

St Paul's Catholic School

Phoenix Drive, Leadenhall, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK6 5EN

Inspection dates	15–16 March 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders are effective because they have taken the right steps to improve the school. They show clear leadership and are well supported by staff.
- Governors have made significant changes to the way they work. As a result, they are very knowledgeable about the school so they successfully challenge leaders and hold them to account well.
- Teaching is good across all key stages because staff are committed to continually improving their practice.
- The specialist provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is good. Consequently, these pupils make rapid progress and are seamlessly integrated into the wider school.
- Pupils are making good progress in most subjects in the school.
- The gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs or disability and others are closing quickly.
- Pupils are extremely supportive and caring of each other. They are fiercely proud of their school and live up to the school's inspiring values and ethos. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is excellent.
- In the sixth form, learners make good progress as a result of good teaching and effective leadership.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most-able pupils, especially in mathematics, do not yet make the same amount of good progress as other pupils because teachers do not stretch and challenge them enough.
- Pupils' progress in science, modern foreign languages and geography is not as good as in other subjects.
- Leaders are taking effective steps to improve the impact of middle leaders but some are new, so have had less time to raise standards in their subjects.
- Teachers in subjects other than English do not develop pupils' writing and reading skills sufficiently so that pupils can attain the highest grades.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the progress that the most able make, especially in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan activities that stretch and challenge these pupils
 - developing the curriculum further to ensure pupils can learn more difficult skills and concepts.

- Further improve the effectiveness of middle leaders, especially in science, modern foreign languages and geography, by:
 - ensuring that all staff follow the school's assessment policy so that all pupils receive helpful advice and guidance on how to improve their work
 - sharing the best practice in teaching more effectively
 - developing pupils' reading and writing skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher and his senior team are committed and passionate about improving the lives of the young people in their care. They set high standards for pupils, staff and leaders. The headteacher and his team embody the school's ethos, 'Love. Serve. Do the best that is possible'. As a result, parents and pupils are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and its work.
- The headteacher and his senior leaders have tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection with vim and gusto. They know the school well and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses accurately. They plan adeptly and use achievement information adroitly in their evaluation of progress. Staff describe leaders as 'approachable and knowledgeable' and 'hard-working and effective'.
- The leadership of teaching is good. There are very effective systems to support staff and check that training makes a difference to pupils' learning in the classroom. Leaders manage performance appropriately to reward good teaching and support those staff that need extra development. Support staff are also managed well so that they promote pupils' learning effectively.
- Middle leadership is good. Middle leaders have taken on more responsibility to raise standards in their teams. They are well supported by senior leaders and are closely involved in the process of school improvement. They increasingly share best practice and work well with external partners so that standards are improving. This is especially the case in the specialist provision, where the special educational needs coordinator and the leaders of each provision work very effectively together. There are a few leaders who are new to middle leadership. These leaders have yet to make a sufficient impact.
- The leadership of the specialist provision is particularly effective. The leaders of the specialist provision communicate well with teachers so that pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress. Leaders ensure that teaching assistants are suitably trained and work well together to support pupils well. Leaders also work effectively with parents, the vast majority of whom are very positive about the quality of provision.
- Leaders use the pupil premium grant particularly well. Leaders know their pupils well and have a clear grasp of the challenges that these pupils face. Consequently, pupils in receipt of the pupil premium are performing strongly overall and closing the gap rapidly with all pupils nationally in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum is impressively broad and gives all pupils opportunities to study a wide range of subjects. Leaders reviewed the curriculum in light of recent changes to qualifications so that there are more opportunities for pupils to develop mastery and a depth of understanding. However, in some subjects, this aspect is less well developed so that the most-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged.
- The school's ethos is based on celebrating each pupil's unique worth and the importance of growing together. School leaders promote these values well to staff, pupils and parents so that all pupils no matter what ethnicity, religion or background are well supported to achieve well. The promotion of equalities is especially strong. As a result, pupils are very knowledgeable, sensitive and understanding of each other.
- There is a very useful and detailed programme to support pupils' movement to further study, employment or training. The school ensures that all pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 receive individual advice and guidance. There are bespoke plans for pupils who may struggle to access information or guidance and there is an extensive programme in every key stage of activities and visits from local and national employers. Pupils undertake work experience in Year 10 and in the sixth form. Consequently, pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of study or employment.
- The school works well in partnership with the local authority and the local teaching alliance. There has been useful support from external partners since the previous inspection. School improvement advisers have worked with leaders at all levels to improve aspects of leadership. The local teaching alliance has provided links with specialist leaders of education to help less effective subjects to improve.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is good. Governors have taken swift action to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection and the governance review. The governing body is now a more organised and more effective body. Governors have identified where they lack specific expertise and recruited specialists to address the gaps.
 - Governors are closely linked to key areas of the school. They scrutinise the work of leaders regularly as well as checking with staff and pupils about the difference that leaders make. Governors are

knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They regularly challenge leaders and have supported the development of a new way to check and report on pupils' achievement. Governors have a very good grasp of how the pupil premium and catch-up funding is spent and the difference it is making.

- Governors have an appropriate overview of how rigorously staff performance is managed. They are very committed to maintaining the school's unique ethos and character and are rightly proud of the distinctive nature of the school.
- The arrangements to safeguard staff and pupils are effective. There are comprehensive systems in place to keep pupils safe. There are also good systems to check on the suitability of staff. Governors and staff are appropriately trained, so that they know their responsibilities well. Consequently, pupils feel well cared for and safe. Pupils know what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns. Leaders work well in partnership with other local partners so that vulnerable pupils are supported quickly. Leaders are tenacious in following up on any concerns. As a result, there is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good. Teachers use the school procedures for planning and assessment well so that lessons are pacy and well organised, and pupils work hard. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and use the agreed school behaviour strategies to reward and support pupils to work hard. The best learning takes place when teachers know their pupils well, plan for their different needs and use any additional adult effectively.
- Teaching in English is very effective. Pupils work purposefully and gain a good understanding of the key skills and concepts of language and a good grasp of literature. Teachers use questioning well to develop pupils' understanding and lessons are well planned to meet pupils' needs. Teachers have a good knowledge of the demands of the new curriculum and have taken effective steps to develop more opportunities for pupils to gain depth and mastery of topics. Work in books is of a high standard and shows that pupils make good progress over time.
- Teaching in mathematics is increasingly effective. Teachers' planning takes into account prior learning so that many resources and tasks are well matched to the different starting points of pupils. Teachers have high expectations so that pupils remain on task and can work well for extended periods. Teachers use questioning well to target gaps in knowledge and make pupils think. However, the most-able pupils in mathematics are not sufficiently challenged, as teachers do not regularly adapt resources or give incisive feedback to pupils so they can reach the highest grades.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. As a result, they develop interesting resources that engage and motivate pupils to work hard. For example, pupils responded with enthusiasm and worked well through a series of well-planned activities, gaining greater knowledge and understanding of the impact of the Nazi state, in a Year 13 history lesson.
- When teaching is less effective, especially in geography, science and modern foreign languages, teachers do not use school procedures well. Consequently, pupils make less progress than they should and they do not try as hard as in other subjects. In some subjects, teachers' planning for and questioning of the most-able pupils is less developed so these pupils make less progress.
- Teachers use the school's assessment policy well. Pupils appreciate the feedback and advice, which they respond to well. For example, in design and technology, pupils acted on useful guidance about improving drawing and measuring skills so that they subsequently created higher-quality work. The homework set contributes to the higher standards and progress that pupils are making.
- The teaching of literacy across the school is developing. Teachers promote vocabulary well and use effective strategies to help less-able pupils complete reading and writing tasks successfully. However, in some subjects, teachers are not developing the most-able pupils' skills to read and write in a more sophisticated way. This is holding these pupils back from exploring topics deeply and expressing complex ideas sufficiently so they can achieve the highest grades.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in Britain through a rich mix of experiences of assemblies, religious education and enrichment activities. The school promotes pupils' spirituality very effectively by ensuring that pupils take part in collective worship regularly as well as attending religious retreats. Pupils learn about different faiths in religious education and explore theories of evolution in science. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong, a good understanding of democracy and can confidently discuss different sexual choices as a result of a well-developed tutor programme.

