

# St John's School & Sixth Form College – A Catholic Academy

Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL14 6JT

## Inspection dates

29–30 January 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders are ambitious for the pupils who attend the school. They have a clear understanding of the school's current strengths and its weaknesses. They have the capacity to improve the school further.
- Leaders, supported by governors, have established a positive environment in which pupils can flourish. The school's ethos is embodied in leaders' provision for pupils' personal development and welfare, which is a strength of the school.
- Outcomes in 2018 dipped from where they had been in 2016 and 2017, in mathematics and science and for the disadvantaged and most-able pupils. Current pupils are making stronger progress.
- Teaching, learning and assessment is effective in enabling most pupils to make good progress. Teachers use planning to good effect most of the time. Teachers' use of tasks usually stretch and challenge pupils of different abilities. However, this is not consistently the case.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, but the key stage 4 curriculum is more developed than key stage 3. Rightly, leaders are to turn their attention to a root and branch review of the curriculum, especially key stage 3, so that it provides the necessary underpinning of pupils' knowledge before the start of key stage 4.
- The leadership of the 16–19 study programmes is effective. Students' progress is in line with national averages and their personal development is well supported. The foundations are in place for outcomes to strengthen further.

## Full report

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

- Continue to further strengthen pupils' outcomes, including the disadvantaged and the most able, by:
  - ensuring that teachers' use of questions is consistently effective in deepening pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding
  - consistently setting work that is pitched at the right level to stretch pupils of all abilities
  - maintaining and extending the recent improvements in the quality of leadership and teaching in mathematics and science.
- Quickly conduct the planned curriculum review, to strengthen the key stage 3 curriculum in particular, so that pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are deepened in readiness for key stage 4.
- Build on the secure foundations in the sixth form and improve outcomes further, by ensuring that all subject outcomes are quickly brought up to the standard of the strongest subject outcomes.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders have been effective in instilling an ambitious, aspirational culture. Pupils are engaged in their learning with positive attitudes the majority of the time, supported by motivated and skilled teachers.
- While leaders are disappointed with some aspects of pupils' outcomes in 2018, they have responded with alacrity to address those areas requiring attention. For example, following a period of recent substantial turbulence in the staffing of mathematics and science, leaders have acted to secure staffing stability in those subject areas.
- In addition, they have established partnerships of external support with the local authority and the diocesan family of schools in order to provide expertise and guidance for subject leaders and teachers. This has been effective in further strengthening the skills of subject leaders, especially in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. As a result, following the blip in 2018, pupils' outcomes are improving in these areas.
- Leaders have taken effective action to develop the skills of teachers across the curriculum through a carefully considered programme of professional development. Teachers at a variety of career points, including the newly and recently qualified, are motivated as a result of their professional development. Morale across the staff team is high.
- Leaders' strengthening of their processes for quality assuring the standard of teaching, learning and assessment has led to good pupil progress across most subjects and years. As a result of focused quality assurance checks on the progress of pupils of different abilities and needs, leaders have a clear picture of current strengths and relative weaknesses. They have acted swiftly to improve their system for monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress, drawing on the support of diocesan schools, so that its accuracy and reliability is strengthened.
- Leaders have made effective use of the Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy. Pupils who have the most need of extra help with their reading and mathematics are identified early in Year 7 and provided with additional support. Leaders' information indicates that as a result of these interventions, pupils' reading skills have improved. Across subjects, the effect of leaders' focus on literacy is that pupils are articulate and confident when sharing their ideas in class and when reading aloud.
- After a period of years in which disadvantaged pupils' progress was in the top 40% of schools nationally, leaders have responded quickly to the dip in 2018. Leaders have put a new plan for the use of funding for the pupil premium in place. It is built on a thorough review of what has worked recently, and what has not, and appropriate research findings from reputable sources. Inspection evidence indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their starting points.
- The school's curriculum is a broad and balanced one, which provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to succeed and make good progress. Leaders are not

complacent, however. They know that much of their recent focus has been on developing the curriculum at key stage 4, with key stage 3 not as far along the road. However, a major curriculum review is planned, which leaders intend to use as the opportunity to create and launch their 'five-year curriculum'.

