

Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

Colney Heath Lane, St Albans, AL4 0TT

Inspection dates

4–5 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students enter the school with prior attainment which is broadly average and attain standards at GCSE level which are in line with the national average. This does not represent sufficiently good progress.
- The most able students and those who have special educational needs are not making the progress they should.
- Teaching requires improvement because it is not having a strong enough impact on accelerating students' progress.
- Not all teachers make good use of information on students' prior attainment when planning their lessons.
- Some teachers' marking of students' work does not explain clearly enough what they have to do to improve and some students do not respond to their teachers' comments.
- Leadership requires improvement because the quality of teaching in the school and students' achievement are not yet good.
- Although senior leaders are driving school improvement, they do not always evaluate the impact of actions they have taken.
- Some subject leaders are less effective than others in monitoring the work of their departments.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders and members of the governing body know the school's strengths and areas for development. They have gained the confidence of staff, students and parents.
- The quality of teaching is improving and teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress and are well supported in their studies.
- Students behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. They feel safe and show a great sense of pride in their school.
- The choice of subjects is broad and balanced and students can access a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- School leaders ensure that students eligible for additional support through pupil premium funding achieve almost as well as their peers.
- The school's pastoral systems are effective in supporting students, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 32 lessons. They observed teaching and scrutinised students' work. A significant number of lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the associate headteacher, other senior leaders, subject and year leaders, groups of students and an external advisor.
- Inspectors met with five members of the governing body and a representative from the Diocese of Westminster.
- Inspectors considered the views of 105 parents through the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation summary, the school development plan and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors evaluated records of students' progress, performance management records and information on the quality of teaching. They also scrutinised the school's records of recruitment checks on staff, behaviour tracking information and attendance records.

Inspection team

John Daniell, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Najoud Ensaff	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector
Laura Henshaw	Additional Inspector
Jane Ladner	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Nicholas Breakspeare Catholic School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary School. It has a sixth form partnership with John Henry Newman Catholic School in Stevenage.
- The school admits students from a wide geographical area including St Albans, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and north London. Some students travel a considerable distance to attend the school.
- The executive headteacher has been leading the school since September 2013 and the associate headteacher took up post in September 2014.
- The number of students on the school roll has fallen since the previous inspection.
- Most students are White British. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language are above the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding, which is additional funding for students who are eligible for free school meals or those who are looked after by the local authority, is one-fifth, below average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action, one-tenth, is average. The proportions of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A small number of students in Year 11 attend Oaklands College on a full-time basis, although this is the last year of this arrangement.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - make better use of available information on students' prior attainment to meet their needs more effectively when planning and teaching their lessons
 - ask questions of students in lessons which deepen their understanding of what they are being taught
 - use marking to encourage students to respond to their comments and so improve their work.
- Improve achievement by:
 - ensuring that more-able students and students who have special educational needs make better progress
 - continuing to improve the attendance of students who have special educational needs.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the quality of evaluation at all levels
 - ensuring that all subject leaders monitor the effectiveness of their areas at a consistently high level.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Although some improvement can be seen since the previous inspection in October 2013, senior leaders' actions have not yet secured good academic outcomes for all groups of students in the school. Whereas, until recently, expectations of what students can achieve had been too low, leaders are now conveying a clear message to both teachers and students that good progress is the minimum expectation. There is early evidence of the impact of these raised expectations in current students' work.
- School leaders have correctly identified the actions that need to be taken to secure school improvement. However, evaluations are not yet detailed enough to show the impact of these actions; and they do not involve subject leaders in the evaluation of their own department's effectiveness.
- The quality of subject leadership is not yet consistently good. Subject leaders have not ensured that all teachers adapt their lesson planning to meet the range of needs of students in their class; nor have they ensured that all teachers' marking of students' work is of a high enough quality.
- The school is well regarded by its stakeholders. Leaders, teachers and students report that the school has improved considerably over the last year. This is demonstrated by a steady improvement in students' outcomes and their attitudes to learning, which in turn is linked to the gradual improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Senior leaders clearly understand their specific roles in driving school improvement. Their impact can be seen in the effective deployment of pupil premium funding. This is closing the gap in attainment between eligible students and others in the school and resulting in students' significantly improved behaviour and attitudes to learning. The expanded senior leadership team has added much-needed capacity at this level.
- Not all middle leaders liaise regularly with senior leaders who hold key information. In particular, the special educational needs coordinator has not worked closely enough with the senior leader responsible for monitoring attendance to tackle the poorer attendance of students who have special educational needs.
- School leaders have improved the quality of teaching over time so that none is inadequate. They are building up a more accurate profile of teaching based on observations of lessons, students' outcomes, progress seen through work scrutinies and discussions with students. Training needs are identified for individual teachers and three strong practitioners have recently been appointed as teaching advocates to support teachers whose practice is not yet good.
- Subject and year leaders are now being held more to account by senior leaders, particularly with respect to students' progress. For example through the RAPS (Raising Achievement in Pupils) meetings which focus on individual students in Years 9, 10, 11. In the sixth form these meetings are now ensuring that appropriate support is targeted more closely.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is constantly under review and modified to enhance achievement. All students in Year 7 follow a skills-based course intended to increase their self-confidence and raise their self-esteem. A selected group of students in Years 8 and 9 are taught a specific humanities course with a greater focus on literacy skills, and students in Years 10 and 11 now have more English and mathematics lessons than in the past. Religious education ensures a balanced understanding of world religions. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given strong emphasis in the curriculum and individual lessons.
- Careers guidance is comprehensive and well-regarded by students. Students receive sound advice when deciding on subjects to study in Key Stage 4. The proportion of school leavers not in education, employment or training is low.