- There is an extensive programme of activities that provides opportunities for pupils to learn beyond the classroom. There are clubs after school that include sport, art, drama and music and a detailed programme of speakers from universities, local businesses and the community. Recently, for example, pupils experienced visits from an engineer who is designing a supersonic car and well-known authors promoting reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The attendance of pupils continues to improve and is well above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability is also above the national average. The very few pupils who do not attend regularly receive targeted support to help them attend more regularly and leaders monitor these pupils very closely.
- Exclusions for poor behaviour remain very low and significantly below the national average. There have been no permanent exclusions in the school for nine years. The school's pastoral system is very effective at managing pupils who need extra support with specialist staff, short tailor-made programmes and by intervening earlier.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills as form representatives, sport team captains and by taking part in the school council. In the sixth form, learners can become ambassadors which involves the supervision of younger pupils at lunch and breaktimes as well as representing the school at formal events. Pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme to develop their leadership skills further.
- Pupils report that they feel safe, well cared for and know which staff to speak to if they have a concern. They are knowledgeable about the pitfalls of social media and how to stay safe. The school's surveys of pupils show that the vast majority are positive about the school and the work of the specialist staff who support them. Pupils are confident that if they raise a concern, staff deal with it promptly and effectively. The overwhelming majority of parents agree that their children are safe, happy and well looked after at school. One parent said of the school, 'I could not thank them enough for the support they have given to my family'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils report that low-level disruption in lessons is rare and that the new behaviour policy is used well by teachers.
- Behaviour in lessons is very good. Pupils listen attentively to teachers and each other. They encourage each other to do well, and this is especially evident with pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Pupils are confident in expressing their views and sharing their ideas even when they disagree with others. They show resilience when facing problems that they cannot immediately solve and the school's work on 'learning skills' is developing this further.
- Pupils move around the large site calmly and quickly. There is very little lateness to school or lessons. Pupils are polite and respectful, they hold doors open for visitors and greet their teachers warmly. At break and lunchtime, they enjoy their free time together and respond quickly to sixth form ambassadors or staff to resolve any rare problems that occur.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying, including homophobic and cyber bullying. They report that bullying is rare, and when it does take place it is tackled quickly by staff. Pupils from different backgrounds mingle together in the canteen. They are ferocious about tackling discrimination and are rightly proud of the school's inclusive ethos.
- Pupils are well presented and smart. They do not drop litter and make the most of the pleasant environment.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Pupils achieve well in English and achievement is improving in other subjects. In 2015, pupils' progress

was broadly in line with the national average in most subjects. Current performance information shows that the majority of pupils are making good progress in English and mathematics as a result of improvements in teaching and focused interventions to support pupils who need to catch up. Leaders have introduced a more robust system to check on how well different groups and cohorts are learning. They also use external partners effectively to check that the information about pupils' progress is more accurate. Leaders share achievement information with parents more regularly and parents value this.

