

# St Aidan's Catholic Academy

Willow Bank Road, Ashbrooke, Sunderland SR2 7HJ

## Inspection dates

14–15 December 2015

## Overall effectiveness

**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Require improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress across all year groups and subjects, particularly in science and humanities because the quality of teaching is variable.
- Too often teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should do are too low and they set work which is not challenging enough. This is especially apparent for most-able pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Teachers do not follow the academy's marking policy carefully enough, as a result pupils are not always clear what they need to do next to improve their work.
- Teaching in the sixth form is not consistently good. Leaders do not check the quality of teaching or the progress of sixth form learners systematically enough.
- Not all academy subject and area leaders are confident or skilled enough to hold their teams to account for the quality of their teaching and the monitoring of pupils' progress.
- Governors have not been rigorous enough in the past at holding leaders to account. This is because governors relied too heavily on information given to them by leaders.
- The academy has not made effective use of pupil premium funding to improve the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

### The school has the following strengths

- The newly appointed acting headteacher has a clear and ambitious vision and is moving swiftly and methodically to get the academy back on track.
- The acting headteacher has ensured that each member of the newly reshaped leadership team is clear about what they need to do to ensure that the academy improves rapidly.
- Recently introduced systems for checking teaching and pupil progress are thorough and beginning to
- Pupils feel safe and are happy at the academy and are confident that staff will act swiftly if they face difficulties.
- The wide range of after-school activities complements the curriculum effectively and supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Pupils are polite and sensitive to the needs of others.

have a positive impact on pupils' performance.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching across all years, including the sixth form, and in all subjects until it is consistently good or better by:
  - making sure that work is sufficiently challenging for all pupils, particularly the most-able pupils and those with special educational needs
  - ensuring that teachers consistently follow the academy’s marking policy so that pupils know what they need to do to improve
  - moving pupils on to harder work as soon as they are ready
  - improving the quality and challenge of teachers’ and other adults’ questioning of pupils so that they develop robust and enquiring minds.
  
- Improve the performance and well-being of disadvantaged pupils by ensuring that they attend school regularly and are given work that stimulates and helps them reach their full potential.
  
- Further develop the roles of all leaders so that they are more able to challenge and support their teams by making sure that:
  - leaders’ plans clearly set out what needs to be done, by whom and by when so that actions can be carefully and rigorously mapped and their impacts checked
  - subject and year leaders help their teams to use assessment information about pupils to sharpen teaching so that it precisely focuses on what pupils needs to do to improve
  - all subject leaders have the skills to check the impact of teaching and the progress that pupils make.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### requires improvement

- The recently appointed acting headteacher has moved swiftly and effectively to tackle pupils' behaviour, the variability in teaching quality and the lack of robust checking systems in the academy. A culture of high expectations that combines both care and challenge is beginning to take root. He has gained the confidence of staff and pupils.
- Senior and middle leaders' plans to improve the academy are full and detailed and set out clearly what needs to be done. However, the timescales are not always precise enough to make it clear when the impact of a particular action will be expected, nor what it would look like.
- The acting headteacher has recently introduced careful and challenging systems to check on the impact that teachers are having on pupils' progress. These involve the monitoring of pupils' books and the quality and impact of teachers' marking on pupils' progress. Inspection evidence and the academy's own information show that these actions are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders have also recently introduced an approach to training for teachers and other staff that is more carefully focused on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. This training draws on expertise from within the academy, as well as from outstanding schools and external trainers. It combines a 'core' of training for all staff plus a 'carousel' of sessions designed to develop a range of skills. Early indications and staff comments suggest that this approach is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Middle leaders are effectively and well supported by the acting headteacher and, most recently, by the governing body. He has moved promptly to support and develop their roles so that they can, increasingly, hold their teams to account for the quality of their work. While there is more that needs to be done, inspection evidence shows that this group of leaders are becoming more aware of the importance of their roles in ensuring that pupils make good and better progress as a result of consistently good teaching.
- The academy provides a broad and balanced curriculum for its pupils. This is supported by a wide range of sporting and other activities which develop and underpin their learning in school and their preparation for their next steps in education, training or work. This helps ensure that pupils are well equipped for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the additional funding for those pupils eligible for pupil premium has been spent effectively. In the past, because systems to track pupils' progress had not been robust, this funding has not been targeted precisely enough and these disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress that they should. The acting headteacher has moved promptly to address this and, supported by the governors, restructured the leadership of this vital aspect of the academy's work. Early signs are that this is beginning to have a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' progress.
- Leaders are deploying additional 'catch-up' funding for Year 7 pupils effectively. For example, pupils receive extra support with their reading through carefully structured support. Inspection evidence shows that this is having a positive impact on pupils' progress in reading.
- Leaders have accurately identified those areas of the academy that need urgent attention and they have recently sought appropriate support and expertise from successful local schools. For example, St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy is providing support for the academy's senior leadership and Sacred Heart Catholic High School is supporting work in geography. In addition The Academy at Shotton Hall is providing support for science and St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn for leadership in the humanities. While it is too early to fully assess the impact of this support, initial indications are that it is beginning to have a positive impact on the work of the academy and pupils' outcomes because it is helping to focus support on areas of the academy that need the most urgent attention.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The governing body has moved effectively to ensure that the academy has strong and effective interim leadership.
  - The governing body is developing an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. This is because the acting headteacher and his team are providing governors with detailed information. This is being supported by governors' appropriately regular visits to the academy.
  - Governors have a realistic view of the academy and they are appropriately involved in aspects of its self-evaluation process. They know that teaching and outcomes are not yet good enough.

