

The Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

Tunstall Bank, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 0SX

Inspection dates 24–25 May 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils currently in the school are making strong and sustained progress across a wide range of subjects.
- There are good programmes in place to support pupils who enter the school with low levels of attainment. These pupils' reading skills develop quickly as a result.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability make as much progress as other pupils across a broad range of subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good. Most teachers plan engaging activities that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do. Most teachers provide good feedback that contributes significantly to pupils' progress.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes and apply themselves diligently. At social times, their conduct is of a high order. The school's Christian values ensure pupils develop a tangible sense of mutual respect, tolerance and consideration for one another.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed effectively. The wide-ranging personal development programme and religious education lessons prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- School directors and the executive headteacher manage teachers' performance rigorously. They acted decisively to address issues in teaching that caused a dip in standards in 2014. Effective recruitment and ongoing training and development of teachers are securing better outcomes for pupils currently in the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough pupils make rapid progress in English or science.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school is not narrowing fast enough. Gaps in attainment at the end of key stage 4 remain relatively wide.
- While the attendance rates are average, the weaker attendance of some disadvantaged pupils has a negative impact on their learning and progress.
- Leaders have not ensured marking and feedback are consistently effective across different subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in order to raise levels of achievement further by:
 - ensuring all teachers provide engaging tasks and move the learning on promptly to prevent the pace of learning from slowing
 - enriching careers guidance further so that more pupils are inspired and motivated to fulfil their potential
 - providing some teachers with strategies to better engage disadvantaged pupils and stretch the most able pupils in their day-to-day teaching.

- Further improve attendance, especially the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the marking and feedback policy is implemented well by all staff across the school
 - developing clear measures for success in relation to the use of pupil premium and catch-up funding for Year 7 to enable trust directors to more easily evaluate the effectiveness of these funds
 - ensuring senior and middle leaders maintain regular checks on the performance of the English and science departments, in order to ensure recent improvements in performance are maintained and developed.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive headteacher, ably supported by the head of school, demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring pupils are safe, secure and well supported within an inclusive Christian ethos. This vision is coupled with a determination to ensure good teaching delivers good academic outcomes for all. Weaker teaching has been largely eliminated and the challenge of significant staff turbulence, particularly within the English and science departments, has been managed well.
- Leaders have an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and plan their actions carefully. School directors have good systems in place to hold leaders to account for the impact of their work.
- Teachers' performance is managed effectively. Rigorous monitoring of pupils' work and the regular consideration of pupils' views ensures leaders know what teaching is typically like. Underperformance is tackled head-on and expectations are made clear. The school has good systems and training opportunities to support teachers in developing and improving their teaching. It uses these effectively to ensure most of the teaching across the school is good. A few teachers are receiving effective support through individually tailored support plans. Leaders have focused on teachers' planning and marking, so that areas for improvement from the previous inspection have largely been addressed. However, not all teachers fully reach the expectations for marking, as set out in the school's more demanding marking and feedback policy.
- Leaders have focused considerable effort on rebuilding the English and science departments, following significant changes to staffing which led to a dip in standards in 2015. In English, they acted swiftly to appoint a highly effective new head of department and strengthened the teaching capacity. External consultancy has been used effectively to guide and review the work of the new team. As a result, current standards are rapidly being secured. Timely interventions in key stage 3 are now resulting in lower-attaining pupils making rapid progress.
- Leaders have developed the curriculum effectively at key stage 3 to better meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils, many of which are disadvantaged. Further changes to the curriculum will be implemented from September 2016. This is because leaders have recognised that more curriculum time is needed for core subjects in order to ensure pupils master key concepts and develop sufficient depth of understanding. The new curriculum model allows for this while still ensuring there is balance across a broad range of subject options.
- A strength of the wider curriculum is the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The personal development lessons across Years 7 to 11 explore topical issues skilfully and sensitively through discussion and debate. Pupils learn about other faiths as well as Christianity and make visits to a range of places of worship. Pupils are helped to develop a strong sense of right and wrong through 'thought for the week'. The exchange programme with a school in Lesotho helps pupils to develop a wider cultural awareness. During the inspection, inspectors observed pupils developing their understanding of democracy by debating the European referendum and casting their votes in a mock ballot.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and the Year 7 catch-up funding, although measures for success are not sharp enough to enable trust directors to evaluate the impact of funding effectively enough. Disadvantaged pupils enter the school with significantly lower levels of prior attainment than other pupils. Consequently, much of the funding is targeted at initiatives in Years 7 and 8. Good analysis of attendance information means leaders have begun to target additional resources at improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4. These initiatives are having a positive impact.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The relatively new governance structure, established following the development of the Dayspring multi-academy trust, is providing effective support and challenge. Trust directors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They took bold steps to address underperformance when they identified weaknesses in teaching in 2014 and have managed issues of turbulence resolutely through a challenging period. As a result, they have secured strong and sustained rates of progress for pupils currently in the school.
 - Governors have given due care and consideration to the development of a sustainable leadership structure. The promotion of the headteacher to her current executive role and the development of a reshaped senior team have been managed well.

