

St Alban's Catholic High School

Digby Road, Ipswich, IP4 3NJ

Inspection dates 16–17 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Attainment rates are rising in all key stages and in most subjects.
- Attainment is high in mathematics. It is usually high in English and is set to be high in both subjects this year.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are reinforced in other subjects.
- The sixth form is good and is a strength of the school. Students make good progress and progress rates are rising.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress.
- Teaching is mostly good or better. Some is outstanding.
- Students feel safe. Parents and carers agree.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Any incidents are swiftly resolved.
- The recently appointed interim headteacher is working effectively to drive improvement forward. With his team, he has accurately identified teaching and achievement as areas to improve.
- Governors offer strong support and are ready to challenge whenever necessary. They make regular visits to the school to assess progress.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not consistently outstanding. A few lessons require improvement. Teaching is variable in science.
- Occasionally the match of work to ability is too general.
- In some lessons, students have fewer opportunities to take a lead in demonstrating what they know.
- Although marking is good, most but not all students know their targets or follow up on the advice teachers give them in their books.
- Sharing of best practice in teaching skills is increasing but not yet consistent.
- The new senior leadership team are still consolidating their roles and responsibilities. Subject leaders are developing consistency in pushing forward improvements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 29 lessons taught by 29 teachers, including joint observations with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, governors, staff, a representative from the diocese to discuss academy links, and groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 45 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 76 staff questionnaires in planning and carrying out the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, which was discussed with the senior leadership team, a range of policies and procedures and the arrangements for safeguarding students. The inspectors also examined data on students' attainment and progress, monitoring procedures, records of behaviour and attendance and governing body documentation.
- Inspectors listened to students read.

Inspection team

Michael Sutherland-Harper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Christine Connearn	Additional Inspector
Piers Ranger	Additional Inspector
John Mason	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The school converted to become an academy school in February 2012. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The large majority of the students are White British.
- A small number of students arrive in the school mid-year.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children from forces' families.
- Alternative part-time education is currently provided for a small number of students at Suffolk New College, at small unit provision in Kesgrave, at Otley College and at St. Christopher's pupil referral unit in Ipswich. In addition, a small number of sixth form students from Copleston and Northgate High Schools attend some sixth form classes through joint provision arrangements.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.
- The interim headteacher has been in post for four weeks. The deputy headship is also an interim post. Both leaders have been appointed from within the school. The senior leadership team has been restructured.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - providing a more consistent match of work to ability in classes with increased opportunities for students to show their learning and understanding in lessons
 - improving the quality of teaching in science
 - sharing the best practice which has been identified in teaching and support skills
 - ensuring that all students have aspirational targets, are aware of them and follow up on guidance given in marking
- Develop the roles of leaders and managers by:
 - embedding the work of subject leaders in monitoring and driving forward improvement
 - consolidating the roles and responsibilities of the recently established senior leadership team.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment above national averages. Most students make good progress and achieve well over time. The percentage achieving 5 A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, dropped in 2012 because of a fluctuation in English results but is predicted, on the basis of current data, to rise in 2013 to previous high standards. Attainment in mathematics is significantly above the national.
- Attainment in science is weaker and is a current focus area for school improvement.
- Sixth form results have fluctuated in the past. Attainment as shown by current data is now more securely above average. The school accepts students who have achieved the minimum sixth form entry requirements. It offers students a range of pathways to reflect the variety of their starting points.
- Intervention groups are reinforced by good communication between teachers and support staff. A wide range of interventions, including extra sessions for literacy and numeracy and off-site provision for some students, are successful in supporting disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Interventions are being reviewed and updated to ensure a more consistent match between provision and student needs, including for those who enter the school at times other than the usual entry dates.
- Data on student progress is regularly collected and reviewed each term to show students who are on track to make good or better progress or who are currently working below expected levels. As a result, students make good progress in most subjects as they move from Key Stage 3 to 4 and beyond.
- Students entered early for GCSE examinations in mathematics make at least similar, and often better, progress than their peers.
- Students who attend courses offered by other providers make progress in line with other students. A teaching assistant from the school goes with them to check on progress in lessons and the school receives regular reports back on their attainment.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their fellow students. They benefit from good support from teaching assistants because their needs are accurately identified, although the match of work to ability is sometimes by broad groups.
- The impact of the pupil premium is good. Interventions, such as one-to-one sessions, extra classes and programmes to help students catch up in Year 7 are being monitored and tracking systems refined to close any remaining gaps and ensure at least good progress. In 2012, students eligible for the pupil premium were in line with others in English and two terms behind in mathematics.
- Reading skills are well developed through regular library lessons and a range of reading challenges. Most students, including the more able, read fluently and with expression but for a few the match of sounds to letters in identifying words is less well developed. To improve this skill, the school has recently introduced appropriate programmes.

- The large majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View feel that their children are making good progress. Students enjoy lessons. They say that they are supported whenever necessary.

