

Inspection of St Bede's Catholic Primary School

Kingsway, Thompson Street East, Darlington, County Durham DL1 3ES

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 December 2024

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The headteacher of this school is Laura Cuff. This school is part of Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Stuart McGhee, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Yvonne Coates.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school has a strong family ethos, supported by its values, which run through all aspects of school life. Relationships between staff and pupils at St Bede's are positive and nurturing. They are built on kindness and respect, which adults model exceptionally well. Pupils are happy. They know that the staff in school help to keep them safe. They talk of having trusted adults they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns.

The school has made recent changes to the curriculum, as well as to wider aspects of the school. This has raised the schools' expectations for its pupils. The school is ambitious for all pupils. Outcomes for pupils are improving, including for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils say their voices are heard. They feel proud to have an impact on school life through the many leadership opportunities that staff provide. Pupils take up a wide range of roles,

including 'house captains', 'eco-warriors' and 'playground leaders'. The school actively seeks the views of its pupils.

Pupils behave well in lessons and at social times. They demonstrate good manners and positive attitudes to their learning. Lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils access learning with minimum disruption.

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

The school has worked with the trust to review some subjects within the curriculum. The curriculum content is well planned and builds pupils' knowledge from the early years to Year 6. Staff know precisely what to teach. However, in some subjects, the checks that staff make on pupils' understanding are not always used to ensure that pupils learn and practise the right skills at the right time. For example, in mathematics and reading, while checks are rightfully carried out on those pupils at risk of falling behind their peers, other pupils are not accessing the learning they need to continue to build on their knowledge.

The early reading curriculum is implemented well. The phonics programme begins at the start of Reception and continues beyond Year 2 for those pupils who still need support. Adults are well trained in delivering the programme. This means when pupils fall behind, adults quickly identify their gaps and ensure pupils gain the knowledge they need to become confident, fluent readers. Pupils read books matched to the sounds they know. Pupils are familiar with the structure of the programme and join in with enthusiasm.

Leaders engage well with external agencies to identify and support the needs of pupils with SEND. The school supports pupils with SEND to learn the same curriculum as their peers. However, the school does not always use what it knows about these pupils well enough. Support plans are not always precise. This means that activities are not always well matched to pupils' needs. Consequently, these pupils do not always build up their basic skills before moving on to more complex learning.

Children get a secure start in the early years. The school has identified the important knowledge for children to learn to prepare them well for Year 1. Children learn through a mixture of taught sessions and opportunities to explore their learning further through play. Adults use the information they gain from checking children's learning regularly to ensure that all children achieve well. There is a focus in the early years on the language, physical and social skills children need for their next steps.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, and they say that teachers are kind. The school has further developed its systems for ensuring positive behaviour, which pupils know and understand. Attendance remains a priority for the school. The school's strong relationships with parents have ensured that pupils' attendance has improved over time.

Pupils recognise the importance of the fundamental British values, such as the rule of law and democracy. They relate these to their school rules and opportunities to vote in school. Pupils have opportunities to discuss and debate current community and world issues. They understand that everyone should be included, regardless of their differences. Pupils

enjoy the clubs that are on offer, including football and choir. They welcome visitors to their school, who share important messages with them, including about water and railway safety.

The school has worked hard to build relationships with parents and carers. Parents now hold the school in high regard. They are appreciative of the changes made by the new leadership team. Parents feel that communication with the school is strong. They are informed of what their children are learning, as well as of wider school initiatives and events.

The new headteacher, supported by the trust and a skilled local governing body, has brought stability and direction to the school. Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop. Staff feel well supported and are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the checks that the school makes on pupils' understanding are not consistently used effectively to ensure that pupils learn and practise the right skills at the right time. Occasionally, this limits pupils' learning and some pupils do not access the learning that they need in a timely enough manner. The school should ensure that staff receive the support that they need to consistently adapt learning based on the assessments carried out.
- Some pupils with SEND do not secure the basic knowledge that they need to access the curriculum as well as they could. This is because, for some pupils with SEND, support plans lack specificity and curriculum activities are not matched well enough to meet their needs. The school should ensure that support plans for all pupils with SEND match closely to their needs and that these pupils have the time and opportunity to build on their knowledge before they are moved on to more complex tasks.

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 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	138523
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10323033
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	315
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Yvonne Coates
CEO of the trust	Stuart McGhee
Headteacher	Laura Cuff
Website	www.stbedesdarlington.bhcet.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is part of Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.
- The headteacher took up her substantive post in September 2024. The deputy headteacher took up a seconded role from another trust school in September 2024.
- This Roman Catholic school has a Christian character. The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle completed a section 48 inspection in May 2023.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and design, and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects, including geography and science.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other leaders within the school. The lead inspector also met with members of the trust board, governing board, including the chair of governors, as well as representatives from the trust and the diocese.
- 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 views of parents, shared through Ofsted Parent View, and an inspector also spoke with parents on the first day of the inspection.
- The views of staff were gathered through interviews and discussions conducted throughout the inspection, as well as the staff survey.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views throughout the inspection, including through the classroom visits and group discussions, as well as at lunchtime and playtimes.

Inspection team

Sarah Gordon, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Zoe Carr	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Stephenson	Ofsted Inspector

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