

# Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

Colney Heath Lane, St Albans, AL4 0TT

**Inspection dates** 9–10 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires special measures.

- Leaders, managers and governors have been too slow to take action to improve the schools' effectiveness.
- Pupils' achievement is inadequate because there is not enough good or outstanding teaching to promote at least expected progress. As a result, the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE grades at A\* to C including English and mathematics is below average.
- Recent actions taken to improve achievement through close checking of teaching, making better use of information about pupils' progress and making leaders responsible for the work of their teams, have not yet had the impact intended because the role of some leaders is not defined.
- The additional government funding that the school receives for disadvantaged pupils is not used well enough to improve their achievement.
- When teachers plan their lessons, they do not make enough use of the information they have about pupils to make sure that the work is matched to the needs of all learners.
- Teachers do not do enough to improve pupils' reading and writing skills.
- The quality of marking varies too much between subjects, and comments on pupils' work do not give them enough information on how to improve.
- Behaviour and safety require improvement because attendance is too low and some pupils do not attend regularly enough to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement because too few students gain the highest A-level grades.

### The school has the following strengths

- The new executive headteacher has quickly analysed what needs to happen for the school to improve. He has moved rapidly to tackle weak teaching and learning.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, of which 15 were seen jointly with senior leaders. They also visited several lunchtime activities and tutor periods, and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, and three representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors talked to many pupils about their learning and life at the school. They held formal meetings with four groups of pupils and reviewed their work in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the 31 questionnaires completed by staff and the 80 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team observed the school's work and reviewed current data about pupils' achievement. Inspectors examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's work, including self-evaluation and development plans.

## Inspection team

Frances Le Pla, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
James Coyle	Additional Inspector
Terence Cook	Additional Inspector
Christopher Christofides	Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.*

### Information about this school

- Nicholas Breakspeare Catholic School converted to become an academy on 1 March 2012. When its predecessor school, known by the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- It is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The school admits pupils from a wide geographical area including St Albans, Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City and north London. Some pupils travel a considerable distance to attend the school.
- The proportion of boys attending the school is much higher than average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language is above the national figures.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care) is average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Five pupils access off-site provision full time at Oaklands College. In Years 10 and 11, approximately 39 pupils attend Oaklands College for one afternoon a week. A very few pupils are educated full time at the Links Education Centre and ESTHMA, which supports those with long-term medical absences.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The executive headteacher has been leading the school since the beginning of September 2013. He is also the headteacher of a nearby Catholic secondary school, which, since September has been working closely with Nicholas Breakspeare Catholic School.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is all good or better by ensuring that teachers:
  - make better use of the information about pupils, including assessment data, to prepare a range of activities that address their individual needs, interests and capabilities
  - give pupils plenty of opportunities to practise their reading and writing skills in interesting contexts in a range of subjects
  - make sure that pupils' work is always marked in a way that gives them clear guidance about how it can be improved.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by making sure that:
  - the checking of the quality of teaching and learning gives teachers clear guidance on what they need to do to improve and identifies and shares good practice
  - the new initiatives for using, analysing and acting on data about pupils' progress are

consistently applied across the school

- plans for spending additional resources, such as pupil premium funding, are reviewed to ensure they are well thought out and consistently implemented so that gaps in achievement reduce
- all school leaders, including those with responsibilities for subjects are clear about their roles and further develop their skills in checking the work of their teams, so that they are able to drive forward improvements in teaching and learning.

■ Improve attendance by:

- analysing data in more detail to identify those groups and individuals who do not attend school regularly enough
- working more closely with the families of pupils who are poor attenders.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is inadequate

- Pupils do not make the progress expected of them because there is too little good teaching. Pupils join the school in Year 7 having attained standards that are typically average in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2012, the proportion of pupils that attained five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics was below average. Standards fell further in 2013.
- Results vary widely between subjects. In the last two years, GCSE results in mathematics were broadly average. In English, they were below average in 2012 and declined further this year. Standards in additional science and French declined dramatically in 2013 and were well below average. Similarly, results in other subjects, such as German, physical education, design and technology, and business studies have been well below average for the last two years. In contrast, results in history are above average.
- Some pupils are entered early for GCSE mathematics at the beginning of Year 11. There is no evidence that this causes pupils to attain lower grades than they would do otherwise.
- Taking into account their previous attainment, most pupils in 2013 made the progress in mathematics expected of them between Key Stages 2 and 4. However, in English, achievement was inadequate, especially for the boys.
- Pupils' work seen in lessons and in their books, as well as school data, show that achievement is not improving. This is because the teaching has been inconsistent and the school has been too slow to identify the students that need additional help to make more rapid progress.
- Pupil premium funding is not being used well enough to raise achievement of disadvantaged pupils. In 2012, their attainment in Year 11 was one and a half grades behind other pupils in the school in English and just over a grade behind in mathematics. These pupils continued to do less well than their classmates in 2013. The gap has not narrowed because school leaders have not checked the progress of these pupils closely enough.
- The school uses its Year 7 'catch up' funding to provide intensive small-group teaching for some younger pupils. However, many of these pupils continue to read, write and spell poorly because teachers do not do enough to help them practise their literacy and communication skills in all their lessons.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similarly poor progress to their classmates. Not all teachers adapt lessons well by preparing activities that are tailored to their needs.
- The progress of pupils who attend education in other locations to study work-related courses is monitored regularly. They make steady progress on their courses.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement because, although results at AS level are improving, too few students gain the highest grades at A level. This is because there is too much variation in the quality of teaching across subjects.