The quality of teaching is good

- The majority of teaching is good or better. Where the quality of teaching is best, careful questioning, good subject knowledge, on-going assessment, brisk pace and challenge mean that all students are fully engaged and teachers and students work together in driving the lesson forward. Tasks and explanations are adapted wherever necessary in these lessons.
- Sixth form teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and students are able to develop as independent learners.
- In a high quality Year 8 history lesson, the teacher used focused questions to draw out students' understanding of what they had learned and remembered from the previous lesson. Video clips, a list of key words and high expectations prompted an enthusiastic response from the students.
- Literacy and numeracy are increasingly reinforced in other lessons as exemplified by the coverage of literacy in a science lesson and of numeracy in geography. Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively.
- Reading is well taught. Some students come out of form time to improve their skills in small-group work. Students are encouraged to read at home. In a few lessons, opportunities to reinforce reading skills are missed when the teacher reads out materials which could be done by students. Volunteers come in at regular intervals to hear students read.
- Where teaching requires improvement, expectations are sometimes inconsistent and the teacher directs the lesson too much. This limits opportunities for students to show their learning and understanding by taking a lead. While students' needs are accurately identified in lesson plans, the resulting match of work to abilities is not sufficiently precise in some lessons. As a result, the quality of teaching, as in science, is variable. The school recognises this and work is now underway to ensure that all teaching is more consistently good or better.
- Inspectors and senior leaders agreed on the grades awarded in joint observations of lessons. The school is currently refining its systems for the monitoring and observation of lessons to ensure that all are consistently good or better.
- Senior leaders have identified where best practice in teaching and support skills exists in the school. Together with the support of advanced skills teachers, the new teaching and learning group is discussing how these skills may be most effectively disseminated across the school.
- Assessment procedures are good, as seen in the joint scrutiny of books with senior staff, and reflect the work which the school is putting in to improve assessment procedures. Homework is regularly set. Regular marking and neat presentation are features of most books but occasionally, targets are not aspirational enough and, occasionally, students do not follow up on the guidance given. Most, but not all, students know their targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The large majority of students have very good attitudes to learning and clearly understand its importance, willingly following up lessons with homework and research. They recognise the

importance of good behaviour and serve increasingly as examples of that high quality behaviour. School council initiatives indicate students' keen interest in developing the social environment of the school and their desire to help others around the world. Effective student voice in the sixth form enables students to participate in discussions with the head of sixth form and the senior leadership team.

- The vast majority of behaviour seen in the school and in lessons during the inspection showed the respect students have for their school premises and for staff and demonstrated courtesy towards other members of the school community.
- In a very small number of lessons where expectations are not high enough, low-level disruption occurs but it is quickly dealt with because the school has effective systems in place for behaviour management. These systems are under constant review.
- The school records the rare incidents of bullying quickly and effectively and moves swiftly to resolve any issues. Students understand the sanctions which are in place. They are familiar with the different types of bullying which may occur, such as name calling and cyber bullying and know how to stay safe on the internet. Exclusions are well below national averages with few repeat offenders, indicating the effectiveness of measures put in place.
- Where behaviour is flagged up as a possible issue, the school has a policy of planning ahead to ensure that provision currently and in the following year is adapted to maximise the engagement of students in lessons.
- Students feel safe in school and their parents and carers agree. Safety is regularly covered as part of the curriculum and whenever any concerns arise, they are swiftly dealt with. Any possibility of discriminatory behaviour is reduced through the attention given to promoting equality for all in assemblies and lessons. Close links to external agencies enhance strong internal procedures and support.
- Attendance fluctuated last year due to higher-than-normal rates of sickness but has improved and is now above average. The school has effective systems for following up on attendance. The small number of students who enter the school at times other than the expected dates are quickly integrated as part of the promotion of equal opportunities. Discrimination of any sort is not accepted. Punctuality is always good or better.

The leadership and management are good

- The interim headteacher has accurately focused on teaching and achievement as areas requiring further development during the short period he has been in charge. Together with his recently formed senior leadership team, and supported by staff throughout the school, he is working effectively to introduce and consolidate improvements. The school has strong capacity for further improvement because of this clear direction. At all times, the emphasis is on ensuring the school is always focused on its key priorities of learning, respecting and caring.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the structures which the new senior leadership team are currently implementing have not yet had time to embed across the school.
- Subject leaders are beginning to monitor standards and provision within their departments more consistently. They share the vision of the senior leadership team but acknowledge that there is

still some work to do to bring about the desired improvements. Together with other staff, they benefit from shared professional development, including through work within the recently established teaching and learning group.

- Procedures for managing and reviewing staff performance are systematic and rigorous. Staff are responsible for their results. Targets set are regularly reviewed as is movement up the pay scales. The school is looking at ways to make the most of the skills of the best teachers in the school and to continue professional development for all staff.
- A broad range of subjects is on offer. The number of work-related subjects is expanding. Links with local businesses and industries are particularly strong to reinforce subjects like business studies, provide practical experience and enable students to understand the world of work. This is supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities which help to reinforce students' social skills and behaviour.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form is good. The new head of sixth form has a good understanding of how data and mentoring are used to improve the progress and attainment of students.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. Tangible links are in place with schools in other countries to develop project work around moral and social themes. The strong focus on ethical and moral issues in personal, social and health education lessons is reinforced effectively in assemblies. Support for students is well-developed.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and meet all statutory requirements.
- The academy has strong and continuing links with the local diocese.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are supportive, know the school well, make regular visits and conduct close analyses of the uses and impact of pupil-premium funding. They have a good knowledge of the quality of teaching and students' achievement. They have a secure understanding of data and have undergone training in this area so that they are able to compare the school's performance with that of other schools. The Chair of Governors has been monitoring the work of the school carefully to ensure that procedures for the management of staff performance are effective. Discussion is underway about how to best reward good teachers and tackle underperformance. Priorities are agreed with the interim headteacher and the senior leadership team and policies and procedures are regularly reviewed. Areas for development are accurately identified but do not all have interim review dates attached in minutes to review and adjust the effectiveness of initiatives.

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	137849
Local authority	NA
Inspection number	411937

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1020
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul McGrath
Headteacher	Colin Walker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01473 726178
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