

St Aidan's Catholic School and Sixth Form Centre

Willowbank Road, Ashbrooke, Sunderland, SR2 7HJ

Inspection dates 2–3 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. They make good progress from their starting points. Students' attainment has risen markedly over the last three years to above the national average.
- Teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding. Students are expected to work hard and they do. Teachers' knowledge of students' needs is generally used well to set good levels of challenge in lessons.
- Students are well cared for and feel safe and valued at school. Their behaviour is typically good around the site and during breaktimes. The vast majority display positive attitudes to learning.
- Leaders, managers and governors have shown the determination and skill to make the necessary improvements to teaching, students' achievement and behaviour since the school's previous inspection. They display the ambition and commitment to improve the school's effectiveness even further.
- Provision in the sixth form is good, and improving well under the leadership of the new head of the sixth form. Students achieve well. The A-level pass rate this year was 100% for A* to E grades. Teaching promotes students' independence and prepares them well for the next stage of their lives.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Recent improvements to teaching and subject leadership are not yet sufficiently embedded to achieve consistency in performance in different subjects or for different groups of students. The result is that achievement and behaviour are not yet outstanding.
- The ambition demonstrated by subject leaders, as well as the monitoring systems used by them, are not consistent enough to ensure that the achievement of students is consistent across all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- Inspectors observed 48 lessons and held discussions with groups of students. They undertook a scrutiny of students' work in the current year.
- Meetings were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders, and with members of the governing body. A telephone discussion was held with the school's improvement partner.
- A meeting was also held with the headteacher of its partner school with which this school has strong links.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents. These included information on the school's most recent examination results, information on students' progress in the last school year, the self-evaluation and the school's development plans. Records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance were also examined.
- Inspectors took account of the 45 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), and of the 35 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Moira Fitzpatrick, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hargreaves	Additional Inspector
Colin Scott	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are of White British heritage, with fewer than average from other ethnic groups. A small number of students speak English as an additional language.
- The percentage of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The percentage of students with special educational needs is below average for students assessed as at school action.
- The percentage of students assessed as school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is average.
- The school has opened the Phoenix Centre on-site this term to provide support for students whose circumstances might put them at risk of exclusion.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement, especially of the more-able students and some students at school action and in Key Stage 3 by:
 - ensuring that all teaching is at least good by July 2013
 - improving the quality of teachers' planning, ensuring that it is based on up-to-date information about students' progress
 - rigorously tracking the progress of the most able to ensure that they reach the highest grades in all subjects
 - sharing the best practice that exists for marking students' work and giving them useful feedback on how to improve
 - using active learning strategies in all subjects and classes
 - identifying where the school's behaviour systems are not being fully implemented and taking action to secure a good climate for learning in all classes.
- Develop the skills and expertise of subject leaders so they make a full contribution to improving the performance of teachers and students by:
 - improving the consistency of monitoring and evaluation by sharing best practice
 - making subject leaders more accountable for improvements in performance
 - providing support and training to enable all subject leaders to fulfil their role in improving teacher and student performance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has risen to above the national average in the last three years. The proportion reaching A* and A grades, while increasing, is not yet as high as it could be in many subjects.
- Students' progress, from when they enter the school to when they leave, is above the national average. School data show that progress is better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Improving progress for younger students is a current priority for the school.
- The school is successfully narrowing the gap in achievement between students who are eligible for the pupil premium and other groups of students. This is because of careful tracking of their progress to ensure they do not fall behind.
- Overall, most students make good progress in lessons and this is confirmed by work in their books. However, the progress of some students can vary, depending on the subject and the teaching group. For example, a few of the lower-attaining students do not progress as well as their peers in some subjects because they are hampered by weak reading skills. Some of the more-able students are not always given tasks that are well matched to their needs. Action to counter this issue by developing literacy in all subjects is beginning to have an impact. The introduction of an Early Reading programme for students in Year 7 has got off to a good start, with reading mentors from Years 8 and 9 already making suggestions for how to improve this provision.
- The few students who speak English as an additional language make the same progress as other students because they are well supported in lessons, by staff and their peers, to understand and complete tasks.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well supported in class by teachers, and occasionally by teaching assistants, to complete tasks and make similar progress to their peers.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is good. From their different starting points students make good progress and reach their targets in most subjects. Overall, achievement in Year 13 is particularly strong, especially in mathematics, PE and information and communication technology. As in the rest of the school, there has been a strong and sustained improvement in performance, at both AS and A level, over the last three years.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View indicated they are pleased with their sons' progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall and there is much that is outstanding, though it is still too variable to ensure good progress in all lessons. However, the school's relentless focus on improving teaching is paying dividends so that the proportion of teaching that requires improvement is decreasing rapidly. Most parents agree that teaching is good
- The most effective learning occurs in lessons where teachers have a clear understanding of students' prior learning and use this information to plan tasks that both challenge and provide success for students. In these lessons learning moves at a brisk pace, with students eager to support each other in shared tasks and to learn from each other. Despite this good practice, the most able are not yet consistently given challenging tasks to enable them to attain highly.
- The active learning seen in many lessons, consistently leads to good or better progress and a high level of enjoyment and engagement for students. When they are set challenges that absorb and excite them, as in a Year 9 French lesson discussing and broadcasting views about their families, students make exceptional progress. Where learning is active students have good opportunities to develop their communication skills.
- Lessons where learning moves at a slower pace share a number of weaknesses which reduce

