

St Aidan's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108869
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	356441
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2011
Reporting inspector	David Brown HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1182
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	259
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ron Cruikshanks
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Hammond
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Willow Bank Road Ashbrooke, Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 7HJ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 47 lessons taught by 47 different teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body, the School Improvement Partner and nominated staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including its self-evaluation, school improvement plans, lesson observation records, safeguarding procedures and other performance information. In addition, 440 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised along with questionnaires returned by school staff and by a representative sample of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas:

- The rates of progress of all groups of students at all key stages.
- How well teachers use assessment information to ensure that lessons meet the needs of all learners.
- The effectiveness of work to improve the quality of teaching.
- How well leaders and managers at all levels use performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of their planning.
- Whether improvements in the sixth form are impacting on outcomes for students.

Information about the school

St Aidan's is a boys' specialist language school, which serves a wide area across Sunderland. The school is larger-than-average in size, with almost all students of White British heritage. A very small number of students from other ethnic groups are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, although the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is similar to the national average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.

The school holds a number of national awards including Healthy School status, the International Schools award and the European Award for Languages.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Aidan's Catholic School is a caring, inclusive and increasingly successful school which is providing its students with a satisfactory standard of education. Attainment at GCSE over the last three years has been average but there was a significant improvement in results in 2010, indicating that the progress made by students is accelerating, although this is not even across all subjects. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE grades rose to 86% in 2010, which was a significant improvement on the previous year and well-above the national average. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same satisfactory progress as their peers.

The school community is notable for its highly positive relationships and has a sense of pride in the achievements of all of its students. A typical comment made by parents, 'My son is proud to be a student at St Aidan's' sums up their views well. A very large majority of parents and carers are happy with their children's education and speak positively about the quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school. Occasional incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with quickly and students know where they can go for advice and guidance or to talk over any issues they experience. As a result, behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Members of the sixth form speak highly of the support they receive and the excellent relationships they form with staff that help them to develop the confidence, skills and attitudes to progress successfully into further education, training or work.

Teaching is satisfactory, with an increasing amount that is good in both the main school and sixth form. Good or better lessons are planned well, based on accurate assessment data and ensure that activities meet the needs and interests of all students in the class. In these lessons, the resources and activities used engage and motivate students well and they make good progress. Good relationships and behaviour in lessons contribute positively to learning. In less effective lessons, work is not planned well enough to challenge or meet the needs and prior attainment of all students, the quality of written and oral feedback to students is variable and as a result, students are not always aware of their targets or how to achieve them. The school's specialism in languages has a positive impact and widens the range of activities available to students at all levels.

The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school's future and the senior leadership team has the capacity to deliver sustainable improvement. Leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. On occasion, however, a lack of rigorous monitoring, evaluation and review of actions taken limits progress and as a result, leadership and management are satisfactory. The school receives high quality support through a strong partnership with a neighbouring secondary school and this is leading to improvements in teaching and in the use of assessment information to support lesson planning although this is not as yet used

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consistently throughout the school. Self-evaluation is honest and broadly accurate but lacks sharpness in tackling key areas of improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' learning and their progress throughout the school by:
 - sharing best practice within the school to increase further the proportion of good or better teaching
 - developing a whole-school tracking system to ensure that the progress of all students is tracked consistently well in order to identify any underperformance and inform timely intervention
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information more effectively to plan work which is well suited to the needs of the different groups of students in their classes
 - ensuring that marking is consistently effective and helps students to know what they must do next to improve their work.
- Raise achievement and improving the quality of provision in the sixth form by redefining the leadership and management roles so that responsibility for academic progress of students takes priority.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The achievement of students is satisfactory and improving. Students enter school with attainment which is slightly above-average. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has improved steadily and is now significantly above the national average. Lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work and current data confirm this trend. However, there still remain weaknesses in certain areas and the progress of students in some subjects including mathematics is weak. The school has recognised these inconsistencies and is taking appropriate action to secure improvements in areas of underperformance. Students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those special educational needs and/or disabilities progress at rates similar to those of their peers.