**The quality of teaching is inadequate**

- Teaching does not ensure that pupils learn quickly enough. Although there is some effective teaching across the school, too much is not good enough. Across the school, teachers do not do enough to develop pupils' literacy and communication skills.
- Where teaching is weakest, too little is expected of pupils and planning is not precise enough to make sure that activities meet the needs of all pupils. As a result, pupils usually have the same work to do, regardless of their ability. Not enough checks are made on pupils' progress to ensure that they understand the tasks set for them.
- In several subjects, such as science and English, pupils have been taught by a succession of different temporary teachers. This has slowed their learning down because subject leaders have not given new teachers enough guidance about the work the pupils should be doing.
- Despite the recent introduction of new guidance, marking remains inconsistent across the school. Too few teachers provide comments or examples showing how work can be improved. Pupils are not always clear about the standard of their work or what they can do to follow up teachers' marking or feedback.
- Where pupils have targets, they are not always as clear as they should be, including to help them attain the higher grades of which they are capable.
- Where teaching is most effective, lessons have a good pace because the sequence of activities is well planned. Work is challenging because teachers have high expectations and pupils' thinking is stimulated through questioning and tasks that are matched to their abilities. In a well-taught history lesson, pupils were encouraged to work in pairs to think for themselves about which sources were most reliable. Skilful questioning by the teacher ensured that, by the end of the lesson, all pupils understood that there are many ways to interpret pictures and quotations about the past.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement because, although students have more opportunities to discuss their work in class, the teaching is not strong enough to enable students to gain the highest grades in the subjects they study at A level.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement**

- Attendance is below average and too many pupils regularly miss school for long periods of time. The school has used some of its pupil premium funding to appoint an attendance officer to work with families and improve attendance. However, it has not conducted sufficient analysis of the absences of different groups of pupils to enable this new initiative to have much impact.
- Despite recent reductions, temporary exclusions because of poor behaviour remain above national levels.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is cooperative and compliant. However, in too many lessons, pupils are dependent on their teacher. Little independent inquiry limits their contribution to discussion or consolidation of learning. This contrasts with their enthusiasm and engagement in the few lessons that involve decision making and reflection.
- Pupils behave well around the school and at break and lunch times. They are polite and courteous in their dealings with adults and other pupils. A large majority of parents and carers

who expressed a view agreed that the school ensures that its pupils conduct themselves well.

- Pupils say they feel safe in the school and bullying of any form is uncommon. Reported incidents are dealt with immediately and firmly. Pupils are well informed about how to stay safe and understand the harm that racist or homophobic name-calling can cause.
- Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take responsibility. Year 7 pupils said that the support they have been given by the sixth form prefects and Year 8 mentors allocated to their form groups has helped them to quickly settle into their new school.

### **The leadership and management are inadequate**

- Until the arrival of the new executive headteacher, leaders and managers did not do enough to tackle the low performance of the school over time because systems to check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress were not thorough. Although weak teaching was identified, it was not adequately addressed, contributing to the decline in achievement.
  - Teachers and subject leaders were not held to account for the performance of pupils in their care and little was done to identify and share good practice. Use of additional resources, such as the pupil premium funding, has not been well planned and, as a result, has had little impact on raising achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
  - The executive headteacher, fully supported by governors, the senior leadership team and staff, has accurately identified what the school needs to do to improve. He has already moved swiftly to deal with inadequate teaching and implement changes to address the key areas for improvement. He is beginning to use expertise from his other school to strengthen leadership at Nicholas Breakspear. For example, he has introduced a system to track and analyse the progress of groups of pupils and has arranged for English teachers at both schools to work together.
  - As a result of the recent work of the executive headteacher, senior leaders and managers across the school are now beginning to become more involved in improving teaching and learning through checking the work of their teams. However, the improvements are still at a very early stage of implementation and some leaders' responsibilities have yet to be more clearly defined. Consequently, the school does not demonstrate sufficient capacity to improve. It is strongly recommended that the school should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
  - The subjects taught in the school are sufficiently broad to offer pupils a suitable range of academic and work-related courses. Pupils receive sound advice about course and career options available at ages 14, 16 and 18. Pupils appreciate the wide range of curriculum enrichment activities available to them.
  - The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Year 7 pupils greatly enjoyed the team-building day at the beginning of the school year because it helped them to mix with others and make new friends.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors show a great commitment to the school and want the pupils to do well. Since the recent changes to the leadership of the school, governance has improved. The governing body had tried hard over recent years to discharge its statutory responsibilities but lack of information from previous school leaders prevented them from doing so. When they became aware that achievement and teaching were not as good as they should be, they initially did not act quickly enough to resolve the situation. However, as their concerns increased, they

took steps to find out things for themselves, for example, by surveying staff opinion. They then took much firmer action to improve leadership by working with the diocese and the academy trust to arrange the appointment of the executive headteacher and the partnership with his other school. They are fully supportive of the recent work that he has led to begin improving the school and have a clear view about how they want to see the school develop in the future. They are now much better informed about the work of the school and have an accurate understanding of the school's performance, the quality of teaching and actions being taken to tackle underperformance. They now challenge school leaders about performance. Governors have identified aspects of their work where they could be more effective and are receiving training from the governors of a local school. The governing body ensures that the safeguarding of pupils complies with national requirements.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137938
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425338

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	718
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	139
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Linda Graham
<b>Headteacher</b>	Clive Mathew (Executive Headteacher)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 October 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 860079
<b>Fax number</b>	01727 848912
<b>Email address</b>	admin@nicholasbreakspeare.herts.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2013