- Academy directors oversee the performance management of teachers robustly. They play an active role in determining whether teachers deserve salary progression. Academy council members monitor their delegated areas of responsibility, such as pupil outcomes and attendance, effectively.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All policies linked to safeguarding are up to date and safeguarding practices are well understood. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and staff training is comprehensive. New members of staff receive early training to ensure they know what to do if they have any concerns. The designated safeguarding leader works effectively with parents, the police and the local multi-agency safeguarding hub, but has had to challenge external agencies when the quality of support provided has not met expectations.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching is good, because of the decisive actions of leaders to tackle weaker teaching head-on. Leaders have quickly reshaped departments where change was needed and new members of staff have contributed effectively to establishing higher expectations.
- Lessons are typified by positive, respectful relationships and purposeful learning. In many lessons, teachers employ a wide range of strategies to engage pupils and ensure the pace of work is kept high. Teachers in these lessons ask probing questions to check understanding. Their good subject knowledge ensures their questions challenge and stretch the most able pupils to think deeply and provide extended responses. For example, inspectors observed very mature discussion and debate in religious education regarding the impact of the Holocaust.
- Teachers' marking and feedback contributes effectively to the strong and sustained progress of the majority of pupils. In the best examples, such as marking seen in history, pupils redraft and improve extended pieces of work in response to clear comments, as required by the school's marking policy. As a result, the quality and depth of pupils' work improves markedly. In some other subjects, such as science, pupils' responses to marking are more superficial and do not develop pupils' understanding sufficiently. Sometimes, pupils are not given the time or opportunity to respond to the teacher's marking, as required by the school's policy; consequently, pupils are not able to learn from their mistakes as effectively.
- Teachers plan lessons effectively, making good use of information on pupils' prior attainment. Some excellent examples of planning were seen where the teacher prepared specific questions to target disadvantaged pupils. This approach ensured they were challenged appropriately. Longer-term planning, linked to new GCSE specifications, has been completed and teachers now focus more on delivering challenging subject content. In mathematics, for example, pupils are introduced to complex topics earlier, and many pupils are responding positively to the challenge.
- Most pupils apply themselves diligently in lessons. They come with the right equipment and get to lessons quickly. Most lessons get off to a brisk start. However, on occasion, some pupils habitually work too slowly and consequently make less progress than they could. In addition, mundane tasks that are sometimes required of them do not challenge the most able pupils.
- Additional adults provide good support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability when working with them in small groups or providing support to them in class. They question pupils well and encourage them to try their best. Specialist additional adults in the English and mathematics departments work regularly and effectively with target groups of pupils in order to consolidate their grasp of new topics.
- Varied homework tasks are set regularly, in line with the school's policy.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils develop in confidence as they move through the school and have a clear sense of their next steps. Careers guidance begins in Year 7 and there are good opportunities to work with business ambassadors from different employment sectors. All pupils undertake an appropriate work experience in Year 10 and the most able pupils have opportunities to visit top universities. However, the programme does not yet do enough to inspire and motivate pupils who have lower aspirations.
- Bullying and the use of derogatory language are rare. The school has won a number of awards for innovative work, led by pupils, which ensures anti-bullying continues to have a high profile.

