

St Alban's Catholic High School

Digby Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3NJ

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teachers do not use information about pupils' performance well enough to support them to make good or better progress. Teaching requires improvement because the individual needs of pupils are not always reflected in lessons.
- The new assessment systems are not used consistently and need time to have an impact.
- The sixth form requires improvement. The progress of sixth-form students has declined. Leaders' analysis of how well students achieve has not always highlighted what needs to improve.
- Leaders have shown, more recently, a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form but it is too early to see significant improvement.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that systems and procedures to monitor and assess how well pupils are achieving are leading to improvement.
- Governors have not acted rapidly enough to address declining pupil outcomes. More recently, they have begun to understand what needs to happen if the school is to improve.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that funding to support disadvantaged pupils is sharply focused on addressing their individual needs.
- The progress of pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are most able has often been slower compared with what was expected both nationally and by the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Safeguarding is effective. There are clear systems and processes in the school to make sure that pupils are safe.
- Pupils are highly motivated, respectful and courteous. When given opportunities to share and reflect they do this well and show very positive attitudes.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are outstanding. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills both in pastoral and curriculum work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Hold teachers to account to ensure that all pupils make good progress by:
 - making sure that leaders at all levels understand their roles
 - being clear about accountability and responsibilities
 - evaluating the impact that teaching has on pupils' progress.
- Improve outcomes for pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are most able by:
 - clearly identifying those issues preventing them from learning successfully
 - matching funding to individual needs
 - holding teachers to account for the progress of these pupils
 - evaluating the impact of additional funding on individual pupils' progress
 - raising expectations about what can be achieved by the most able.
- In the sixth form improve outcomes for students by:
 - being clear about responsibilities and accountabilities of teachers, managers and leaders
 - embedding the new assessment and monitoring systems
 - using information about student performance to determine priorities for improvement
 - evaluating the impact of recent changes to raise attainment and accelerate the progress of students.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders do not manage information about how well some groups of pupils are doing effectively enough. Consequently, their outcomes are not improving quickly.
- Leaders have only recently made clear links between the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. Middle leaders do not always use these new systems to ensure that they improve the progress of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged and the most able.
- The impact of Year 7 catch-up funding is not clear. Interventions are not always evaluated to show how well pupils have progressed.
- The school improvement plan and self-evaluation demonstrate that leaders and governors are committed to addressing issues of underperformance and slow progress. However, there is not enough emphasis on how the pupil premium funding is linked to teaching, assessment and outcomes to show how this will make a difference for pupils.
- The curriculum policy alludes to a vision of offering provision that meets individuals' needs but the curriculum is broadly the same for all. The school offers a range of extra-curricular activities, but attendance is often reduced by transport issues as many children live some distance away from the school. In the pupils' survey undertaken as many as 40% of respondents said they never or occasionally attended activities. The school has organised late buses in the past, but this has been limited more recently to revision sessions after school.
- Middle leaders are positive about recent changes and have welcomed the opportunity to be involved in developing the new assessment policy which has just been implemented. There is a sense that collaboration in the development of this policy is galvanising staff and helping them to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of their teaching.
- Professional development programmes for staff reflect the school's priorities. Staff feedback suggests that this programme is meeting their needs. However, performance management targets lack precision, which results in teachers not being held to account robustly for the progress of pupils.
- Funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used in a wide range of interventions, activities and staffing. The impact is positive and is reflected in the improvements pupils make from their respective starting points.
- The executive headteacher manages the religious ethos of the school and works closely with the diocese. Two part-time secondments from another school increased the capacity of the leadership team last year and helped meet staffing needs.

Governance of the school

- Governors recognise that, in the past, they have not been sufficiently rigorous in questioning how well pupils were achieving or challenging leaders about plans for improvement.
- There have been changes in membership and leadership on the governing body and

increased capacity as a result. Governors have completed a skills audit, and are in the process of filling any vacancies to meet the needs of the group.

- Governors are determined to make a difference and to improve the outcomes for pupils and students. They recognise that systems for accountability and responsibility need to be improved. They are clear about their plans and ambitions for the school and understand their statutory responsibilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding in the school is very much a culture rather than being just systems and procedures.
- The curriculum and pastoral systems support keeping children safe. Students in the sixth form and pupils say they feel safe.
- The dedicated team overseeing the day-to-day work take appropriate and prompt actions when necessary and have routines to monitor and evaluate their work.
- The school has clear systems to regulate and monitor the employment of staff and can demonstrate through its single central record that checks are completed according to statutory requirements. Governors and the principal moderate and check these records.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers' planning for learning does not regularly take account of the needs of some groups of pupils. This slows their progress.
- Teachers do not routinely use information about pupils' performance to identify how to meet the needs of individuals. Strategies to support pupils who are disadvantaged are not clear enough. Teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve are too low.
- Pupils and staff spoke of a lack of consistency in assessment previously with different departments adopting different approaches. New assessment systems have very recently been introduced. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this initiative on pupils' outcomes.
- Teaching assistants support pupils well in lessons and help them to access the work. Collaboration with the class teacher provides them with clear information about how to support their pupils.
- Pupils demonstrate resilience when work is challenging. In a key stage 3 drama lesson, all groups of pupils in the class responded very well to a challenging project where they had to apply the work of a theatre practitioner to their group presentations.
- Teaching in English and drama is effective with more pupils currently making better progress than in other subjects. The school has strengthened the teaching in science and mathematics. However, it has yet to have a marked impact on progress over time.
- Questioning is a strong feature in some lessons and helps pupils demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