- Governors are developing stronger links with middle leaders. This is beginning to give them clearer insights into what needs to be done to improve the academy.
- Governors have not monitored the impact of the additional pupil premium funding effectively.
- Governors are appropriately involved in making decisions about whether teachers should receive pay rises, based on their pupils making good progress. The governing body also has effective procedures for managing staff underperformance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are checked and trained as required and pupils feel safe at school. The academy makes safeguarding a high priority through topics that pupils are taught in the curriculum and it liaises with parents and carers as well as a range of external agencies when it is necessary so that pupils are fully supported and safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because teachers' and other staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough. As a result, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching and learning across subjects and between years.
- Teachers do not always take enough account of what pupils already know and what they can do. This is because the academy has only recently developed effective ways of gathering and analysing information about pupils' skills and progress. As a result, the work set can either be too hard for pupils or, more usually, not hard enough. Too often, most-able pupils are not given work that stretches and deepens their learning. Similarly, less-able pupils, including those with special educational needs, are given work that does not contain enough challenge.
- Pupils do not always take sufficient pride in their work. Too much of the work seen in books and folders, including in the sixth form, is untidy. Too much appears unfinished and academy policy in respect of the presentation of work is not consistently implemented. Staff do not always follow up these shortcomings.
- The academy's approach to marking is not used consistently well by all teachers and support staff. The academy-wide policy asks teachers to give pupils feedback and suggest areas for improvement which build on the work that pupils have completed. Where this is done effectively, pupils respond well and develop their understanding and pleasure in learning. However, the academy's own policy is not applied consistently and opportunities are sometimes missed to accelerate pupils' progress because they do not know precisely enough what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers do not use questioning effectively enough to ensure that all pupils make good and better progress. Too often, questions from teachers and other adults focus on 'what' rather than 'why' and 'how'. As a result, opportunities are lost to explore and enjoy complex ideas and resolve knotty problems; pupils do not get into the habit of asking challenging questions of themselves and of each other.
- Pupils report that they enjoy reading and welcome the opportunities they get to read. As well as opportunities to read in English lessons, there are regular reading sessions each morning before school. These sessions are open to all pupils in Years 7 and 8, but pupils who are behind in their reading, including those who are disadvantaged, are particularly encouraged to attend. The academy's own information shows that pupils are making significant progress in their reading as a result of these recently introduced sessions.
- Teaching for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is too variable. In some lessons, teachers make sure that the particular learning needs of individuals are accurately met, which means that pupils are able to make progress. However, too often work is not well matched to pupils' skills and abilities.
- The teaching of humanities, science and mathematics is improving. This is because leaders have identified what needs to be done and are using training and support, including from effective local schools, to improve teachers' skills. While it is too early to say that these improvements are sustained, early signs are that they are having a positive impact on pupils' progress in and enjoyment of learning.
- Where pupils are stimulated and required to give of their best, they rise to the challenge. In a religious education lesson, for example, inspectors observed pupils thinking hard and engaging in high-level and profound debate around issues of various faiths' attitudes to sexuality. Pupils showed high levels of understanding, empathy and engagement.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders and governors take the safety and well-being of pupils very seriously and make sure that all pupils know how to keep themselves safe both in and out of school, including when online. Pupils report that they know the different forms that bullying can take and that it is very rare. The academy's own records support this.
- Pupils know what to do if they feel uncertain or unhappy and they report that they have every confidence that if they did have concerns about themselves or another pupil the matter would be dealt with effectively and well by adults at the academy.
- Pupils understand the importance of a good education. They have noticed and welcome the recent and greater emphasis given by leaders to the academic aspects of the academy.
- Pupils know that both physical and emotional well-being are important. The academy provides a wide range of sporting activities as well as chances for reflection and stillness during Mass, assembly and tutor time. There are also opportunities for pupils to choose from a wide range of after-school activities through the 'Extended schools' programme. There are a wide range of activities on offer, ranging from 'Let's get cooking' and science club to skiing and dodgeball. There is also a well-attended breakfast club where pupils are able to practise and extend their reading.
- The academy's personal development curriculum is detailed and carefully planned. It is overseen by a newly appointed member of the senior leadership team and underpinned by a programme of themed assemblies and acts of worship. It contains a series of 'core themes' such as citizenship and 'Living in the wider world'. These encourage pupils to think beyond themselves and to understand what it is like to be somebody else. Further evidence of this 'wider world' aspect of the academy's work can be seen in the charitable and physical links pupils have with projects in Bosnia, Nepal and India.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The vast majority of pupils behave well during breaks and lesson times. Inspectors saw no examples of low-level disruption. Almost all pupils have good attitudes to learning and try their best even when the pace of learning slows as a result of weaker teaching.
- Pupils are polite and follow the academy dress code. They welcome the recent emphasis that leaders have placed on smart uniform and the resulting positive impact on behaviour. As one pupil reported, 'if you deal with the small things, the big things take care of themselves.'
- Pupils show respect for the school premises. There is very little litter. One pupil remarked that there is significantly less litter and discarded food about the academy than there used to be. 'There are fewer seagulls now,' he said.
- Relations between pupils and staff are very positive. Pupils are respectful of staff and of each other. They speak warmly of the efforts that staff make to look after them.
- Exclusions from school are well below national averages. The academy has a provision for those whose behaviour is challenging, The Bridge. This is well managed and pupils who attend say it helps them reflect on their behaviour as well as giving them an opportunity to catch up with their work. However, inspection evidence shows that work for these pupils is not always carefully set by teachers and that the progress of some of the pupils who attend The Bridge is not good enough.
- Levels of persistent absenteeism, although reducing over the past three years, are still too high. The number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is also too high but decreasing. Overall attendance at the academy is slightly higher than the national average but it is improving as a result of carefully focused actions by leaders.

