

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Cuthberts Catholic First School, Berwick

Prince Edward Road, Tweedmouth, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 2EX

Inspection date:

20 May 2025

Outcome

St Cuthberts Catholic First School, Berwick has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Clare McGregor. This school is part of Bishop Bewick 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), Anita Bath, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Harrison.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at St Cuthberts Catholic First School, Berwick. They are welcomed into school each day by friendly and caring staff. Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and when playing together at breaktimes. They are eager to learn and willing to help. Pupils are happy to attend the school, which one parent, echoing the views of many parents and carers, said has a 'huge heart'.

The school makes full use of the local area to deliver and enhance the curriculum. Pupils' knowledge and skills are developed through educational visits to local museums, practical investigations on Northumbrian beaches and residential stays on the site of an Anglo-Saxon settlement. Pupils in Years 1 to 4 have a secure knowledge of water safety from their weekly swimming lessons.

The school has high expectations of its pupils. Pupils respond well to these expectations. For example, in this small first school, all Year 1 pupils reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2024. They enter Year 2 as very able early readers. The school's staff have a deep knowledge of the pupils and their families. The individual needs of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are being met increasingly well.

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

Children build deep foundations for future learning in the early years. They enjoy attending school, build extremely strong relationships with staff and understand the school's routines well. The school is particularly adept at developing children's speaking and listening skills. Children who need additional help to develop their oracy are supported in school by the staff well and, when needed, referred to specialist services quickly.

Pupils read well and widely at St Cuthberts. Staff deliver the school's phonics programme with expertise and flair. Pupils are confident readers from an early age. Any pupils that fall behind are supported well to catch up quickly. Pupils' love of reading is enhanced by the storytelling that goes on in school. Children in the early years are entranced when surprise storytellers, be it parents, carers, relatives or members of the local community, pop into school to share a storybook with them. This provision is joyful and very effective.

The school has implemented a curriculum that progresses sequentially from the youngest children in the Nursery Year to the oldest pupils in Year 4. Pupils make exceptional progress through the curriculum in subjects in which key links between themes are specified and clear. These links are not clear in all subjects. On occasion, pupils find it difficult to link and apply their knowledge and understanding fully. The additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent wisely. Disadvantaged pupils make steady progress through the curriculum. The large proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language make similarly effective progress.

The trust carried out an insightful review into the school's identification of and provision for pupils with SEND at the beginning of the academic year. The ensuing report's recommendations have been implemented fully. The school has trained all staff to adapt their teaching to better meet the needs of individual pupils with SEND. Consequently, pupils with SEND are remembering and using more curriculum content.

Children learn how to play and work together purposefully in the early years. Throughout the school, pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons are exemplary. Their behaviour at the less-structured times of the school day is very good too. Pupils develop their understanding of others through a well-sequenced programme of personal, social and health education. Pupils care for one another. They look after each other well. The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and on time.

The school has a clear vision for pupils' personal development and preparation for their next stages of learning. Pupils have a thorough understanding of how to stay healthy and safe, particularly when working and playing online. Children in the early years take responsibility for their learning environment through their joyful participation in tidy-up time. Older pupils carry out their leadership roles of responsibility with enthusiasm. They make positive changes in school such as reducing plastic waste. New pupils to the school receive a warm welcome and settle in quickly. Pupils have a strong and developing understanding of difference and diversity.

The school understands the strengths of the curriculum and the areas that require further development. The trust supports the development of the curriculum well. Trustees and members of the local governing committee are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities. They hold the school's leaders to account incisively. The school considers workload fully before introducing new initiatives. Staff are proud to work at a school that supports their professional development and emotional well-being well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The core knowledge and themes that link learning together are not identified consistently well in the school's curriculum. As a result, the school's ability to plan activities that build links in pupils' knowledge and understanding is hindered. The school should review the existing curriculum to ensure that the core content and the links between core content are explicit and delivered with clarity by staff.

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 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 predecessor school, St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Berwick, to be good for overall effectiveness in February 2018.

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	148998
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10346805
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Harrison
CEO of the trust	Anita Bath
Headteacher	Clare McGregor
Website	www.st-cuthbertsrc.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Cuthberts Catholic First School, Berwick opened on 1 April 2022. It is one of 39 schools in the Bishop Bewick Catholic Academy Trust.
- The school is part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Its predecessor school's most recent section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, took place in February 2020. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place within eight years of that date.
- St Cuthberts Catholic First School, Berwick is included in Northumberland County Council's proposals to change from a three- to a two-tier education system in North Northumberland from 1 September 2025.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other leaders.
- The lead inspector spoke with members of the local governing committee, the chair of trustees, the trust's CEO and the trust's director of performance.
- A telephone discussion was held with the diocesan deputy director of education.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke to some pupils about their learning.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 evaluated a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- The inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents and staff gathered through Ofsted's questionnaires, including Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ian Dawson

Ofsted Inspector

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