

St Aidan's Catholic Academy

Willow Bank Road, Ashbrooke, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7HJ

Inspection dates

9–10 January 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong leadership, management and governance have successfully improved the school's effectiveness since the last inspection. The enthusiasm and commitment of the headteacher and deputy headteacher are unrelenting. Expectations are high and the school continues to improve at a good rate.
- Leaders have successfully addressed previous weaknesses in teaching. Teaching, including in the sixth form, is now good. As a result, pupils in all key stages are now making good progress from their starting points across a range of subjects. Standards of attainment are rising.
- Good teaching effectively promotes pupils' interest, involvement and motivation in lessons. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Pupils are confident in asking questions.
- A small amount of variability still remains in the quality of teaching. Sometimes, work for the most able pupils lacks challenge and this hampers their progress. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Leaders' actions to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are paying off. These pupils are now achieving as well as others.
- Leaders have improved pupils' behaviour since the last inspection. Pupils, parents and carers agree. Pupils conduct themselves very well in lessons and around the school. They are confident, polite and courteous to one another and to staff. Pupils behave well and show positive attitudes to learning. Attendance is above average.
- Arrangements to check how well pupils are doing in each subject are very thorough. Even so, there remains scope to ensure that the evaluation of the progress of key groups of pupils is even more robust.
- Governance has improved, and governors carry out their duties effectively. They are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- As a result of effective leadership and good teaching, sixth-form provision and outcomes are now good. Careers guidance in the sixth form is strong. However, leaders know that the quality of careers advice and guidance in key stages 3 and 4 and the take-up of work experience in the sixth form could be further strengthened in order to prepare pupils and students even more effectively for their future.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment even further by making sure that teachers consistently challenge the most able pupils, especially in mathematics.
- Further strengthen the good quality of leadership by making sure that the evaluations of the progress and patterns of behaviour of key groups of pupils are even more robust.
- Improve the quality of careers advice and guidance in key stages 3 and 4 and take-up of work experience in the sixth form so that pupils and students are even better prepared for their futures.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are committed and relentless in their work for continuous improvement. They show passion and enthusiasm. They know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well.
- Senior leaders have established high expectations of staff and pupils and lead by example. As a result, there have been significant improvements since the last inspection in the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' progress and behaviour.
- The headteacher has taken appropriate, decisive and effective actions to eradicate weak teaching. As a result of these actions, there have been significant staff changes over the last two years and, consequently, outcomes for pupils have improved. However, the resulting instability in staffing in some subjects, including mathematics, modern foreign languages, humanities and science, has slowed the rate of impact on improving the progress of some pupils from their starting points.
- Senior leaders have established robust and thorough systems for monitoring the progress of all pupils and have linked them effectively to their checks of the quality of teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching and the outcomes of pupils are continuously improving. However, leaders acknowledge that they need to make some further improvements to ensure that the evaluation of the progress of key groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged and most able, is even more robust.
- Governors and senior leaders have developed a strong culture of accountability. They work closely with middle leaders through frequent meetings. Consequently, middle leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of their departments well and take appropriate and effective actions to support individual pupils.
- Senior leaders continuously review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils. Leaders have made sensible revisions to the range of subjects available to pupils. They ensure that learning in subjects is effectively enhanced through the wide range of sporting and after-school activities on offer. Leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to improve the quality of careers advice and guidance in key stages 3 and 4 and to improve provision for work experience in the sixth form.
- Staff appreciate the quality of personalised training and coaching available to improve their teaching practice. The professional development programme includes opportunities to work with other schools, in local partnerships, including the neighbouring St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy. Leaders closely link training and support to a well-planned programme of self-evaluation. Consequently, the quality of teaching is now good.
- Leaders use well the additional funding, including pupil premium, catch-up and funding to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They evaluate the effect of all aspects of the school's intervention programme to make sure that their actions are making a difference. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is now close to the progress of other pupils nationally and is improving in most year groups. The progress of the pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is also improving and is good.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in the warm relationships that are prevalent across the school community. Throughout the year, pupils take part in a range of fundraising activities for a number of charities. The weekly form-time activities, acts of collective worship and themed assemblies for all pupils in Years 7 to 11 provide opportunities to raise awareness of moral and ethical issues, as well as to develop understanding of different faiths and beliefs. These are central to the schools' efforts to ensure that pupils are prepared effectively for life in modern Britain and have respect for diversity.