- The school meets all requirements to safeguard the well-being of its students.
- The school has commissioned support from the local authority and external consultants, to good effect. This support has been complemented with an appropriate level of challenge. The local authority consultant and a representative from the Diocese of Westminster have rigorously monitored the progress the school has made through the 'strategic action group'.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They monitor the work of the school well through their committees and the 'strategic action group'. Their financial expertise has been strengthened by the recent appointment of a governor with experience in this field. The Chair of the Governing Body meets with the headteacher every week and sends minutes of these discussions to the full governing body so that all members are kept up to date with developments.
 - Governors are attached to subject areas and year groups and they conduct visits to the school which are followed up with notes and action points. They receive regular reports on the quality of teaching in the school and how well each subject is performing.
 - Governors ensure that the performance management system only rewards those staff who meet their targets.
 - Scrutiny of governors' minutes of meetings shows that the challenge to senior leaders provided by members of the governing body has improved. This followed a review of the governing body in April 2014. As a further result of this review, governors acknowledge the importance of comparing the performance of Nicholas Breakspeare Catholic School to other schools when measuring the impact of school improvement strategies.
 - Governors play a full part in promoting the school's values and ethos of tolerance, respect and equality of opportunity among all stakeholders, including leaders, staff, students and parents.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are polite and courteous towards each other, to members of staff and visitors to the school. Students say that behaviour has improved dramatically, as has the respect shown to each other by students and teachers. Only when teaching does not fully engage students is there a risk of low-level disruptive behaviour. Students move around the corridors sensibly and with purpose, arriving to their lessons punctually and with the right equipment.
- Students speak highly of their school. They wear their uniform with a great sense of pride. The school site is litter and graffiti free. Students socialise well with each other during break and lunch times. Systems are in place so that members of staff can acknowledge and reward students who 'do the right thing'. Parents are overwhelmingly of the view that the school makes sure its students are well behaved.
- The proportion of students who are excluded from school for a fixed period of time has fallen, and there has been no permanent exclusion for the last three years. The number of behavioural incidents in lessons has also decreased.
- The school has successfully introduced a new rewards system which promotes positive behaviour. This school's clear message to students and parents is that it 'will not give up on any child'. So, for example, students who exhibit challenging behaviour are provided with a personalised curriculum to engage them and raise their aspirations.
- Reports on students who attend Oaklands suggest that there are no behaviour issues, although a small minority have a poor record of attendance.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. All students who were spoken to say they feel safe in school. An overwhelming majority of parents believe that their children feel safe in the school.