- The programme of professional development for staff has been developed to meet the needs of individuals as well as to address wider priorities. Staff explained how the training helped them to reflect and improve. This aspect of the school's work is led well. However, the quality of teaching is still uneven across all years and subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The work of leaders in this area is more effective than in other aspects of the school's work because pupils are highly motivated and work extremely well together. They respond maturely to the challenges set. They show confidence in sharing and discussing complex issues. Inspectors saw how comfortable and confident some pupils were in critiquing each other's work.
- A highly effective 'Preparing for Your Future' (PYF) programme is delivered across the whole school. It combines spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) activities with safeguarding, personal, social and health education and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. The programme is well respected and pupils recognise that the use of external speakers supports them in their understanding of often complex issues. Inspectors saw Year 7 pupils debating issues surrounding friendship, and Year 8 looked at poverty. Reflection days, where pupils spend the day with their form tutors, support pupils' spiritual development and contribute to strong SMSC provision.
- As part of the PYF work programme, pupils have many opportunities to learn how to stay safe, about relationships and how to deal with negative forms of behaviour such as bullying. Feedback from pupils was clear about how they are given time to develop and apply skills that will help them to live in modern Britain.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well as they move around the school. They were observed playing and socialising maturely at break and lunchtimes.
- Some pupils, parents and staff, in the surveys, questioned the consistency in the way behaviour was dealt with in the school. Expectations are clearly publicised, but they are not always followed consistently.
- Leaders and pastoral staff monitor behaviour closely. Internal referrals and fixed-term exclusions have reduced over time.
- Punctuality is good. Attendance in 2016 was better than the national average for most pupils. The numbers of pupils who are persistently absent is much lower than the national average.
- Attendance is monitored very closely, and incentives such as 'in to win' are used to reward those who improve and attend regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Historically, pupils who are disadvantaged have not achieved as well as the school had hoped for in terms of the targets they set. They do not achieve as well as other pupils nationally. The school has undertaken considerable analysis to identify reasons for the significant slowing in progress in 2016. The school's analysis of 2017 unvalidated results indicates that outcomes for pupils who are disadvantaged have improved.
- Most-able pupils' progress was below the national average in 2016. The school has been tracking how current most-able pupils are progressing and identified that some are not making as much progress as they had expected. This has been included as an area for development in their improvement plan.
- Progress in English and mathematics was below expectations in 2016 but the provisional attainment information suggests this will be more positive in 2017. Currently, pupils are progressing at least in line with the school's expectations in these subjects.
- Attainment of pupils overall has been largely in line with national averages but this hides the fact that many pupils started their education at the school with above-average prior attainment and have therefore not made such good progress.
- Information about the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in 2017 indicates that they are making similar steady progress to that made in 2016. Progress is no better than this because insufficient attention is paid to ensuring that all teachers are held to account for the progress of this group.
- Some pupils said that careers information advice and guidance did not help them make decisions about their options choices.
- Progress in English, mathematics and science is accelerating as the impact of improved teaching becomes apparent.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Leaders are addressing the decline in students' outcomes with the recent introduction of a target setting and monitoring system. This is not fully implemented and a clear understanding of responsibilities and accountabilities is lacking. In 2017, some subjects such as English and French have improved outcomes.
- Outcomes are variable with a decline in some subjects' achievements over time and improvements in others. Overall, progress information provided by the school shows a declining trend over the last three years. Student outcomes require improvement because students do not achieve as well as they should.
- The new leadership team in the sixth form monitors the quality of teaching, learning and assessment more closely. Teachers do not routinely use information about pupils' performance to identify how to meet the needs of individuals.
- The school offers a broadly academic A-level programme. A one-year course is available for those who wish to improve their GCSE outcomes. The current curriculum has not been reviewed recently to determine its suitability for students. There was a wide range of prior attainment among those studying A level in previous years which

resulted in some students not following programmes of study suitable to their needs.

- Students can undertake work experience and this is related to their overall career aspirations. Compared with national averages, the school is above average in retaining students for the duration of their course.
- Study programmes are developed alongside careers guidance work. A very small number of students said that they were not able to study their preferred course, but this was because of insufficient take-up.
- Students feel safe and can explain how they not only learn about safeguarding and personal safety skills, but that they also get opportunities to debate issues that will support them when they move on from school.
- There is strong social, moral, spiritual and cultural work that was seen in lessons and opportunities where students could explore these concepts. In a Year 13 modern foreign language lesson, students showed how they could debate the concept of diversity and show empathy for differing viewpoints.

School details

Unique reference number	137849
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10023501

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 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	988
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	153
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David Verney
Principal	Colin Walker
Telephone number	01473 726178
Website	www.st-albans.suffolk.sch.uk
Email address	general@st-albans.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- St Albans Catholic High School is an average-sized secondary school. It is an academy converter with a Roman Catholic religious character.

- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who have an education, health and care plan is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is below the national average.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils attending alternative off-site provision.
- The school receives support from an executive headteacher and the Diocese of East Anglia. There have been two recent secondments from another school in a neighbouring diocese.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence about the progress that pupils make over their time at school and the quality of teaching and learning. They observed learning across a range of subjects and year groups. Some observations were done jointly with senior leaders.
- Pupils' work was scrutinised in lessons, and inspectors spoke to pupils about their work and experience at the school.
- A range of school documentation was reviewed including assessment information, the school's own evaluation of its performance and the plans for improvement. Information relating to the quality of teaching was considered. The school's policies and procedures were scrutinised including those relating to safeguarding.
- Meetings took place with governors, the executive headteacher, the principal, the diocese director of schools, senior and middle leaders and those teachers who had recently started working in the profession.
- Inspectors considered 69 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including free-text comments. They also reviewed 34 responses from staff and 36 from pupils to the online Ofsted surveys. Additionally, governors provided inspectors with the findings of their own survey to which 74 members of staff had responded.

Inspection team

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David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
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Shân Oswald	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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