

St Benedict's Catholic School

Beetons Way, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 6RH

Inspection dates 11–12 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In 2014, while the school successfully reversed the decline in standards not all groups of students benefitted from the improvements made. Disabled students, those with special educational needs and students with low prior attainment do not make as much progress as others.
- The performance of students fluctuates between different years and subjects. In particular, students' progress in Key Stage 3 is not good enough. Continuity in students' learning is weak, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- Teachers do not make enough use of assessment to adapt their teaching in order to meet students' needs, particularly those who find learning difficult. Additional adults are not given enough information or direction to maximise their support.
- The high quality of teaching in the sixth form is not adapted skilfully enough for use with younger students.
- Although the headteacher sets a good example and is well respected by students, staff and parents, other leadership roles are not effective enough in the work of the school. Some middle leaders are not established yet because they are new to the post or school. Not all staff feel they are well led. The leadership of the curriculum, special educational needs and teachers' use of data require improvement.
- School self-evaluation and improvement planning are not promoting sufficiently rapid action. Teachers' use of data and marking remain inconsistent, limiting support for some students. Plans do not show clearly enough how the effectiveness of staff leading improvements will be measured. This restricts the headteacher and governors in holding leaders to account.
- Not enough information is given to parents about the content of the curriculum.

The school has the following strengths

- Due to a concerted effort by senior leaders, GCSE results improved markedly in 2014. Better teaching and results in English contributed to significant gains in the overall proportion of students who gained five A* to C grades.
- Sixth form students consistently attain very high standards from above-average starting points. A high proportion of sixth formers progress into higher education, including universities where competition for places is particularly high.
- Students' good behaviour makes a very positive contribution to their learning. In particular, their conscientious attitude to homework and reading habits prepare them very well for further study.
- In the past year, the governing body has raised expectations of the school. More direct involvement in evaluating the school is contributing to higher levels of challenge, more focused use of resources and improvements in attendance and performance.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out because the school admitted Year 7 students for the first time in September 2013. These students are now in Year 8. The inspection was conducted at no notice following non-compliance with the statutory requirement to provide parents with detailed information about the school's curriculum on its website.
- Her Majesty's Inspectors revisited the school four weeks after the original inspection to gather further evidence on the achievement of students and aspects of social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, of which six were seen jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited a sample of personal, social and health education lessons, tutor periods and two assemblies.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, two representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Telephone discussions were held with a representative of the diocese and a parent.
- Inspectors talked with many students about their learning and life at the school. They held meetings with six groups of students and reviewed their work in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the 20 questionnaires completed by staff and the 46 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team: observed the school's work; reviewed current data about students' achievement; examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance; and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions about the school's work on government changes to the curriculum and assessment. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the impact of those changes.