Students made satisfactory progress in around half the lessons observed during the inspection and good or occasionally outstanding progress in others. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Students show consideration for others and have clear respect for the values promoted by the school. Students of all ages form positive relationships with staff and are polite and considerate. Their attendance is average and improving and they are punctual to lessons. Students are encouraged to develop aspirations for higher education and a very high proportion continues in education, training or employment.

Students say they feel safe in school and they have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and lifestyle. They take part in physical and sporting activities regularly and make a good contribution to school and community life. Students believe

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that they are listened to, their opinions are valued and that they can influence decisions about school life. Cultural development is good, partly as a result of strong links through the languages specialism with other countries, and the students' sense of spiritual, moral, social and cultural responsibility is well developed. Religious education lessons, school assemblies and form periods provide strong opportunities for spiritual reflection. In one school assembly a number of school staff led an effective and thoughtful presentation on the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan in which students were encouraged to reflect on how their situation compared to the suffering of the victims of the disaster. The students had chosen to send money raised on a recent charity day to the disaster appeal.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing proportion that is good or better. In the most effective lessons, teachers have high aspirations for students and set challenging tasks. When lessons are planned well teachers assess the needs of their students quickly and precisely, and adapt what they do to ensure all students understand and make good progress. In one outstanding Year 7 lesson in geography, for example, students made excellent progress due to a range of challenging activities designed and made accessible to all by the teacher through clear explanation and good intervention. Where teaching is less effective, there is too much teacher talk and students are passive and compliant, there are few opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and they are not

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guided in how to improve. In these lessons, there is a lack of challenging resources and tasks for the most able, and too little adapted material for the least able. Learning is often a single planned task with little opportunity for differentiated activities.

Senior leaders and managers recognise from their monitoring that there is too much variation in the quality of teaching across the school, especially in the use of assessment to support students' learning. Where assessment is effective, teachers use students' individual targets to match work accurately to their known capabilities, and ensure that questioning and marking further support the students' learning. In less effective lessons, there is insufficient challenge to the full ability range with more-able students, in particular, making slower progress. Students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form generally know their target grades and have a reasonable understanding of how they should go about securing these. At Key Stage 3, students' awareness of targets and strategies for improvement is less well developed.

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of most students. Recent school self-evaluation, however, has identified the need to modify, broaden and enrich students' personal development skills. As a consequence, Year 7 students are now introduced to study skills which support their development as independent learners and better prepare them for the next phase in their education. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular opportunities, especially those linked with the school specialism, including an extensive range of educational visits and work-related learning opportunities. Religious education has a high profile in the curriculum and is consistent with the ethos of the school.

The school is a caring organisation and places great emphasis on the provision of good quality care, guidance and support. Staff know the students well and potentially vulnerable students are identified and provided with targeted support. There are very effective strategies to support students who miss some of their education and the school uses the internal Phoenix Centre to support students with social and emotional needs which would otherwise disrupt their own learning or the learning of others. There are excellent transition arrangements for students when they enter the school and as a result of the support they receive students can make confident and well-informed choices about their future. The school is aware of the need to use tracking data more effectively to analyse the impact of its work on specific groups and to ensure it is improving academic achievement.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The recently appointed headteacher has identified as a priority the need to improve teaching and learning in order to raise standards. He realised that there was a need to change the culture of the school to be more receptive to change and accountability. He has a clear vision for the school which is now shared openly across the staff and governing body. Strengths and weaknesses are generally recognised and structures and systems to improve the school have been put into place. However, these are not yet sufficiently developed at all levels to ensure consistency across all subject areas and aspects of school life. Although staff understand the need for rapid improvements in key areas, there are a number who are not yet actively engaged in the process. The current school development plan indicates that much of the strategic work of the school is at an early stage of implementation, although many of the operational, day-to-day issues are being progressed satisfactorily. Although progress has been made in improving teaching and learning and in raising overall standards, weaknesses remain, notably in mathematics and in the progress of more-able students. The headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team provide strong direction and successfully communicate high expectations to staff and students.

The school has a satisfactory governing body, which is developing an effective role in monitoring and questioning the effectiveness of school policies and their impact on students' progress. Safeguarding is given a high priority; the safeguarding policy is clearly stated and rigorously followed and all reasonable actions are taken to ensure that the school is safe. Child protection procedures are strong and well-administered, and training for staff is thorough and of good quality. There are detailed equalities policies in place, which embrace the principle of valuing each student and their contribution to life at the school. All students are treated fairly irrespective of religion, race or other characteristics.