Governance of the school

- Governance has been significantly strengthened since the last inspection. Governors acknowledged the findings of the last inspection and took prompt actions to improve their skills.
- Since the last inspection, five new governors have been recruited to the governing body with a range of appropriate skills. The governing body has identified their further training needs and a personalised training programme is in place. Consequently, governors are now providing effective direction and an increasing level of challenge to all school leaders, including middle leaders, under the guidance of the knowledgeable and committed chair of the governing body.
- Governors receive succinct and accurate information. As a result, they know well the strengths and areas for improvement of the school. Governors are linked to different subject areas of the school and make regular visits to check the quality of teaching and learning and the progress pupils are making.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and pupils said that they feel safe.
- There is effective supervision on entry to school in the mornings, at lunchtimes and between lessons. Consequently, the conduct of pupils around the school is calm, orderly and pupils are punctual to lessons.
- School leaders responsible for safeguarding are very knowledgeable and ensure that all staff have appropriate and up-to-date safeguarding training. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about child protection procedures, the signs to look for and how to report concerns.
- Leaders record safeguarding concerns effectively and make timely referrals to the local authority social care services where necessary. They keep an accurate record of conversations and actions. Senior leaders, including governors, check safeguarding records regularly and the school has comprehensive policies for safeguarding. As a result, the school takes timely, supportive and appropriate actions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has significantly improved and is now good. Teachers' strong subject knowledge, consistently effective planning and probing questioning identify any misconceptions and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding effectively. As a result, pupils now make good progress.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very positive and, as a result, pupils feel confident in asking questions in lessons and demonstrate pride in their work.
- Arrangements to assess pupils' progress are effective. Teachers regularly check on pupils' progress during lessons. In the vast majority of pupils' books, teachers' feedback ensures that pupils know how to improve their work. Consequently, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, develop their knowledge and understanding at a good rate.
- Pupils are usually set challenging activities in lessons. Expectations of pupils are typically high. In English, for example, teachers consistently plan focused activities, which are pitched precisely to challenge pupils of all abilities, irrespective of their starting points. As a result, all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress. However, this is not always the case, notably in mathematics, where sometimes activities lack enough challenge for the most able pupils. This can slow their progress.
- There are detailed and thorough systems in place for checking the quality of teaching and learning. Senior and middle leaders know the strengths and weaknesses in teaching in each subject. They provide targeted support and development to staff in order to improve teaching. The teaching of mathematics, for example, has already strengthened. Leaders know that more still needs to be done to ensure that the most able pupils are continually challenged.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively through the school's taught curriculum. The religious education curriculum makes a particularly strong contribution to this. Senior leaders coordinate a well-planned and comprehensive programme of themed assemblies and acts of worship. Pupils are aware of different cultures and faiths. Sometimes, staff and pupils lead sessions on different cultures and religions based on their own personal experiences. Pupils display respectful and tolerant attitudes towards each other and are keen to get involved in fundraising activities for charities.
- The school promotes strong values of respect and equality, which pupils understand well. Most pupils demonstrate these values consistently in school and show positive attitudes to their learning. They are respectful of others when offering opinions. In

lessons, pupils contribute with enthusiasm and a high level of independence.

- Leaders are effective in considering carefully the welfare of the very small number of pupils who attend alternative provision. There is very good communication between school staff and the providers. As a result, these pupils follow a personalised curriculum that is appropriate to their needs, with much improved progress, behaviour and attendance.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are happy at school and proud to be members of its community. They report that the school has improved significantly in the last couple of years. Pupils wear their uniform with pride, respect the well-kept environment for learning and are rarely late for lessons.
- Senior leaders have recently reinforced the high expectations of behaviour. Although this has led to an increase in fixed-term exclusions, both pupils and staff report that behaviour has improved. Leaders' systematic approach to behaviour is reducing effectively the number of incidents of poor behaviour. Staff deal with any incidents quickly and efficiently. Pupils are clear about the consequences and sanctions associated with specific actions.
- There are very few incidents of bullying, and when it does occur, staff deal with it appropriately. The school received the 'Excellency in challenging bullying' award in 2016/17.
- Most pupils show very positive attitudes towards their own learning. They attend regularly, and the school's overall attendance rate is above average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved due to the school's concerted efforts to work closely with individual pupils and their families.
- Typically, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well in lessons. However, occasionally, when learning is not well matched to pupils' starting points and abilities, a few pupils become less actively engaged with the tasks.
- Leaders track and analyse the behaviour of pupils well and produce detailed analyses of the different types of behaviours. However, leaders acknowledge that they need to make some further improvements in this area, to make the evaluation of the behaviour of key groups of pupils more robust.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over the last two years, the school has seen a year-on-year improvement in the overall attainment and progress of pupils. By the end of Year 11 in 2017, standards had risen and were above average, especially in English.
- Work in current pupils' books and folders and school information from the regular assessment of pupils' achievement show that, from their starting points, pupils are making good progress in a wide range of subjects. Levels of attainment in key stages 3 and 4 are generally higher than those seen nationally and continue to rise.