## Outcomes for pupils

## require improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because they are not consistently good both in the past and for pupils who are currently in the academy. This is because teaching has not been good enough and currently is not consistently good.
- Pupils currently in Year 11 and in the previous year entered the academy with broadly average attainment. The proportions of higher attainers was in line with national figures but there were fewer low

attainers than the national average. Current Key Stage 3 pupils entered the academy with attainment that was significantly above the national average.

- Since the previous inspection, outcomes for Year 11 pupils have declined each year and are similar to the national average. Considering their starting points in Year 7, this does not constitute good progress.
- The difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 and others in the academy and nationally remained wide in 2015. This was because not enough disadvantaged pupils achieved five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils who are currently in the academy are beginning to catch up with their peers as a result of more effective leadership that is focusing support rigorously. The academy's most recent information suggests that the number of disadvantaged pupils who will attain five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, in 2016 and 2017 will be significantly higher than over the past three years.
- In 2015 the attainment of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs in Year 11 was much lower than pupils who were not disadvantaged, disabled or had special educational needs nationally. Overall, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, although well cared for, do not make the progress that they should.
- The most-able pupils do not reach the high levels of attainment that they are capable of. In the past too few of these pupils have attained the highest GCSE grades. This is particularly the case in science, geography and history. The academy's own recent information shows that most-able pupils are beginning to make better progress. However, it is too early to say whether this progress is sustained.
- As with most other groups of pupils, lower-attaining pupils do not always make good enough progress to help them catch up with others. For example, last year pupils who received additional support through the Year 7 catch-up programme (which is additional funding given to schools to support those who join with attainment in English and mathematics below what is expected) did not make the rapid progress required to catch up. However, those pupils who are receiving this support this year are making better progress.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