- In 2015, the gap between the achievement overall of disadvantaged pupils and that of others nationally narrowed. The progress of disadvantaged pupils in English in 2015 equalled the national average for all pupils. However, there was a wider gap between the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics and others in 2015. Current information shows that gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 and other pupils in the school are closing rapidly as a result of a sharper focus by leaders on improving teaching and intervention for these groups. In other current cohorts, there is not a gap between the achievement of this group and others.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability achieve well. In 2015, these pupils made more progress than their peers in school as a result of very effective support and intervention. The current cohort are making better progress in English than their peers in both key stages and the gap is narrowing in mathematics. There is a strong track record of these pupils moving on to college, apprenticeships, university and employment as a result of the support from the leaders and teaching assistants in the specialist provision.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress and are well supported. In 2015, these pupils achieved GCSE grades above the national average for similar pupils nationally. Current information shows that pupils who speak English as an additional language are making good progress.
- The most-able pupils' progress was below the national average in 2015. Leaders have identified this as a priority and current information shows that the most-able pupils are making more progress in English and science in Key Stage 4 than previously. In mathematics, the achievement of the most able is improving but not rapidly enough.
- The school's approach to reading is increasingly effective in Key Stage 3. Pupils who received specific help with reading make accelerated progress. However, leaders recognise that they can sharpen their approach and further increase the profile of reading across the whole school so that pupils' reading skills develop further.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The leadership of the sixth form is effective. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have taken swift and appropriate action to improve outcomes for learners. As a result, standards for learners are rising and there is less variation between the performance of different subjects.
- Learners enter the sixth form with broadly average attainment and are able to choose from a wide range of subjects. In 2015, learners' progress was broadly in line with the national average for academic and vocational subjects. The progress of current learners is improving and these learners are now performing well in both academic and vocational subjects.
- There is a rising trend in the numbers of learners going on to university and this is especially true of those learners who are disadvantaged. In 2015, a significantly higher proportion of learners went to university than the national average. There was also an increase in the number of learners who attained places at Russell Group universities. This is as a result of leaders' effective work to improve learners' academic achievement.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to plan engaging lessons and assess learners' work accurately. Learners meet regularly with their staff mentor who reviews their progress and sets them targets to achieve by the following meeting. Leaders also work closely with parents to keep them informed about how well their child is doing. Learners are clear about their current achievement and know the next steps they need to take to move through their courses rapidly and remain within the sixth form.
- Learners who did not achieve a grade C at GCSE in English or mathematics are well supported. A good proportion achieve this, well above the national average for these learners. The vast majority of learners remain in the sixth form. The very few who leave go on to study an apprenticeship or take up employment.

- Learners experience an extensive enrichment programme that includes different sports, creative writing, learning a language and enterprise experience. The school has invested in the Extended Project Qualification as well as the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award to provide learners with alternative ways to develop key skills and aptitudes.
- The attendance of learners in the sixth form is good and they are punctual to lessons. Learners in the sixth form are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Programmes successfully cover issues such as e-safety, driving awareness and maintaining personal health, as well as more focused activities that give advice on applying for apprenticeships or universities.
- Learners in the sixth form are closely involved in the life of the school because they volunteer their time as student ambassadors and work with younger learners in different subject areas as additional experts or as sports leaders.

School details

Unique reference number	110517
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10002335

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,801
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	414
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Herbert
Headteacher	Michael Manley
Telephone number	01908 669735
Website	www.st-pauls.org.uk/
Email address	enquiries@st-pauls.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 December 2013

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- There is a wide range of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds in the school, the largest groups being White British and Black African.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is broadly in line with the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding given to schools for those known to be eligible for free school meals and for looked after children.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is significantly above the national average.
- The school has specialist provision in three departments that supports pupils who have hearing impairment, pupils with visual impairment and pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. There are currently 47 pupils in the specialist provision.
- The headteacher is chair of the Stephenson Trust, which includes the Stephenson Academy and the Bridge Academy.
- The school is a member of the Denbigh Teaching Alliance, a group of schools in Milton Keynes that provides initial teacher training and support for teachers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 51 lessons across all year groups and subjects. Some lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff. They took account of the 81 confidential questionnaires received from staff. They also met with governors and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic planning, minutes of meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, and records relating to pupils' safety and academic progress. They also scrutinised work done in lessons.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour before school, at break and lunchtime, around the school, in tutor periods and other activities.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally and formally. Inspectors took account of the 91 anonymous responses from parents on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as three letters from parents.

Inspection team

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Jonathan Whitcombe	Ofsted Inspector

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