

The John Henry Newman Catholic School

Hitchin Road, Stevenage, SG1 4AE

Inspection dates

28–29 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher is determined to ensure that students achieve high levels of academic success, and become confident, caring, and cultured individuals who contribute well to the school and the wider community.
- Together with the senior leadership team, the headteacher is driving rapid improvements in teaching and achievement. The school celebrated its strongest ever GCSE results in 2014.
- Students' conduct is impeccable. They are courteous, considerate and hard-working. Very high proportions engage in sporting and cultural activities which contribute well to their personal development and enrich school life. Many help contribute to the learning and well-being of others.
- Leaders, including members of the governing body, ensure that the school is a safe environment and students are exceptionally well-cared for. Students' excellent relationships with those who teach and support them contribute to their enjoyment of learning and their drive to succeed.
- Over time, teaching has been effective in ensuring that most groups of students make at least good progress, and achieve well.
- The sixth form is good. Students study a range of courses that help equip them well for the next stage in their education and employment. Many develop the ability to lead effectively; all are able to work productively, both individually and with others.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Over time, most students have made good rather than outstanding progress.
- Until recently, leaders of some subject areas have not been successful in narrowing the gaps between the progress and attainment of disadvantaged students and that of others.
- The impact of the resources used to support disabled students and those who have special educational needs is not always checked carefully enough.
- Teachers do not always use the information they hold on students' prior achievement to plan activities that are of the right level of difficulty for all groups, including some students in the sixth form.
- Sometimes students continue to make errors because feedback on their work is not sufficiently regular or clear.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 50 lesson or parts of lessons, and during tutor periods. Several lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed behaviour during lessons, break periods and as students moved around the school site.
- Inspectors analysed documentation, including that relating to: attendance, exclusions, safeguarding, behaviour, the school's systems for improving teaching and learning, records of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and details of its use of additional funding to support disadvantaged students.
- Inspectors took account of the 141 responses to the online, Parent View survey in addition to the school's own survey results of parental opinion, and the 85 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other senior and subject leaders, teaching staff, members of the governing body and groups of students.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Seconded Inspector
Balbir Golhar	Additional Inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional Inspector
Katrina Lambert	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The John Henry Newman Catholic School, which is part of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust, converted to become an academy on 1 March 2012. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- This is a much larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a large sixth form.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, at just over 10%, is below the national average.
- Approximately 10% of students are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and students who are looked after by the local authority. This proportion is below the national average.
- The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is, at 16%, slightly higher than the national average.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- The school receives the Year 7 catch-up funding for a small number of students who did not reach the expected Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 national tests.
- The headteacher is also the executive headteacher of the Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School.
- The school meets the current national floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2012, having previously been a deputy headteacher at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement, including in the sixth form, by ensuring that all subject leaders check that teachers consistently:
 - use the information they have about what students know and can do to plan activities and provide resources that will allow all groups to take the next steps in their learning and make rapid progress
 - give regular and precise subject-specific feedback to students that shows them how to improve their work, and provide them with the opportunity to act upon it
 - monitor carefully the impact of the learning resources and support given to disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and make changes when necessary.
- Sustain the improvement recently seen in the rates of progress made by disadvantaged students across the school so that they continue to narrow the gap between their achievement and that of other students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is determined that all students will achieve the best possible academic outcomes, and develop the personal skills that will enable them to be successful individuals who make a positive difference within their communities. This ethos is shared by staff, who also understand the school's clear priorities for improvement. They are pursuing these and bringing about rapid improvement.
- Relationships within the school are harmonious, productive and characterised by mutual respect and the absence of any kind of discrimination. Students' behaviour is excellent. Students develop an understanding of, and a respect for, those with different lifestyles to their own.
- Senior leaders are improving the quality of teaching, and the extent to which it enables all groups of students to make rapid progress. They have taken responsibility for the leadership of key subject areas; this has helped to improve standards in English and mathematics. Effective teaching techniques are systematically shared. The school's monitoring information indicates this is improving the impact teaching has upon learning.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Senior leaders promote equality of opportunity by ensuring that students have access to a very wide variety of different courses, including vocational subjects in the sixth form. The school regularly adapts its curriculum so that it best fits the needs and interests of each individual wherever possible. This contributes to students' high levels of motivation.
- The curriculum prepares students for life in modern Britain well; students have a secure understanding of British values, including what it means to live in a democracy and the importance of personal freedoms, and understand when these must be limited in order to protect the essential rights of others.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education exceptionally well. Students learn about the major faith traditions and develop respect for those of all faiths and none; all continue to consider issues of faith and their importance within contemporary society as part of the sixth form curriculum. High proportions of students learn a musical instrument, sing in the choir, participate in drama, or play competitive sport regularly. Over 150 students performed in the most recent Christmas Concert, for example. A similar number are members of choirs, jazz and concert bands.
- Leadership is not outstanding because, until recently, some subject leaders have not enabled all groups of students to enjoy the highest levels of achievement within their respective subject areas. Some have not ensured that all teachers quickly identify and meet the needs of those students who need additional support to catch up, or provided extra challenge to help them move ahead. Although senior leaders are aware of and are addressing these weaknesses, this has slowed the progress of some students over time, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
- Senior leaders have strengthened systems to hold subject leaders accountable for standards within their subject areas, and support them in identifying and tackling issues quickly. Leaders share information about how much progress students are making, what is being done to support individuals, and the impact of this work. Changes are made as needed. As a result the impact of teaching on learning is improving and pupil premium and Year 7 'catch-up' funding are being used effectively. The gaps in the rates of progress being made by disadvantaged students and others have narrowed sharply, particularly in mathematics.
- Leaders provide students, and their parents, with up-to-date guidance and advice about the different educational opportunities and career options that are available, and the qualifications and personal qualities required for success in these. They challenge stereotypes and introduce students to possibilities that they may not have otherwise considered, such as apprenticeships. Almost all students are successful in reaching their chosen educational or employment destination.
- The academy trust provides support that helps leaders understand, manage and limit the school's exposure to financial, legal and other forms of risk.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors ensure that the school's statutory responsibilities concerning safeguarding are met; their