Inspection team

Ian Middleton, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Brenda Watson

Additional Inspector

Piers Ranger

Additional Inspector

Neil Stanley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Benedict's Catholic School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school for students aged 11–18 years. As part of the ongoing reorganisation of education in West Suffolk, the school currently admits students in Year 7 as well as Year 9.
- Around two thirds of students are from the Catholic community in Bury St Edmunds and the wider area.
- Most students are White British. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national figures.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and students in local authority care) is low.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs.
- A small group of students attend alternative provision off-site. Placements include West Suffolk College in Bury St Edmunds and the British Racing School in Newmarket.
- Sixth form provision is collaborative with the neighbouring academy, County Upper.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching so that the impact on raising standards is sustained by:
 - using information about students more astutely, particularly disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs, in order to assess and address their individual needs more effectively in lessons
 - raising teachers' expectations of students in Key Stage 3, building on their prior experiences, setting higher levels of challenge and establishing higher standards of accuracy and presentation
 - using feedback and marking more skilfully to make clearer to students how to reach higher standards
 - making more of students' positive attitudes, expecting the note-taking and recall of prior learning that characterise the high quality learning in the sixth form
 - using resources to aid learning more creatively and effectively, including deployment of additional adults.
- Improve attainment by:
 - accelerating the progress of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with low prior attainment, disabled students and those with special educational needs
 - ensuring that students progress well in all their subjects, from accurately assessed starting points
 - reducing students' absence and exclusions.
- Make leadership and management more effective by:
 - giving leaders more specific roles and targets linked to improving students' learning, achievement and well-being, for which they are more clearly accountable to the headteacher and governing body
 - developing a continuous cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning at all levels, promoting a stronger culture of professional development through more critical feedback and target setting
 - improving equality of opportunity and the continuity of students' learning through the curriculum, in particular in ensuring that students do not repeat work unnecessarily
 - ensuring that parents and carers are more fully informed about the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- While rising standards in 2014 successfully reversed previous decline, the leadership and management have not done enough to tackle the weaknesses in meeting the needs of all students. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged students, those with low prior attainment and students who have special educational needs. These weaknesses are in the curriculum, teaching and support.
- The headteacher is effective in promoting a positive ethos. He is determined to achieve outstanding status for the school, and rightly points to students' most recent GCSE results and academic achievement in the sixth form as indicators of the school's capacity to improve.
- However, senior and middle leaders' plans to improve the school do not do enough to bring about concerted action. These plans do not give sufficient information about the expected impact of improvements on students' outcomes, particularly under-achieving groups. This limits governors in holding leaders to account. In addition, the timescales are not challenging enough.
- The leadership of teaching and the use of assessment is not advancing quickly enough. The school's improvement plan identifies priorities for 2014-15 that were clear at the time of the last inspection. Responsibility for the leadership of special educational needs combined with leadership of a year group is not proving effective.
- The school's systems for checking its own effectiveness require improvement. Although evaluations of teaching and learning undertaken by inspectors aligned broadly with those of senior leaders, some aspects of teaching are not given enough emphasis. This includes the quality of teachers' planning of learning, feedback to students and marking of their work.
- Insufficient curriculum content is shared with parents to meet statutory requirements. Curriculum development, following the introduction of the new National Curriculum and removal of assessment levels, is at an early stage. Curriculum continuity, particularly in Key Stage 3, is not maximising students' skills on arrival at the school or addressing gaps in their knowledge. Staff are not well enough informed to avoid repetition, set appropriate levels of challenge or tailor support at the right level.
- There are examples of highly effective leadership and management, such as in mathematics and in the sixth form. In these areas, sustained success is driven by the clear purpose of staff and generally a strong sense of progression for students, including those students that are not achieving as well in other subjects.
- Clear expectations result in students' good behaviour and attitudes to learning. Case studies provided by the school indicate that care for students, including those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, is often strong. Better management of attendance has contributed to students' improved achievement. However, absence is still higher for disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs. Exclusions remain higher than the national average and similar schools.
- There are examples of good management of additional help and resources. For example, in English more robust monitoring and evaluation by school leaders and specialist support by the local authority has contributed to better subject leadership, teaching and students' performance in 2014, reversing the decline in 2012 and 2013. Nevertheless, not all school-based resources are deployed well, such as additional adults in the classroom.
- While the breadth and balance of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 is adequate to meet the needs of most students, options are limited for students pursuing a work-related pathway. For most students, curriculum continuity into the sixth form and into higher education is a strength of provision. However, the proportion of disadvantaged students in the sixth form is small.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is generally good. In addition to subject provision, initiatives such as book week, international day, arts week and science master classes at Cambridge University enable students to work with a wide range of inspirational adults. Opportunities to develop respect for and tolerance of others are a strength of these aspects of provision. The recently appointed citizenship leader is rightly planning more opportunities for students to consider how negative

challenges to modern democratic values may arise and can be overcome.

