

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Benedict's Catholic High School

Red Lonning, Hensingham, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 8UG

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 June 2025

Outcome

St Benedict's Catholic High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Polite and happy pupils are well cared for by staff at this school. Pupils display positive attitudes to their learning. They are attentive, engaged and keen to participate in lessons.

The school has increasingly high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Current pupils are learning the curriculum well.

Pupils benefit from a well-thought-out programme that is designed to increase their awareness of different careers. Younger pupils speak eagerly about 'world of work' days sparking their interest in potential careers.

The school provides a range of clubs. Pupils are keen to participate in activities that help to nurture their talents, such as the school band and football club. They also enjoy learning new skills, for example through orienteering events and the gardening club.

The school offers a range of school trips both locally and internationally. For example, pupils build on their geographical and historical knowledge through a visit to a local castle. Pupils enjoy competing and representing their school in sporting competitions and science challenges. Sixth-form students proudly hold positions of responsibility on the school council that develop their leadership skills. Furthermore, some Year 12 students support younger pupils with their reading fluency.

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

In recent years, the school has redesigned and strengthened its curriculum. This is particularly the case in key stage 3. The published outcomes of national examinations taken in 2024 do not reflect these substantial improvements to the quality of education

that pupils now receive. Pupils who left the school in 2024 did not benefit from these improvements early enough. Current pupils have secure knowledge across the curriculum. Most produce high quality work that shows their deep understanding of the subjects that they study.

The school is addressing the low number of pupils opting for the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects diligently. Slightly more pupils are choosing to study modern foreign languages than in the past.

Typically, teachers deliver the curriculum well. They check how well pupils have understood before moving on to new learning. Teachers are adept at spotting and addressing misconceptions that pupils have. From Year 7 to Year 13, teachers ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of subject-specific vocabulary. That said, from time to time, teachers do not choose suitable learning activities to help pupils to secure knowledge and remember it over time. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as highly as they could.

The school quickly identifies any additional needs that pupils may have. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to adapt learning effectively to support these pupils. However, in a minority of subjects, the adapted curriculum for some pupils with SEND is not as ambitious as it could be. It does not allow a small number of pupils to achieve as well as they should.

Reading is prioritised across the curriculum. Staff are well trained to understand how to support pupils who struggle with reading. Pupils who are at the early stages of reading receive support that helps them to catch up quickly with their peers. Texts are chosen carefully to support pupils' enjoyment of reading. This helps pupils to explore a diverse range of themes. The library is a hive of activity.

Pupils behave well around school. They are courteous to staff and to each other. For example, pupils hold doors open for others to go through. There is rarely any disruption to learning. Should this happen, the school deals with it appropriately. This means that, in lessons, pupils can focus on their studies. Students in the sixth form act as excellent role models for younger pupils. They act respectfully and wear the school's uniform with pride.

Pupils learn about the different options available to them after leaving school. They make informed choices about their next steps. For instance, pupils learn about apprenticeships and university courses. The school ensures that pupils have a solid understanding of what being a positive citizen in Britain means. Pupils' knowledge of the fundamental British values is strong. Students in the sixth form learn about financial planning and are educated about the risks of drugs and alcohol. Pupils are accepting of those who are different to themselves and celebrate each other's uniqueness. The school has ensured that pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe in different situations. For example, they learn about online and road safety.

The governing body uses its expertise well to hold the school to account. It provides a high level of challenge to the school. At the same time, governors are supportive of the

school and work with it to ensure improvements are made. Staff enjoy the sense of community within the school. They speak highly of the open culture and how well leaders listen to them. They appreciate the school's efforts to reduce their workload, such as the use of artificial intelligence to adapt resources. Staff feel valued and appreciate 'thank you Thursday'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff do not choose the most appropriate learning activities to achieve the ambitious aims of the curriculum. As a result, some pupils do not build knowledge as well as they could. The school should ensure that teachers provide effective activities that help pupils to apply their knowledge and to remember more over time.
- In some subjects, the adapted curriculum for a small number of pupils with SEND is not designed well enough and does not match the ambition of their peers' curriculum. This limits how well a small number of pupils with SEND develop and deepen their knowledge in these subjects. The school should ensure that the adapted curriculums in these subjects are refined so that pupils with SEND gain deeper knowledge and achieve more.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in December 2019.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	112398
Local authority	Cumberland
Inspection number	10379976
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
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	991
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Kayleigh Daniels
Headteacher	Emma Jackson
Website	www.st-benedicts.cumbria.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 December 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a Roman Catholic school and part of the Diocese of Lancaster. The last section 48 inspection took place in June 2024. The next is due to take place by 2029.
- The school uses two registered and one unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to the headteacher, other senior leaders and members of staff.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime and spoke to pupils about their experiences of school.
- The lead inspector held discussions with representatives of the local authority and the diocese. She also spoke with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments, and the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Jenny Jones, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Marchant

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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