arrangements for monitoring the work of the school's leaders in this respect are exemplary. They are proud of, and work effectively to maintain, the school's caring ethos. Governors receive regular updates from senior leaders about the quality of teaching and support the headteacher when difficult decisions need to be made to tackle areas of underperformance. Governors review data about students' performance in public examinations annually. They use this analysis to help set appropriate priorities for improvement, and inform recommendations for pay progression made as part of the performance management process.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Almost all parents agree with this statement and with good reason. Students are impeccably polite and welcoming; they go out of their way to be helpful. There is little need for adults to monitor or regulate students' conduct as they move around the site or socialise during break and lunch periods. They treat their facilities with respect; litter, graffiti or damage of any kind are almost unknown.
- Students wear their uniform with pride and move purposefully around the academy site. At times, they are in a hurry to get to lessons that they particularly enjoy. Behaviour in lessons is characterised by their strong desire to learn, achieve and improve. Rates of attendance are high.
- Disruption to learning is rare; teachers are respectful and positive in their interactions with students, who almost always respond in kind. Teachers seldom need to apply sanctions, but when this is necessary most students quickly correct their behaviour. The school's use of temporary exclusion is very rare and declining over time.
- Many students behave in ways that actively promote the learning, personal development or well-being of others. In 2014, students raised over £40,000 for charities by leading and managing a variety of events. Older students act as 'mentors', and help younger ones to develop their literacy skills and to discuss any personal issues that may be troubling them. Each new Year 7 student is helped to settle in by a sixth form mentor. Head students contribute to the running and development of the academy community.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Annual safeguarding training means teachers know what to do if concerns about students arise. Most governors are safer recruitment trained and ensure arrangements for checking the suitability of those who work, volunteer in or visit the school are robust and rigorous. Trips and visits only proceed after careful risk assessments have been completed.
- Students have an excellent understanding about how to stay safe in a variety of contexts. They understand the consequences of misusing the internet, and how to minimise risk when using social networking sites.
- School leaders' effective work with other agencies ensures that students who are vulnerable are well supported. They follow up cases of unexpected or persistent absence from school carefully.
- Students understand the different kinds of bullying that can occur, but are clear that incidences of it are rare. This is supported by the school's careful monitoring, which indicates that just two cases have been reported during the current academic year. Students and parents are confident that any issues are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is usually effective in enabling most students in all year groups to make good, and often very good progress. The overwhelming majority of parents feel that their children are taught well, and students are generally very positive about the impact of teaching on their learning.