- The local authority has provided effective support since the school's examination results declined further in 2013. For example, a comprehensive review of the English department followed by resources and professional development to develop better teaching have helped to raise achievement in the subject. A review of data and the use of assessment have been less effective in improving teaching across all subjects.

■ The governance of the school:

- The Chair of the Governing Body, new to the role in September 2013, has raised governors' expectations of the school and increased levels of challenge. Changes in committee structures and governors' responsibilities are proving effective in enabling governors to gain a greater insight into the school, including through first-hand experience. This challenge had a demonstrable impact on students' improved GCSE results in 2014.
- The governing body is very well led, driven by a deep commitment to meeting the needs of all students at the school regardless of background. For example, governors are actively seeking ways of increasing the proportion of disadvantaged students joining the school to at least average levels and raising attainment for all.
- Governors use data confidently to pursue any indications of underachievement or disengagement. For example, although governors are rightly proud of students' positive attitudes to learning, which are the norm, they are concerned about the above-average proportion of exclusions. They are clear about taking account of students' results when evaluating the performance of staff, including the headteacher. However, the underdeveloped use of school self-evaluation and improvement planning by school leaders limits the quality and range of school-based information available to governors.
- The governing body fulfils its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and ensures that these arrangements meet statutory requirements. Action has been taken to improve communications with parents.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- Behaviour is good. Most parents who responded to Parent View considered behaviour to be well managed. Students prepare well for lessons through conscientious homework and regular reading. In lessons, they make a good contribution to their learning by engaging in discussion, asking pertinent questions and offering well-considered answers, particularly the boys. The positive attitudes to learning that students develop prepare them well for the next stage of their learning and life.
- Students are very appreciative of the school's caring ethos and understand their contribution to making school a supportive environment for other students. The School Council is respected by students and staff, and it plays an active role in the school's development, including the recruitment of teachers.
- Students collaborate well when working in pairs or groups in class. At breaks and lunchtimes, students are considerate towards one another; interaction between students in different year groups is cohesive. Occasionally, students lack a sense of urgency when moving between lessons.
- Students' attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now average. The school is working with parents, carers and external agencies to reduce absenteeism further, particularly persistent absence.
- Exclusions remain above average and under scrutiny by governors, more of whom are now involved in the process of exclusion. Exclusions data contrast starkly with the calm, caring and compliant qualities that characterise most students' behaviour. However, the staff questionnaires contained some criticism, noting inconsistencies with which the school's behaviour policy is applied. Inspectors observed good behaviour.

Safety

- The safety of students is good. Students demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves and each other safe in different situations. They understand the potential dangers of electronic communications.

- The school has developed an ethos in which bullying is rare and cooperation is common. Students are confident that rare incidents of bullying, racism or harassment are taken seriously by staff. In all years students express positive views about behaviour and consider the school a calm and orderly environment for learning. Students develop respect for their peers and adults in the school community, including those with differing views or beliefs. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children feel safe at school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because not all groups of students make good progress. Assessment information, observations of lessons, scrutiny of students' work and discussions with students indicate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching within and between subjects.
- Not all teachers use information about students' achievement sufficiently well to structure their teaching for different abilities. While work pitched at middle abilities meets the needs of most students and is a basis for more-able students to use their initiative and inquiry, students who need additional support fall behind.
- In lessons where additional adults are available to provide support not enough information is given to them to focus their efforts. Too often, support staff repeat what the teacher has already provided rather than structure their input in a way more suited to the student. There are successes, for example, the one-to-one support provided for pupil premium students in English and mathematics.
- Teachers' use of assessment varies too much. For example, in a Year 9 design and technology lesson, a teacher used homework effectively to evaluate students' starting points and the students arrived at the lesson with a wide range of information about board games, linked to the classroom topic. Students presented their homework using designing skills of particular importance in the subject. Their homework quickly indicated their varying experience at different middle schools and their wide-ability range. This information enabled the teacher to organise activities and pitch challenges accordingly.
- In contrast, in other lessons pupils repeat work they have done in earlier year groups, including in primary school. Expectations, particularly in Key Stage 3, are not always high enough. This includes standards of presentation and accuracy and stretch for the most able.
- The quality of teachers' feedback and marking varies too much within and between subjects. There are good examples in history, art and modern foreign languages. In most subjects not enough constructive guidance, illustration or challenge is provided to promote a response from the student. Students' spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting are not marked routinely in the context of different subjects.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. This is used effectively to probe students' answers to questions or to improvise and take learning further forward when students give challenging answers. Older and more-able students respond particularly well to the stimulating discussions led by staff. However, not enough students have been taught essential skills, such as how to take notes or develop discussions between students before joining the sixth form. As a consequence, some opportunities to deepen or revisit learning are missed.
- The good teaching at the school is strongly focused on developing key subject skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, in mathematics, students are taught how to develop a range of problem-solving skills. They learn how mathematics can be applied in a range of contexts. Similarly, in physical education, making the contribution of exercise and diet to a healthy lifestyle explicit engages students.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics rose substantially in 2014, not all groups benefitted from the improvements which brought this about. As was the case in 2013, disabled students and those who have special educational needs