- In some subjects, such as modern foreign languages, science and humanities, results in Year 11 in 2017 were disappointing. Weaker teaching in the past in these subjects had a negative impact on pupils' achievement over time. However, as a result of decisive and effective actions by leaders to improve teaching and outcomes, pupils' achievement in these subjects has greatly improved. Current school assessment information and inspection evidence indicates that pupils are now achieving well in these subjects.
- Since the last inspection, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has significantly improved. Currently, most disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. The previous gaps in achievement compared to other pupils are narrowing year on year in all year groups. Teachers set pupils appropriate and challenging work and monitor their progress diligently. However, a small number of the most-able disadvantaged pupils could be challenged even further.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making good rates of progress in most subjects as a result of effective teaching and tailored support.
- The most able pupils do not make consistently good progress, especially in mathematics. Work sometimes lacks the challenge needed to ensure that they use and apply their problem-solving or analytical skills on a regular basis.
- Overall, the school prepares pupils well for their next steps in education, training or employment. In 2017, almost all of the Year 11 pupils went into employment, education or training. Even so, leaders acknowledge that they can strengthen careers advice and guidance in key stages 3 and 4 even further.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Since the last inspection, sixth-form provision has improved and is now good. Students achieve well. This is as a result of good teaching and effective leadership. The sixth-form leader has high expectations and a very strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this area.
- Leaders have planned all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programme well and students follow coherent programmes of study. Outcomes in academic subjects are at least in line with national averages.
- In 2017, there was a slight dip in students' outcomes. This reflects some weaker teaching in the past. However, as a result of strong sixth-form leadership, teaching has now been strengthened. Current school assessment information and inspection evidence shows that students in Year 12 and 13 are achieving well and outcomes are improving at a good rate.
- Students who did not gain a GCSE pass in English and mathematics in Year 11 receive additional support and teaching to help them to make progress towards securing a pass. In 2017, this was more effective in English than in mathematics. This reflects previously weaker teaching in mathematics. However, leaders have taken decisive action to improve the sixth-form teaching in mathematics and, as a result, performance in mathematics for current students has improved.
- Sixth-form teaching is good. Typically, the level of challenge is high for all students. Students respond well, demonstrating very positive attitudes to learning. They are

polite and respectful to each other, attend regularly and behave well.

- Students spoke highly about the quality of provision and the support they receive. The quality of careers guidance and advice provided to students, for example, is very strong. Aspirations are high. For example, 40% of the students who left in 2017 went to Russell Group universities, including Cambridge University. The school offers work experience to all students but only about one third of students take up the opportunity. Leaders acknowledge that there is more work to do to improve this part of the provision so that students are better prepared for future employment.

School details

Unique reference number	139538
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10042181

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	848
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	117
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Dr Catherine Emmerson
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Shepherd
Telephone number	01915 536 073
Website	www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk/
Email address	contactus@staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 December 2015

Information about this school

- St Aidan's Catholic Academy is an average-sized secondary school.
- 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.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in permanent positions in February 2016.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant staffing changes, including the leadership of the science, modern foreign languages, mathematics and geography departments.

- Most pupils are of White British heritage, with a small minority from other ethnic backgrounds.
- A quarter of the pupils in school are known to be eligible for pupil premium. This is about average for schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is average.
- A small number of sixth-form students attend St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy as part of their programme of study.
- The school uses the Link School, Sunderland Training & Education Farm and Sunderland College for alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of 48 lessons across most subject areas, including form-time activities, and observed an assembly. Many of the visits to lessons took place with senior leaders. During visits to classrooms, inspectors looked in pupils' workbooks and questioned pupils about their learning.
- Discussions took place with the headteacher, other senior leaders and most subject leaders. Inspectors also held discussions with members of the wider body of staff.
- Discussions also took place with the school improvement partner and members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils from all year groups, including students from the sixth form, about what it is like to be a young person at the school. Inspectors also listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including between lessons, at break times and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors took into account the 118 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 115 free-text responses from parents. They also analysed 43 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors examined records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors also scrutinised documents, including school development plans, governing body minutes, leaders' monitoring notes and information about pupils' achievement.

Inspection team

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Phil Riozzi	Her Majesty's Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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