- Most teachers use their strong subject knowledge, and their understanding of what students already know and can do, to plan interesting activities that help them take the next steps forward in their learning. In a Year 8 history lesson, engaging source material and the teachers' skilful questioning helped students gain insights into conditions for children working in factories, and the contribution they made to Britain's industrial revolution. There are, however, a few exceptions to this general rule. On occasion, teachers do not use their knowledge of students' prior achievement to plan the teaching for different groups of students well enough.
- Teachers often use questioning and other techniques to gain a clear understanding of where students have made errors in their thinking or their problem-solving, or to explore why they have used a particular method. This kind of questioning, often a feature in mathematics lessons, helps teachers to adjust their explanations so that students understand how to move forward. Students are happy to ask when they are unsure of something, and to try again until they succeed.
- Most of the time, students know what they have to do next to reach their challenging targets because they receive and act upon regular, precise and clear feedback on their work. Marking within English, mathematics and modern foreign languages is particularly effective.
- In most subject areas, teachers are alert to students' errors in spelling, and in their use of punctuation and grammar. They also help students, especially those whose main language is not English, to understand the meaning of specialist language, and what it is that words commonly used in exam questions, such as 'analyse', or 'explain', require them to do. This helps them to understand the best ways to structure extended writing and to develop ideas and arguments within it. Students read confidently in all subjects and are able to discuss the meaning and importance of text. The development of students' numeracy skills across different subjects is less consistent.
- In a small proportion of weaker teaching, students make less progress than they should. Sometimes this is because the teacher has planned new activities without using information about how much progress the students have made already, meaning some complete work that is too easy or too difficult. Some students continue to make the same mistakes because the feedback on their work is infrequent, or does not include subject-specific advice that shows them how to improve. Occasionally, disabled students and those who have special educational needs are given resources to use that do not help them learn effectively or promote their rapid progress.
- In the past, some teachers have been too slow in identifying students who need additional support. This has limited the progress made by some disadvantaged students, particularly in mathematics. Changes leaders have made mean students at risk of falling behind are now identified quickly and supported effectively.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is above average. They make good progress and achieve results at GCSE that are above the national average in many subjects, including English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has risen considerably over the past three years. Almost eight out of ten did so in 2014.
- Disadvantaged students' attainment at GCSE is typically below that of other students nationally, as are their rates of progress. In English, the gap between the small number of disadvantaged students' attainment and that of others in the school is typically half a grade; their progress and attainment are close to that of others nationally, however. In mathematics, disadvantaged students make slower progress and gain, on average, a grade below their school peers, and half a grade below other students nationally. The school's monitoring data, and scrutiny of students' work, indicates that gaps are narrowing quickly because of improvements in teaching and leadership.
- Disadvantaged students' attainment is typically close to that of other students nationally in modern foreign languages, and close to or above that of others nationally in humanities subjects. In 2014, these students' attainment in science was above that of others nationally.

- The progress of students for whom English is an additional language is good overall, and their attainment is just above that of their peers in mathematics, science and the humanities.
- Over time, the school's effective systems for pastoral care and academic support have enabled looked-after students to make at least good progress and gain the necessary qualifications to access employment, further education or training.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs usually make good progress from their individual starting points because of the generally effective support that they receive. Occasionally their progress is less rapid than it might be, because the resources some are given to use are not a good match for their needs.
- The most able students make progress that is at least in line with that of their peers nationally, and achieve well. Over half achieved more than five A or A* grades at GCSE in 2014. Their achievement in science was significantly above that of their peers nationally. Current students are making good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. This is the result of the school's very effective focus on showing individuals precisely how to attain A* grades in different subjects, and on setting challenging work to move them towards this target.
- The school does not make use of early GCSE in entry, except in a very small number of cases when to do so has been to the benefit of the individuals concerned.
- The additional 'catch-up' funding to provide additional support for the small number of students who join the school, having not achieved at least a Level 4 in the Key Stage 2 national tests, has been used effectively. This has enabled most eligible students to make accelerated progress in English and mathematics.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form curriculum is broad and balanced; leaders have ensured that students can choose between a very wide range of academic and vocational subjects. This ensures that all can study subjects that are a good match for their interests and abilities. The overwhelming majority complete, and achieve success in, their chosen courses of study.
- Leaders have ensured that the behaviour of sixth form students is impeccable. Attendance is high, students are punctual, and take a pride in their appearance. They are exceptionally mature, and make good use of the periods of time when they are not being taught to complete independent study or quiet reading. They appreciate their separate identity within the school but also enjoy the considerable contribution they make to its broader life. Many organise and lead activities themselves, including drama productions that involve younger students.
- Students in the sixth form feel safe, secure and well cared-for. Despite its large size, leaders have created a strong sense of community in which all have a sense of belonging, and are known and valued as individuals. Students have a good understanding of various risks, such as those relating to cyber-bullying and the safe use of social media sites.
- Teaching in most subjects is effective in ensuring students make good progress over time. Most teachers have high expectations, and use their excellent subject knowledge, and their knowledge of the students, to plan stimulating activities. Teachers use discussion and debate very effectively to help students develop, test and evidence their arguments.
- In most subjects, regular assessment helps teachers understand when to change activities because students need to spend more, or less time on a task. It also means mistakes are challenged quickly. Regular feedback helps students to make the necessary changes to their work, and understand how to best convey complex responses when completing extended written work. This is a particular strength in subjects such as psychology, sociology, English and law.

- Sometimes teaching lacks sufficient challenge for the most able students, and in some subjects students continue to make mistakes because the feedback they receive is infrequent, or not precise enough to make clear what they need to do to improve.

- The sixth form is not outstanding because, while most students make good progress from their usually high starting points, it is not consistently excellent in all subjects. Attainment over time is typically strong in law, psychology and sociology at A level. Students make good, and sometimes outstanding progress, and achieve well in, vocational subjects. A high proportion of students gain the A level grades they need to secure entry to the more selective universities.

- Students are highly appreciative of the support they receive when preparing applications for entry to university. A high proportion are successful in these; many take up places at some of the most selective universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. Guidance and support is equally helpful to those who decide to take employment or undertake further training.

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	137895
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	453320

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	1542
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	460
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Harte
Headteacher	Clive Mathew
Date of previous school inspection	Not inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01438 314643
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