The school has good and developing relationships with parents and carers and there are well established procedures for keeping them informed about their children's development and progress. The school's extensive partnership links, many of which relate to its languages specialism, make a strong contribution to students' achievement. Community cohesion is promoted within the school and wider community through a developing range of curricular and extra-curricular activities; students demonstrate empathy for those from a different culture but have limited experiences of the diversity of the multicultural country in which they live. The impact of these initiatives has not as yet been evaluated sufficiently.

Overall, the school provides a satisfactory and improving education for its students and gives satisfactory value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form provision is satisfactory and improving. The most recent results indicate that students now make satisfactory progress from their starting points and that there are no major variations between the progress made by different groups of students. The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education.

Teaching in the sixth form has improved and is now good. Staff use appropriate methods and resources, including technology, to promote learning. The assessment of students' work is regular but feedback to students is inconsistent and weak in some areas. Lessons are well structured and students' progress is assessed to give an accurate picture of how well they are doing. Working relationships between the teachers and students are very good. The care and support enjoyed by the students is valued, particularly when a difficulty is identified and they seek help. Students report that teachers are happy to give up time with additional classes when extra support is needed and that they are consulted and that their views are listened to.

The curriculum meets the needs of its students satisfactorily and there are plans to extend the range of vocational courses on offer. Expertise from partner schools is used well to enhance the school's own provision. Transition arrangements into the sixth form and into higher education are good. Students are encouraged to develop a range of life skills in their time in the sixth form, including an extensive range of languages, basic cooking and financial awareness. Students make a positive contribution to their local community. Many are involved with the leadership programme in sport with partner primary schools and also with charity work to support the wider global community.

Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. There is a sixth form action plan but this does not yet clearly identify key priorities for improvement and how to progress them. At

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present the target setting system used is complex and confusing and needs to be simplified so that students have a single challenging target in each subject area.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers that responded to the parental questionnaire was much higher than average and the overwhelming majority showed high levels of satisfaction with the school. In particular, almost all believe that the school keeps their child safe. A small number of parents and carers who responded added written comments. Many praised the school, however, concerns which were raised included poor communications between the school and parents and carers. The inspection team investigated these concerns during the inspection and found that the school is making good efforts to communicate effectively with parents and carers. Positive written comments were focused on praising the school for its pastoral care and support of individual students. The strong set of positive responses from parents and carers endorses the inspectors' view that St Aidan's is a satisfactory school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Aidan's Catholic School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 440 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1182 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	113	26	262	60	52	12	6	1
The school keeps my child safe	137	31	286	65	13	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	136	31	253	58	42	10	2	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	137	31	256	58	38	9	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	117	27	279	63	28	6	2	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	86	20	267	61	72	16	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	77	18	299	68	52	12	2	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	115	26	259	59	21	5	4	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	106	24	288	65	30	7	5	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	125	28	256	58	39	9	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	80	18	269	61	56	13	2	0
The school is led and managed effectively	114	26	271	62	36	8	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	148	34	257	58	23	5	5	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of St Aidan's Catholic School, Willow Bank Road, Ashbrooke, Sunderland, SR2 7HJ

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were pleased to be able to take your views into account. It was also very helpful that many of your parents and carers completed the questionnaire as we could also take account of their views. It is clear from the evidence that we collected that you enjoy being at school and feel well cared for by your teachers. You said that everyone is friendly and that there is a positive and supportive atmosphere in school. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- St Aidan's is a satisfactory and improving school.
- GCSE results have improved significantly.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory and the proportion of good teaching is rising.
- The care, guidance and support you receive are good and you feel safe.
- The new headteacher and senior leadership team are making the right improvements to help you achieve even more.

To help the school improve further, we have said that senior leaders should further improve the quality of your learning and progress throughout the whole school by:

- sharing best practice within the school to improve teaching
- ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to plan and deliver lessons that are closely matched to your individual needs
- ensuring that marking is more effective to help you know what you must do next to improve your work
- raising achievement and improving the quality of provision in the sixth form

You can help your teachers by continuing to behave well and working hard at all times. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Additional Inspector

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