

Inspection of Benfield School

Benfield Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE6 4NU

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This school and its wider community have experienced significant turmoil since the last inspection. Some pupils, staff, parents and carers have been let down and continue to feel so. They struggle to trust the vision and improvements that new leaders are bringing about increasingly well.

After a period of decline in educational standards, behaviour and attendance, leaders are taking effective steps to address these areas. There are green shoots of improvement. However, some of the actions previously taken by leaders have alienated key stakeholders, including some staff and parents. New leaders know that there is much to do to build bridges. Many staff say that the culture has improved recently.

Many pupils say that behaviour is improving and bullying is increasingly rare. Leaders' records confirm their views. However, some older pupils and many parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire continue to have concerns. Many pupils behave well, both in lessons and around school. However, too many pupils do not attend school often enough. They do not benefit from the increasingly strong curriculum that is in place.

Leaders have ensured that a varied programme of extra-curricular activities and wider opportunities are available. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills. Members of the pupil leadership group are proud of how the group helped to design and resource the new reading area. These pupils are keen to work with leaders to improve the school further.

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

Leaders have taken the right steps to strengthen the curriculum. They have highlighted the important knowledge they want pupils to know and remember. In many subjects, this knowledge is broken down into small steps that build on from what pupils have learned before. This helps pupils to learn about the subject itself and what it means to be a subject expert.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and are determined to help pupils succeed. They share leaders' vision of ensuring that pupils benefit from their time at school, both academically and pastorally. In many lessons, pupils are engaged and listen attentively to their teachers. Sometimes, teachers are not sufficiently ambitious for what pupils can achieve. This includes in the sixth form. Many pupils, including pupils eligible to receive pupil premium funding, are capable of making greater progress and learning more. In a few lessons, low-level disruption sometimes slows pupils' learning.

Teachers are kind and caring. They know that some pupils need more help and support. This includes those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities

(SEND). Leaders have ensured that pupils with SEND have support plans, which set out how teachers can help them best. However, some teachers do not use the strategies set out in the support plans consistently well. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not always receive the help they need. Some struggle to access new learning. Pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read are swiftly identified when they join the school. Trained staff help pupils to read with increasing accuracy and confidence.

The great majority of pupils are polite and respectful. They rarely hear derogatory language in school. For the most part, lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils enjoy social times and talking with their friends. A minority of pupils continue to be disruptive. Leaders and staff are working together increasingly well to ensure a consistent approach to helping all pupils to behave as leaders expect. The behaviour policy, recently re-launched, includes a relational approach which aims to help pupils to self-regulate their behaviour. The number of more severe behaviour incidents has reduced dramatically. Many within the school community acknowledge the positive changes that the new leadership team are bringing about. However, some parents continue to be concerned about the behaviour of some pupils at this inclusive school.

Some pupils do not attend school often enough. They do not benefit from the increasingly strong curriculum that is now in place. Leaders know how important it is that pupils attend school more regularly. A Department for Education (DfE) attendance partner is supporting leaders with this work. As with other areas of school development, leaders' focus on this area has shown steady improvement recently. The Aspire provision which opened in the spring term, helps pupils who struggle to attend school. There are already a number of pupils who have been successful accessing this provision.

Some pupils, including those in the sixth form, do not remember much of what they have been taught from the wider curriculum. For example, many pupils do not know much about the different world religions or about fundamental British values. Some older pupils are rightly concerned that they have not learned much about healthy relationships. New leaders have recently reshaped the personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) curriculum. There is now a regular timetabled lesson for PSHCE. Leaders have taken steps to strengthen careers provision, including for the sixth form. In the spring term, all pupils had the opportunity to attend a careers fair, meet a range of employers and learn about different options for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Governors and trustees are skilled, experienced and determined strategic leaders. They have an accurate understanding of the school, its strengths and where it must improve further. They work together with the trust to support and challenge school leaders to be the best that they can be for the benefit of pupils. Governors and trustees are committed to ensuring that staff feel listened to and supported. The culture of the school has recently changed. Many staff are pleased with the change. There remains work to be done to rebuild the trust and confidence of some staff, pupils and parents who have been let down in the past.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are keenly aware of the dangers that pupils may face. Leaders ensure that staff have the training they need to spot the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Staff report any concerns promptly and leaders swiftly follow these up. However, on rare occasions, important safeguarding records do not always contain sufficient detail about the steps that leaders have taken to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They know the importance of using electronic devices, including mobile telephony, sensibly.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teaching staff do not use the teaching strategies that are outlined in SEND support plans consistently well. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not receive the help that they need. These pupils struggle to make sense of new learning. Leaders should ensure that all teaching staff have further training and support, so that all pupils are able to access and learn the taught curriculum.
- Some pupils do not attend school often enough. Persistent absence remains too high. These pupils miss out on important learning and do not make the progress of which they are capable. Leaders should closely monitor the impact of their strategies to improve attendance and take action where needed to ensure the regular attendance of all pupils.
- Pupils do not have a strong knowledge of some aspects of the PSHCE curriculum. Consequently, some pupils are not sufficiently well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders should ensure that the new PSHCE curriculum provides pupils with the opportunity to regularly revisit the important knowledge that leaders have identified, so that pupils remember this knowledge over time.
- Some parents and some staff continue to have concerns about the school. They struggle to trust that leaders are taking the right steps to bring about much needed improvements. Leaders should continue to further develop relationships with parents and other stakeholders.

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](#)' 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	144271
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10281760
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1000
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	22
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Anne McNall
Headteacher	Anthony Martin
Website	www.benfield-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 March 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Benfield School is part of Newcastle East Mixed Academy Trust (NEAT). The proportion of pupils who are eligible to receive pupil premium funding is well-above average.
- Since the last inspection, there has been a lot of change at senior leadership level. The senior leadership team has been expanded with the appointment of new assistant headteachers. The current headteacher took up post in July 2022. A new chair of governors has been appointed too.
- The school has an additionally resourced provision for pupils with social and communication difficulties, including autism spectrum disorder. It also has an additional resourced provision for pupils with a physical or medical disability. All of these pupils with SEND are integrated into mainstream lessons.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and

engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

- The school uses nine alternative providers. Four of these providers are registered with the DfE.
- At the time of the inspection, leaders had completed a consultation with the wider community to seek views on the possible closure of Benfield sixth form.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The day that this inspection was announced, Tuesday 9 May 2023, 40 pupils were suspended. The inspection coincided with the recent re-launch of the school's behaviour policy. These suspensions were carried out in line with the school's behaviour policy and are recorded correctly in the school's management information system.
- The lead inspector met with members of the trust board, including the chair of the trust board, the local governing body and the chief executive officer.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher. They also met with other senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, personal development, careers, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, physical education, history, modern foreign languages and science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Members of the inspection team looked at a range of documentation regarding the support pupils with SEND receive. Inspectors looked at the quality of the provision for pupils with SEND in lessons.
- Inspectors met with the designated lead for safeguarding. They checked records of actions taken by leaders to keep pupils safe. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks. Inspectors spoke with a wide range of pupils and staff, both formally and informally, about the safeguarding culture in school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- Inspectors looked at a range of information regarding behaviour. Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons and at social times. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about behaviour.
- The views of parents were considered through the responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and through telephone conversations held with three parents. The

views of pupils were considered through responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, as well as through meetings held with pupils.

- The views of staff were considered through meetings held with staff and from the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Eleanor Belfield, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Stuart Mcghee	Ofsted Inspector
Lindsay Oyston	Ofsted Inspector
Geoff Lumsdon	Ofsted Inspector
Toni Spoors	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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