

Inspection of a good school: St Benedict's Catholic High School

Red Lonning, Hensingham, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 8UG

Inspection dates:

17–18 December 2019

Outcome

St Benedict's Catholic High School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe in this school. They like the new school building. They said that the new facilities give them more things to do during social times. Pupils are friendly to each other. One pupil said, 'Nobody is ever on their own here because everybody has friends.' Pupils are confident that teachers deal well with any bullying that occurs.

Behaviour has improved considerably. Pupils said that there are still times when pupils misbehave in lessons. However, teachers deal with it quickly.

Pupils work hard. They participate fully in their lessons. Most subject teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Pupils' learning is improving as a result. In mathematics, pupils do not learn as well as in other subjects. Pupils said that there is just too much to remember in mathematics.

Pupils enjoy the trips and visits that take place. This week pupils, including sixth-form students, had been on a trip to the pantomime. Pupils said that they really enjoy the many drama and music opportunities that there are in school. They like participating in the performances. Sports activities are also important to pupils. The Year 9 girls have managed to get to the final 16 in a national football competition.

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

There have been some significant changes at St Benedict's Catholic High School since the last inspection. There have been considerable changes in staffing, including the headteacher and the chair of governors. As well as staffing changes, there has been a move into a new school building. These changes have caused some disruption to pupils' learning. Pupils' progress in their GCSE examinations dipped considerably in 2017. However, stability is returning to the school and pupils' learning is starting to improve. In 2019, pupils made progress in line with national averages in their GCSE examinations.

Across the school, including in the sixth form, most teachers have high expectations of

learners. They have developed a curriculum that focuses on the key knowledge that pupils need. Across all subjects, this knowledge is ordered carefully through all key stages. Teachers help pupils to remember learning by revisiting previous knowledge as they move through the curriculum. In most subjects, teachers continually make links between new learning and prior knowledge. This helps pupils to develop a deeper understanding of key learning.

In the past, few pupils have been able to study all the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The entry rate for the EBacc was well below the national average. This is because pupils were not encouraged to study history and geography to GCSE level. Currently, in both Years 10 and 11 almost all pupils study at least one of these subjects. For these year groups, the proportion of pupils that study the full suite of EBacc subjects is in line with the national average.

In mathematics, pupils do not achieve as well as in other subject areas. Pupils say that mathematics is too difficult because there is too much to remember. In the lower sets, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils. This impacts particularly on disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The new special educational needs coordinator has completed a review of the provision for all pupils with SEND. Teachers have been given training on how to support these pupils in their lessons. Detailed information on how to help individual pupils is available for all their teachers. Almost all subjects are now able to help these pupils to learn more effectively. The achievement of pupils with SEND is improving as a result.

Leaders provide effective careers advice and guidance to all pupils, including students in the sixth form. Leaders organise a 'World of Work' day where local employers give pupils information about careers in the local area. There are opportunities to visit a variety of colleges and universities. This information, together with the improvements to the curriculum, ensures that all leavers move on to appropriate education, training or employment.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum helps pupils' and students' personal development. All learn how to keep themselves healthy, both mentally and physically. They are taught that everyone is different, and these differences should be respected and celebrated. There are opportunities to learn about other religions and cultures.

Charity work is important to the pupils. They said that there is a food bank collection point at the entrance to school. They have also been collecting money to buy Christmas presents for children by filling empty sweet tubes with 20 pence pieces. Students in the sixth form have been visiting pensioners.

Improvements in pupils' behaviour have led to a reduction in the proportion of pupils who are excluded for a period of time. Staff are very positive about the new behaviour process. They say that they feel more supported when dealing with incidents of poor behaviour. Staff say that leaders listen to them. They think that leaders consider their welfare.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all appropriate checks are made so that only those who are safe to work with pupils are employed by the school. Training ensures that all staff are vigilant and know the signs of a pupil in need of help. Referrals to external agencies are made promptly.

Pupils receive regular training on how to keep themselves safe. They explained how important it was to keep their personal information safe, particularly while online. They talked about the recent assembly that they had on how easily pupils can be exploited and brought into gang crime.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The current curriculum in mathematics is not meeting the needs of all pupils. Pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, do not achieve as well in this subject as they do in others. Leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that it meets pupils' needs. They should ensure that teachers have high expectations of all pupils in this subject.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged St Benedict's Catholic High School to be good on 16–17 September 2014.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	112398
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10046387
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
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	1113
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John McQuirk
Headteacher	Emma Jackson
Website	http://st-benedicts.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 September 2014

Information about this school

- The Diocese of Lancaster undertook a section 48 inspection in May 2017.
- The school currently uses alternative provision at West Cumbria Learning Centre to contribute to the education of a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, we spoke with pupils about their work and school life. We held meetings with senior leaders, governors, subject leaders and the school improvement partner from the local authority.
- We reviewed documentation, which included leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and the school development plan. We scrutinised information about attendance and behaviour.
- We considered the views expressed by parents and carers in the 164 responses to

Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as parents' comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View. We considered the 58 responses to a questionnaire for staff. However, there were no responses to a questionnaire for pupils.

- We reviewed a range of documentation about the school. This included information about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff and support for pupils. We also spoke to representatives of the alternative provision used by the school.
- We looked closely at mathematics, art, and geography during the inspection. We met with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with pupils, met with teaching staff and looked at pupils' work. We also considered other subjects as part of the inspection.

Inspection team

Erica Sharman, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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