students' engagement with learning. These include: 'teacher talk' dominating the time for learning, so that students become passive and disinterested; tasks that fail to excite or challenge students; and irregular and cursory marking with too little feedback which does not help students to improve their work. School tracking data, scrutiny of students' work and discussion with students confirm where such lessons occur.

- The quality of marking and feedback to students is improving, though still inconsistent. It has taken a good step forward this term with some excellent practice introduced in some departments. The good quality marking often seen in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is gradually being imported to Key Stage 3, but not quickly enough. In the best examples, students are directed on how to improve through teachers' comments, given examples of working methods, or are referred to specific resources to help them find out for themselves how to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Good pastoral care and a strong sense of feeling valued contribute much to students' good behaviour. Students welcome the school's new behaviour systems, which they say are clear and fair in providing guidance to staff and students about the school's expectations of good behaviour. However, some comment that not all staff follow procedures consistently, which leads to disruptive behaviour in a few lessons that is not checked quickly enough.
- Students have a good understanding of different forms of bullying and how to deal with these. They also have high levels of trust in adults to resolve any problems.
- Students have very positive attitudes to school and are proud to be a part of it. Some believe it is, 'One of the best schools in the North East.' Others say that the school offers many pathways to success, so there is something to help everyone succeed.
- Attitudes to learning are mainly very positive, especially in lessons where learning moves at a brisk pace. There are instances where attitudes to learning are not as strong as they could be, particularly where teaching does not engage students. Overall, students are ambitious to do well and they work hard in lessons.
- Students whose circumstances might make them vulnerable to exclusion are well cared for in the on-site Phoenix Centre when they need additional support.
- Clear expectations of conduct and good supervision make this large site safe and secure for students. Students say they feel safe at school and their parents overwhelmingly agree.
- Sixth-form students are very positive about the supportive ethos and 'family feel' of the sixth-form provision, which they say helps them to overcome any difficulties. Their ambition to do well is seen in their recent request for supervised study sessions, so that they can make best use of their time in school, and in their desire to make a greater contribution to the life of the school.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have an accurate and detailed picture of the school's effectiveness, gained from regular monitoring of teaching and learning and the use of effective systems for tracking students' progress. The proportion of good and better teaching is increasing, while that requiring improvement is reducing quickly.
- The headteacher's relentless focus on improvements to teaching through good performance management and close partnership with another school, leading to a greater emphasis on teacher's accountability for the progress of their students, has seen performance in examinations rise quickly both in the sixth form and at the end of Year 11.
- Subject leadership is improving under the clear expectations and guidance of senior leaders. Many leaders have a good understanding of their accountability for the performance of staff and students in their department. However, this is not consistent enough and this is reflected in the varying performance of teachers and students in some departments. The good, and

sometimes outstanding, practice seen in some departments is not being shared widely enough to improve the performance of all quickly.

- Almost all staff who returned questionnaires agreed they were proud to be a member of the school, and all felt that leaders did all they could to improve teaching.
- A broad and balanced curriculum offers both academic and vocational pathways at Key Stage 4 and a wide range of subjects is available at AS and A level. A drive to improve the use of literacy skills in all subjects has begun this term. Reading is being promoted robustly with the introduction of the Early Reading programme, in which students from Years 8 and 9 act as reading mentors for students in Year 7. These initiatives demonstrate the school's effective use of pupil premium funding.
- For a large majority of students, the overwhelming strength of the curriculum is the extended school programme. This provides a huge range of activities to develop students' interests and talents. These are so popular and well attended that it is difficult to notice when the school day has ended! They contribute much to students' strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students fully meet requirements.
- The school receives light touch support from the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has successfully managed the restructuring of staffing and brought finances under control.
 - Members of the governing body rigorously challenge school leaders over the school's performance and the contribution of staff to its overall effectiveness.
 - The governing body set challenging targets in its drive for excellence and actively monitor the work of the school, spending time to discover its strengths and weaknesses.
 - Governors are proud of the improvements that have been made since the appointment of the headteacher in 2010.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	108869
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	405200

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

Type of school	All-through
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	1,055
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr C Emmerson
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Hammond
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2011
Telephone number	01915 536073
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