- Students are taught about e-safety and the risks associated with social networking sites. Older students demonstrated a sound awareness of the dangers of extremism or radicalisation.
- Incidences of bullying are rare. Any occurrences of bullying are followed up and measures are taken to prevent any reoccurrence.
- Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well looked after, they speak positively about the support they receive from members of staff.
- Attendance is above average and continuing to improve, although students who have special educational needs attend less regularly than their peers.
- Staff in the school are clear about their role in keeping students safe. They receive regular training and updates relating to the safeguarding of children. An exception is that the member of staff who manages the behaviour support unit has not received training in the use of reasonable restraint or de-escalation of aggressive behaviour.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Over time, teaching has not met the needs of all groups of students. This means that more-able students and those who are disabled or have special educational needs have made too little progress compared to their peers.
- Despite the school's requirement that teachers plan to meet the needs of the most and least able students in their class as well as all others, in practice much teaching is targeted towards students of middle ability. This means that the more-able students are often not challenged and that those who are less able find their work too difficult.
- Teachers' questioning is inconsistent in quality, sometimes it is not probing enough to allow students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of what is being taught. At times teachers do not give students enough time to reflect on their answers and they resort to answering questions themselves.
- While teachers are diligent in marking students' books, their written comments do not require the students to respond in enough detail to show that they have understood what they got wrong. A few books contained numerous reminders from teachers to respond to their comments, but students had failed to do so over a significant period of time.
- Although there are some areas for improvement in teaching, there are also some significant strengths. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and relationships between teachers and students are positive. Teachers are skilled at promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in a lesson that involved students working together in groups to explore the rights and wrongs of topical issues, students maturely weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites and the risks associated with such activities.
- Students make strong progress in lessons where expectations are high and where the work is well matched to students' prior attainment. In a Year 10 drama lesson, for example, students achieved very well because the teacher skilfully adapted her planning so that every student could make good progress and because she checked regularly for understanding throughout the lesson.
- Teachers are increasingly successful at supporting students' literacy and numeracy development. More effective teaching identifies key words at the start of the lessons, which students later apply in their written work and in discussions. Inspectors' scrutiny of students' books showed an increasing use by teachers of extended writing tasks. Students are encouraged to read, they enjoy reading, and more students are borrowing books from the school library than previously.

The achievement of pupils**requires improvement**

- Achievement requires improvement because students who enter the school with broadly average attainment are not making sufficiently good progress to achieve standards above the national average by the end of Year 11. In 2014, provisional unvalidated data show that the proportion of students who achieved 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was 57%, an improvement on the previous year.
- Too few of the students who enter the school with high attainment make the progress they could. This is linked to the quality of teaching they receive because often teachers do not provide enough challenge for these students in their lessons.
- The progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs, from their different starting points, is not improving quickly enough. The school's current forecasts for the new Year 11 cohort do not suggest there will be much improvement.
- Students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers.
- Attainment in the vast majority of subjects at GCSE level increased in 2014. However, attainment in additional science and in product design remained well below the national average.
- Almost all students who studied full-time courses at Oaklands College in motor repairs and in social care gained a 'pass' grade.
- Initiatives targeted at students eligible for additional support through pupil premium funding have ensured that the gaps in attainment between these students and others in the school have narrowed significantly. As a consequence, GCSE results in 2014 show that disadvantaged students achieved around half a grade lower than other students in English and mathematics. Successful strategies have included the appointment of an assistant headteacher with oversight of pupil premium, after-school peer mentoring in mathematics, Easter revision classes and the use of a school counsellor. The tracking of these students' progress is an effective aspect of the school's evaluation process.
- Until recently, the school operated an early entry policy for students studying mathematics in Year 11. Students eligible for pupil premium funding achieved particularly well under this policy.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium has been used well to fund small-group sessions in English and mathematics, to recruit a senior learning support assistant who comes from a primary school background and who works with identified students from Year 7, and to purchase various resources to develop students' literacy and numeracy. These strategies have had a positive impact, helping students to make better progress and achieve their targets.
- Inspectors observed some outstanding and good learning taking place during their visits to lessons and through their scrutiny of students' books and data. While there remains too much that requires improvement, school leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning forecasts a rising trend in achievement over time.

The sixth form provision**is good**

- Achievement in the sixth form is good, although students' attainment is stronger at A2 level than at AS level. The school's tracking data, which has been accurate in the past, suggests a rising trend in attainment. Students make particularly good progress in communications, history, music and physics.
- Success rates for students re-taking GCSE English and GCSE mathematics are improving. Unvalidated 2014 results suggest significant improvements in A* to B grades across many subjects and improving retention rates.

- Students enjoy being in the sixth form. Their views are represented well through the sixth form leadership team which meets regularly to discuss issues of concern. All sixth form students have a whole-school responsibility. This includes helping younger students with their reading or supporting teachers in their classroom. Students who met with inspectors talked positively about their recent educational excursion to Uganda, where they worked with a charitable organisation to help build houses. This experience made a real impact on their attitudes to living in modern Britain and helped them appreciate the importance of a community spirit.
- Students are provided with good guidance on the next stage of their educational career or preparation for work. Many students continue their studies at university level.
- Inspectors saw good and outstanding teaching and learning taking place in sixth form lessons. Teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge. They track students' progress regularly and provide good quality feedback on their performance.
- Effective leadership of the sixth form ensures that the curriculum continues to develop to best meet the needs of students. The recent partnership agreement with John Henry Newman School in Stevenage has broadened the choice of subjects available, particularly with regard to vocational courses.

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	137938
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447068

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	625
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	166
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Graham
Headteacher	Clive Mathew (executive headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	09 October 2013
Telephone number	01727 860079
Email address	admin@nbs.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. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email 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, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: 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 and 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.

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
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