- The personal development curriculum ensures pupils are well informed about risks and know how to protect themselves. The programme is sufficiently flexible to respond to identified needs. For example, a programme on road safety was recently delivered following a 'near-miss' incident involving a pupil from the school. There is good provision in place to inform pupils about risks when online and pupils spoke knowledgeably to inspectors about sensitive topics such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.
- The school employs a counsellor to support pupils who are more vulnerable or feel anxious. An inclusion room provides a safe haven for those pupils that need a supportive adult to talk to.
- The special educational needs department runs a 'sportability' programme to encourage access to sport for pupils with disability, which contributes significantly to pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Teams of disabled pupils compete at a national level. Healthy eating and healthy lifestyles are also promoted effectively by the physical education department. For example, pupils are provided with recipes for athletes, such as 'go faster fish pie'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves well and move around the school calmly and purposefully. Relationships with members of staff are good and pupils readily respond to instructions. Pupils tidy up well in the Bistro following break and lunchtime and there is almost no litter around the well-maintained site.
- In lessons, most pupils show positive attitudes and apply themselves diligently. However, when teaching lacks pace, pupils become passive and adopt slow work rates. Although pupils know their targets, some lack the motivation and resilience to persevere and prefer not to challenge themselves.
- Staff, pupils and parents that responded to Ofsted's surveys all indicated that they feel the school manages behaviour well.
- Attendance is improving. For this academic year, overall levels of attendance are in line with the national average. Effective rewards and a high-profile attendance challenge are ensuring the importance of good attendance is well understood. Leaders track and analyse attendance data well. As a result, they have begun to target particular groups whose attendance is low, such as disadvantaged girls in key stage 4, more sharply. However, this work is not fully embedded. Academy council members meet with parents on a monthly basis to provide support, where attendance is a concern.
- The very small number of pupils who attend alternative provision on a part-time basis attend well and are making good progress. School leaders are vigilant in checking that these pupils are safe and well cared for when not on the school site.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils enter the school with average levels of attainment. Pupils in different year groups currently in the school make strong and sustained progress across a broad range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Current assessments indicate that the proportion of pupils on track to attain five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics in 2016 will be above the 2015 national average.
- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress because leaders acted decisively to address weaker teaching in 2014 and 2015. The school underwent a period of significant change as leaders worked to raise expectations. The resulting upheaval, including in staffing, had a negative impact on the progress of some pupils, particularly within the English and science departments. Outcomes in both subjects were well below the national average in 2015. Stable staffing and effective teaching in both departments now mean that pupils are once again making good progress.
- The proportion of pupils on track to make expected or better progress in English and mathematics is in line with that seen nationally. The outcomes of recently completed and externally moderated controlled assessments in English are strong, indicating outcomes overall in English are likely to exceed the school's cautious predictions.
- The work in pupils' books indicates that teachers have high expectations across the whole curriculum. Pupils' work is generally neat and tidy and there are good opportunities for them to write at length.
- Disadvantaged pupils enter the school with levels of prior attainment well below that of other pupils. A high proportion enter the school with relatively weak literacy skills. Leaders have ensured there is good provision in place in Years 7 and 8, through well-planned reading programmes. Teachers regularly listen to pupils read and assess the development of their reading skills, leading to rapid gains. The weakest readers receive good support to help them develop their phonics skills (the sounds letters and groups of

letters make). There is a good range of age-appropriate books available. As a result, the progress disadvantaged pupils make across a broad range of subjects is at least as good as that of other pupils, and has improved steadily over the last three years. However, gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers at the end of key stage 4 remain wide and leaders know there is more to do to narrow attainment gaps further.

- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability receive good support. The special educational needs coordinator, who joined the school in September 2015, has reviewed their needs and tracks their progress carefully. This information shows that these pupils are making similar progress across the curriculum to other pupils in the school.
- The most able pupils make similar progress to that of other most able pupils nationally. The most able pupils in last year's Year 11 made weaker progress in English last year as a result of the turbulence in staffing. However, this is not the case for pupils currently in the school because leaders have focused teachers' training on ensuring lessons are stretching and challenging.
- The proportion of pupils that secure sustained places in further education, employment or training is in line with that seen nationally. Most pupils transfer to local further education colleges or move to other sixth forms in local faith schools. Apprenticeships are increasingly popular and the proportion of pupils that secure apprenticeships is above that seen nationally. The very small number of pupils that attend alternative provision attain suitable qualifications to move to the next stage of their education, employment or training.

School details

Unique reference number	139184
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10011027

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	756
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Stuart Bain
Headteacher	Gill Booth
Telephone number	0191 523 9745
Website	www.venerablebede.co.uk
Email address	venerable.bede@venerablebede.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Venerable Bede Church of England Secondary School converted to an academy in January 2013 and became The Venerable Bede Church of England Academy. The school is a lead member of the Dayspring multi-academy trust, which formed in November 2014.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The large majority of pupils are White British. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need or with an education, health and care plan is below average.
- A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision at East Durham College, Springboard and Young Mums on a part-time basis.
- The headteacher became executive headteacher of both the Venerable Bede Church of England Academy and Ian Ramsey Church of England Academy in 2014.
- By the end of the inspection, the school's website met statutory requirements.
- The school meets the government's current floor targets, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 part lessons of which a number were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During these observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate the quality of current work. Inspectors also undertook a number of shorter visits to lessons in order to evaluate the general climate for learning and observed pupils' behaviour at social times around the school.
- Inspectors visited the school's resource base for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher and head of school, other senior leaders, a group of teachers, the head of the English department and a group of pupils. Further meetings were held with academy directors, an academy council member who is a member of the Financial and General Purposes Committee, and representatives of the Durham Church of England Diocese.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policies, assessment and attendance information and records of checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors looked at minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors took account of the 47 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and to the 48 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 38 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

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Catherine Morgan	Ofsted Inspector
Tudor Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

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