not all teachers take as much time to check your work and give you feedback which helps you to improve. We have asked the governing body and staff to make important changes in both these areas. I'm sure you will think of ways in which you can help them to achieve this.

We were delighted to see how good your behaviour is and how supportive you are of each other. You told us that bullying is rare in the school and, if it does happen, it is dealt with well and often by other students. The students who are involved in peer mentoring and as 'Bully-Buddies' told us that they are proud to be able to help everyone in this way.

Your headteacher and her senior colleagues lead your school well and are making strident efforts to keep the community informed about how well the school is improving. We know that you will want to support them in their efforts.

Best wishes on behalf of the inspection team and good luck with all that you are seeking to achieve in the future.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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