## require improvement

- Leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement because leaders have not moved promptly enough to address the variability in the quality of teaching. This variability in teaching has meant that learners in the sixth form have not done as well as they should.
- Leaders are acutely aware that achievement is not good and that leaders in the past have not had a clear enough understanding of the quality of teaching. Careful plans are now in place to address these shortcomings. These plans are ambitious, yet realistic. They systematically address what needs to be done, by whom and by when. However, because leaders' planned actions have not yet had time to have a positive impact. As a result, outcomes for learners in the sixth form also require improvement.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement because it is highly variable in quality. For example, in some lessons teachers have very high expectations and their questioning is probing and challenging leading to learners making good progress. However, this is not always the case. Too often teachers' expectations are too low and their questioning is mundane. It does not give learners enough opportunities to explore and develop ideas. Similarly, because teachers do not always follow the academy's agreed approach to marking, learners do not always receive feedback from teachers that helpfully deepens and extends their understanding. As a result, opportunities are lost and learners are not always clear what they need to do to improve.
- As in the rest of the academy, learners feel safe and well cared for. However, the systems for checking learners on and off the academy premises during the day are unclear and need addressing as a matter of urgency. Also, sixth formers report that, other than during some assemblies, they do not receive regular, focused support in further developing their awareness about the risks attached to drugs, alcohol and sexual activity. Leaders are aware of this and plans are in place to address it.
- Sixth formers are well-behaved and polite. Their attendance overall is good and improving. They are attentive to the needs of others and aware of their responsibilities as older learners. However, they report that they would welcome more opportunities to serve the academy and wider community.
- The curriculum offered in the sixth form is broad and balanced and aimed at those who are likely to seek entry to further and higher education at the age of 18.
- The academy provides good-quality careers advice to its sixth formers. Guidance on making the right university and college choices is detailed and learners report high levels of satisfaction with it. They feel

well prepared for their next steps. The guidance learners receive for next steps other than university is not so strong. Approximately 80% of sixth formers at the academy leave to attend university.

- The numbers of pupils who enter the sixth form without C grades in English or mathematics, or both, is very low and varies from year to year. The academy is awaiting the results of the November 2015 examinations.
- Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are not as good as they should be and are variable according to the subjects being studied. In some subjects it is 100%. In others, such as English and history, only half of the learners enrolling on the courses stayed until the end of Year 13. Retention overall in 2015 was roughly three quarters of the learners who started courses in Year 12.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139538
<b>Local authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10008327

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	950
<b>Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes</b>	128
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Catherine Emmerson
<b>Acting headteacher</b>	Kevin Shepherd
<b>Telephone number</b>	01915 536073
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.staidancatholicacademy.co.uk">www.staidancatholicacademy.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:contactus@staidancatholicacademy.co.uk">contactus@staidancatholicacademy.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3 October 2012

## Information about this school

- St Aidan's Catholic Academy is an average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are of white British heritage, with fewer than the average from other ethnic groups. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who special educational needs is below average.
- The pupil premium, which is the additional government funding given to schools for children who are looked after and those who are eligible for free school meals, provides support for just under a fifth of pupils. This is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards. These set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- A small number of sixth form pupils attend St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy for part of the week to study some of their courses.
- The acting headteacher was appointed in September 2015.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 36 lessons. Three of the observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work books and folders and talked with them about their learning and attitudes to school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the acting headteacher and members of the senior and middle leadership team, including the leaders responsible for pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils. The lead inspector met with the Chair of Governors on the first day of the inspection and with the Chair and vice-chair of governors and two other governors on the second day.
- As well as talking with pupils at the start and end of school, at breaks and at lunchtimes, inspectors also met more formally with three groups of pupils from across the school, including the sixth form.
- An assembly was observed and inspectors also observed the movement of pupils around the academy between lessons and during break times.
- Inspectors took account of 43 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. They considered the school's own surveys of the views of parents and pupils.

## Inspection team

Mark Evans, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Phil Riozzi	Her Majesty's Inspector
Malcolm Kirtley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dr Janice Gorlach	Ofsted Inspector

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