

Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

Tunstall Bank, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 0SX

Unique reference number (URN): 139184

Monitoring inspection report:

11 March 2026

At the most recent graded inspection, the following areas were identified as needing to improve:

- The school's curriculum has not been well implemented over time. This is, in part, due to high levels of staff absence. However, it is also due to some staff not checking what pupils know and can do before setting new learning. As a result, pupils do not have a secure understanding of what they have been taught. The school should ensure that they identify the strategies that are most effective for securing pupils' knowledge and that these are implemented consistently across the school.
- Pupils do not have a secure understanding of important subject-specific vocabulary and terminology. Staff do not focus on this important information in some lessons. Some pupils cannot read, write and communicate as well as they should be able to. The school should ensure that staff emphasise important vocabulary and guide pupils to use it confidently in their written and verbal responses.
- Over time, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have not gained the skills and knowledge they require to succeed in external tests and assessments. Therefore, pupils are not well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. The school should ensure they have effective systems to assess gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills and implement precise support, intervention and teaching strategies that will most benefit pupils' outcomes.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough or meet the school's high expectations for conduct. This is because the positive ethos and culture created by the school is not embedded among a significant minority of pupils. The school should ensure that the importance of regular attendance and a positive attitude to learning are continually emphasised and that areas of concern are continually addressed.
- Pupils do not have a secure understanding of the school's personal, social and health education curriculum. In particular, knowledge of parliamentary democracy, a wide range of world faiths and the protected characteristics are not embedded among pupils. This limits how well prepared they are to live in, and contribute to, modern British society.

Leaders and trustees are taking effective action to improve the school but continued work is needed to remove the requires significant improvement designation.

During the monitoring inspection, inspectors focused on the following evaluation areas:

- Leadership and governance
- Curriculum and teaching
- Achievement
- Attendance and behaviour
- Personal development and wellbeing

Leadership and governance

Leaders and trustees focus on the right areas to improve the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and improvement planning helps drive leaders' ambitions forward. A significant priority is improving the consistency of teaching across the school. Leaders support this with tailored professional development. Staff enjoy these opportunities to learn. They recognise it is helping them make pupils' experience better. Trustees are highly knowledgeable and effective in their work. The chair of trustees works closely with local governors to ensure they can effectively support and challenge the school's work.

Leaders recognise that there is more work to do to improve the school. They are sensibly prioritising long-term change in the culture. This includes ensuring staff and pupils develop warm and trusting relationships. Although leaders have worked effectively to reduce inconsistencies in how school-wide approaches are applied, it is still too soon for these actions to have made a noticeable difference for all pupils. Furthermore, parents and carers do not have a consistently positive view of the school. Too many would not recommend the school to others. There is more for leaders and trustees to do to develop a constructive relationship with the wider community. This includes helping parents and carers understand the improvements that are happening in their school.

Safeguarding

At the previous graded inspection, safeguarding was evaluated as being effective.

Achievement

Over time, pupils have not achieved as well as they should. However, there are signs of improvement. This includes in the most recent published data from national tests. In class, pupils' knowledge and skills typically help them to access the curriculum well. They can usually explain key concepts, using subject-specific terminology. Older pupils can make connections in their learning over time. However, some gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills remain. These are, however, increasingly addressed by teachers due to improvements in teaching. Pupils' higher-than-average absence continues to have a negative impact on their achievement. Some pupils miss too much learning, which means their understanding is not as secure as it should be.

Attendance and behaviour

Pupils' attendance remains below national averages but it is improving. Leaders analyse data closely and use it intelligently to make improvements. This is increasingly a strength of their work. The thoughtful expansion of the attendance team, including the appointment of an education welfare officer and an attendance officer, is having a positive impact. Targeted projects, such as the '21-day challenge', show sustained improvements over time.

The rates of persistent absence are still a cause for concern. This is particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders know this and plan to build upon their success with other target groups.

Pupils and staff say that behaviour is getting better. They report a calmer, more focused culture supported by clear systems. Although sanctions for pupils are higher than leaders would like, they are reducing. This includes suspensions, permanent exclusions and removals from class. In lessons, pupils typically behave well. They comply with teachers' expectations and increasingly take pride in their work. Some pupils and parents share concerns about bullying. However, these concerns are not reflected in the day-to-day life of the school. Leaders take bullying seriously and promote a culture of respect.

Curriculum and teaching

Pupils speak positively about improved lesson structures that are helping them settle quickly into their learning. Across the school, staff now ensure leaders' clear expectations shape what they do in class. This includes strategies such as modelling learning and making regular checks on the accuracy of pupils' work. Reading is a priority and explicit teaching of subject-specific vocabulary is becoming an embedded part of the school's work.

Staff ensure that their attention goes to the pupils who need it the most. This includes pupils with SEND and those who face other barriers to their learning. Where teaching is effective, questions help probe what pupils know and can do. Pupils with SEND also get the right support at the right time. However, there is still some variation in how well pupils are supported to learn. For example, pupils need more opportunities to explore ideas and explain their learning in class. In addition, some tasks in lessons do not help pupils to achieve as highly as they could. This is because the work is sometimes too easy or too narrowly focused, which means pupils do not have enough opportunity to apply, connect or deepen their learning further.

Personal development and wellbeing

Pupils engage in an increasingly broad personal development programme. They enjoy having a say in new clubs and trips that leaders are putting in place. Leaders have invested in strengthened pastoral care. As a result, pupils talk about feeling safe and cared for in school. Through a structured personal development curriculum, pupils are

developing their knowledge of the wider world. They speak confidently about healthy relationships and online safety, for example. Leaders know there is more work needed to ensure pupils' knowledge of these, and other topics, is as secure as it could be.

Additional next steps

Leaders and trustees should continue to work to address the priorities for improvement identified in the last graded inspection report.

About this inspection

The inspectors carried out this monitoring inspection under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005, and it was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require significant improvement following the graded inspection that took place in January 2025.

The school's previous inspection and the first monitoring inspection were carried out under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) at that time. The renewed EIF took effect from 10 November 2025. The areas for improvement identified at the school's graded inspection and subsequent monitoring inspection have been cross-referenced to the relevant evaluation areas in the inspection toolkit for consideration on this monitoring inspection.

The purpose of this monitoring inspection was not to determine grades for any of the evaluation areas set out in the school inspection toolkit. The purpose was to identify and report on the school's progress in addressing priorities for improvement since the school's previous inspection.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the headteacher has changed. An acting headteacher who works for the trust executive team is currently in post.

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the chief executive officer of the trust, other executive trust leaders, other senior leaders and the chair of trustees to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection.

Lead inspector

Hannah Millett

His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector

Geoff Lumsdon

Ofsted Inspector

About this school

School capacity	900
Number of pupils on roll	748
Resourced provision or SEND unit (if applicable)	No

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