made less progress than they should in 2014. Students who join the school having attained below-average standards make less progress than similar students in most schools. In addition, Year 11 students eligible for pupil premium funding made less progress than more-advantaged students in the school in 2014.

- In 2014, the school's data indicate that 69% of students attained five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. This is well above the 2013 national level of 60% and the 2013 school level of 53%. This represents good progress for Year 11 students, who joined the school having attained average standards at the end of Key Stage 2. The most-able students made good progress in 2014 following underachievement in 2012 and 2013. The proportion of A* and A grades showed marked improvement in many subjects.
- The small proportion of students taking work-related courses off-site achieve English and mathematics GCSE at school. They make sufficient progress to continue in further education or employment post-16.
- Students consistently attain above-average standards in mathematics. The proportion making progress better than that typically expected is high.
- More targeted support for students helped to raise standards in English in 2014. The proportion of students attaining GCSE A* to C and A* and A grades surpassed 2013 national averages. Initiatives such as the Year 7 Catch Up, are contributing to improvements by focusing on students who enter school with below-average literacy skills. However, disabled students and those who have special educational needs still make less progress in English than other groups.
- Students read widely and often. The school library is frequently used by students. Book loans have increased significantly following a concerted effort to improve reading habits. This is also having a positive impact on the quality of students' writing.
- Students' achievement fluctuates too much in some subjects. These include science and design and technology. Above-average standards are consistently reached in the arts, history and religious education at GCSE. This success contributes positively to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school does not use early entry to GCSE examinations, conscious that students should not settle for lower grades than they might otherwise achieve.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The sixth form is a strength of the school. A high proportion of students continue into the sixth form, although the proportion of disadvantaged students is very small. High aspirations and hard work combine to create a very positive ethos credited to the very effective leadership of the sixth form.
- The range of academic options, offered in collaboration with the neighbouring academy, are suitably broad. The school has started to provide additional opportunities for the small proportion of sixth-form students who join AS courses without GCSE English or mathematics.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge very effectively in the sixth form. At this level students are challenged by staff and other students to think deeply. Feedback to students is focused clearly on the knowledge, understanding and skills required to do well in different subjects.
- Judicious use of information, advice and guidance for future education or employment underpins students' motivation and progression.
- Very positive attitudes to learning are common in the sixth form. In addition, students make a strong contribution to school life, for example, through mentoring younger students.
- Sixth-form students make good or outstanding progress in most subjects, from above-average starting points. Their attainment is well above national averages and is the highest amongst schools in the local authority. The proportion gaining university places is also high; the school is one of the top state schools in the country for progression to Oxford and Cambridge.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124861
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	447736

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	736
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Snape
Headteacher	Hugh O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2013
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