

Inspection of a good school: Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

Tunstall Bank, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 0SX

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 November 2021

Outcome

Venerable Bede Church of England Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's Christian ethos is central to life at the academy. Pupils understand the importance of the school's values of joy, hope, forgiveness, wisdom and perseverance. The personal development programme broadens pupils' horizons. They learn to value peoples' differences. Pupils treat each other and staff with respect. They are taught valuable life skills, such as personal finance and how to write a curriculum vitae. Pupils grow in confidence throughout their time at the school. They enjoy school and feel safe.

Leaders' expectations of pupils and staff are high. Pupils are encouraged to develop a love of learning. They enjoy the wide range of subjects that they can choose to study. They know that teachers want the best for them and value their support.

There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to get involved in wider school life. Pupils appreciate the range of sports that they can play and the opportunities to learn musical instruments. Pupils with leadership responsibilities, such as prefects and 'bully buddies,' are proud of their roles.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. Visitors are made to feel welcome. Most pupils agree that teachers take bullying seriously. When bullying is reported, pupils are well supported.

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

Pupils benefit from a curriculum that is broad and ambitious. The curriculum builds on what pupils have studied in primary school and prepares them well for their next step in employment, education or training. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are well supported. Pupils who need help with reading benefit from additional sessions with trained staff so that they catch up quickly.

Curriculum plans are well designed. In each subject, leaders have identified what they want pupils to know and remember. This subject knowledge is taught in a carefully

considered sequence that helps pupils to build their knowledge over time. Leaders have plans in place to broaden the range of subjects that will be studied by pupils in Year 9. This is to support more pupils to study subjects such as languages in Year 10.

Leaders have prioritised pupils' vocabulary development, including a focus on the use of subject-specific language. For example, in design and technology, pupils are encouraged to use key terms such as 'ergonomics'. This work is bearing fruit and many pupils rise to the challenge. However, some pupils find it difficult to understand some of the new words that are introduced to them. This is because some teachers do not explain new words clearly enough. As a result, some pupils find it hard to confidently use the key terms that leaders want them to know and remember.

The Christian ethos permeates all aspects of school life. This is particularly true of how leaders support pupils' personal development. Pupils value weekly opportunities to learn important knowledge that will help them when they leave school. They speak enthusiastically about what they have learned about important issues such as healthy relationships and the concept of 'consent'. Careers education opens pupils' eyes to the world of opportunity that is available to them.

Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around school. Low-level disruption is rare and never tolerated. Pupils told inspectors how much they value their teachers. They are proud of their school and so are staff. They feel that the school is well led and that leaders consider their workload and well-being. One member of staff captured the views of many, stating, 'I feel like part of a team, but also part of a family.'

Trustees and the academy council know the school extremely well. They ask leaders probing questions about pupils' well-being and carefully scrutinise how well pupils with SEND are supported. Trustees' knowledge of some aspects of the quality of education is not as well developed. As a result, they do not offer the same level of challenge to school leaders on curriculum development as they do in other areas of their governance responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have a clear understanding about the risks that pupils may face in the community. Staff are well informed of these. They know the signs that might indicate that a pupil is at risk of harm. There are well-understood systems for staff to report any concerns that they have about pupils. Leaders make timely referrals to external agencies when pupils need further support. As a result, pupils get the support that they need.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Tutor time is used to teach pupils about important safeguarding issues that could affect them. This includes teaching pupils how to spot the signs of grooming and the dangers of knife crime.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not introduce new subject-specific language well to pupils. As a result, some pupils, particularly those with low prior attainment, find it difficult to learn new vocabulary and use this in their work. Leaders should ensure that teachers carefully introduce new vocabulary so that pupils can use this language confidently and accurately in their work.
- Trustees do not have a sharp enough understanding of the curriculum to effectively hold leaders to account for the quality of education. Trustees should ensure that they take necessary steps to better scrutinise the decisions made by leaders on curriculum development and the quality of education that the school provides for pupils.

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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2016.

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.

If you are the school and 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	139184
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10199786
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	908
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Neil Williams
Headteacher	David Airey
Website	www.venerablebede.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 May 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Dayspring Trust.
- A very small number of pupils attend one of three registered alternative provisions: The Beacon of Light, The Link School and Consilium Evolve.
- The school has a Church of England denomination. The last section 48 inspection took place in June 2017. The next inspection should take place within the prescribed period. Section 48 inspections (or the equivalent inspection of an academy) are usually carried out every three to five years (and usually within two to three years of a new voluntary-aided school or academy or free school opening). Section 48 inspections were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and restarted in September 2021. The first inspection will be within eight years of the last, rather than the usual three to five years.
- The trustees who are responsible for the governance of the school are referred to as 'directors' within the school and trust.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the Dayspring Trust, trustees, including the chair and vice-chair of trustees, as well as members of the local academy council.
- The lead inspector held telephone conversations with a representative from the diocese, a school improvement partner from a neighbouring local authority and a representative from Consilium Evolve.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, design and technology, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also held meetings with leaders to discuss other subjects, such as mathematics. This included reviewing curriculum plans and further samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held discussions with leaders who are responsible for safeguarding. The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding records and scrutinised the school's single central record.
- A range of documentation was also reviewed by inspectors, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement planning.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around school, including at social times. Inspectors also spoke formally and informally with pupils and staff about their experience in school.
- Inspectors considered the views given in Ofsted's online questionnaires by 247 pupils and 77 members of staff. The 218 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey were also considered, including 120 free-text responses.

Inspection team

Graham Findlay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Matthew Vellensworth

Her Majesty's Inspector

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