- A rich and varied wider curriculum to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare them for life in modern Britain is in place. There is a particular focus on the arts, with numerous community-inspired projects underway. For instance, the 'Heartlands' project has inspired many pupils to study their community's heritage in depth. The 'postcard' project, together with visits to museums and other culturally important sites in the locality, has provided pupils with a keener understanding of the moral and cultural impact of war.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors are committed to the achievement and safeguarding of pupils. They are united in their collective vision that pupils are entitled to a high-quality education, within the values of the school's Catholic character.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know what actions have been taken to address areas for improvement. Minutes of governors' meetings indicate that they ask pertinent questions of leaders, to hold them to account for the school's performance.
- While governors have a secure grasp of where there are improvements to be made, they are a little generous in their assessment of how well the school has performed over time. Their evaluation of current performance is an accurate one, however, and provides them with a sound basis from which to challenge leaders further.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong safeguarding culture in the school.
- Leaders' checks on the suitability of staff to work in the school are strong and meet legal requirements. Staff are trained in the appropriate aspects of keeping children safe. Staff know how to report worries or concerns. While all staff spoken to by inspectors understood their safeguarding responsibilities and that all concerns must be passed on, leaders need to ensure that everyone follows the school's policy on how such concerns should be reported.
- Leaders' processes for reporting concerns to external agencies, such as the local authority, are thorough. Records are detailed and show leaders' timely actions.
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare. They said that they know of a trusted adult in school they would tell should they be worried about bullying, or if anything else was worrying them. Leaders routinely record reports of bullying. Bullying instances are relatively few in number, but all reports are investigated and appropriate action taken where required.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching across a wide range of subjects and year groups is effective in enabling pupils to make strong progress. For the majority of the time, teachers set work which is pitched at the right level for pupils at different starting points. As a result, pupils are typically challenged and stretched in their learning. This is especially evident in English, mathematics and science.
- Leaders' high aspirations for pupils' achievement is reflected in teachers' planning. Most of the time, this results in learning which pushes pupils to do as well as they can. Where teachers' aspirations of what pupils can achieve are at their highest, teachers' very strong subject knowledge is put to effective use. For example, technical, subject-specific terminology is taught so that pupils can access examination mark schemes at the top level.
- Teachers usually make very effective use of questions to check pupils' understanding. Frequently, teachers go on to ask more probing questions, requiring pupils to think more deeply about their knowledge and understanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are typically very strong, so pupils are willing to attempt answers which they know might be wrong, or only partially correct, to try to grasp important points fully. On these occasions, teachers support and reassure pupils as they reach for new knowledge. It is not unusual to see pupils challenging one another's answers, such is the collaborative atmosphere in classrooms most of the time. Occasionally, teachers' questioning is less probing and challenging, so pupils' understanding is sometimes not as stretched as at other times.
- Pupils are provided with ample opportunities to improve their work the majority of the time. Most of the pupils spoken to by inspectors had a sound awareness of their target grades, their current levels and what they need to do to improve. Usually, pupils can state subject-specific skills they need to apply so that they get better marks, rather than generalised and broad targets like 'revise more'. This clarity of guidance from teachers, plus the opportunities for pupils to act on it, is supporting pupils to make strong gains in their learning across the curriculum.
- Teaching is typically committed, energetic and enthusiastic. This is evident across the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, it is also evident in a wide range of other subjects, including physical education, music, art and drama. Allied with secure subject knowledge and effective planning, such a positive approach to the practice of teaching is supporting pupils in making strong progress.
- Most of the time, teachers make sure that they have checked that all pupils have grasped the necessary learning before moving on to the next stage of the lesson. Sometimes, teachers do not do so and move on while a few pupils are still processing the previous information. As a result, at times, some pupils' progress is not as strong.
- Leaders have introduced a literacy policy with the intention of supporting pupils' reading, writing and speaking across the curriculum. Often, pupils are provided with opportunities to learn the spelling of important subject vocabulary, or to correct errors in spelling and grammar. Sometimes, the application of the policy is more variable and so pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are occasionally not as developed as

they could be.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils' attitudes to their own learning are strong, with most pupils, most of the time, keen to get on and make progress. The standard of presentation in most pupils' books is good. The large majority of pupils are proud of their work and were eager to show their books to inspectors.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils are taught how to be safe. In addition to being taught about keeping safe when online, pupils have received education about matters such as water safety and cold-water shock, the dangers of alcohol, racism and homophobia. Pupils are aware of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils are well supported in their emotional well-being. Leaders have organised support for pupils' mental health, for example. They have set up 'conflict resolution' groups to address fall-outs between pupils. As a result, leaders' records indicate a reduction in the number of reported conflicts.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Almost all of the time, pupils' conduct in lessons is good. Pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and to their classmates. As a result of well-established standards of behaviour, relationships between staff and pupils are strong. This enables pupils to learn and make good progress in an atmosphere of purposeful cooperation. Very occasionally, a few pupils are chatty and do not listen as attentively as they should.
- During the inspection, pupils' conduct between lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime, was mostly respectful and considerate of others. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school. A small number of younger pupils, though, said that there is occasional pushing and shoving by older boys, some of which was seen by inspectors.
- Leaders have got a firm handle on pupils' attendance at school. Consequently, rates of attendance are above the national average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is below than the national average.
- The use of fixed-term exclusion is below the national average, as is the frequency of repeat exclusions. From an already low base, the rate of fixed-term exclusion during 2017/18 reduced further.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Outcomes across a range of subjects in 2016 and 2017 were in line with the national average. In 2018, however, pupils' progress overall was below the national average. In particular, pupils made less progress than their peers nationally in mathematics and

science. Disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils made less progress than the national averages.

- However, in 2018 in English, humanities, modern foreign languages and the 'open' suite of subjects (all subjects other than English, mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages), progress was in line with the national averages. The least able pupils and middle-attaining pupils made progress in line with the national averages.
- The progress of pupils currently in the school is good across a range of subjects and years. After the dip in 2018, pupils' progress in mathematics and science is improving strongly. Effective leadership, teachers' planning and stronger monitoring of the quality of teaching are driving this improvement.
- Similarly, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most able is improving strongly across a range of subjects and years, including mathematics and science. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are making good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders' actions have ensured that pupils make positive next steps after they finish Year 11. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are not in education, employment or training is 0%, well above the national figure.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- Leaders have a very clear focus on students' progress and an obvious determination for further improvement. Leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. To a very large extent, this is informed by a comprehensive quality assurance system, which provides leaders with an accurate picture of how things are going. Where necessary, leaders are able to intervene and support students who are at risk of falling behind.
- For the Year 13 students who completed their courses at the end of the academic year 2017/18, outcomes were in line with the national average. Outcomes for 'academic' and for 'vocational' A levels were both in line with the national averages. Students who needed to re-take GCSE English and/or mathematics performed better in 2017/18 than the national figure. Leaders' analysis shows that a large proportion of subjects performed better in 2018 than in 2017. A small number of subjects, while broadly average in outcomes, did relatively less well than the majority.
- Inspection evidence shows very clearly that most current sixth-form students are making good progress from their starting points, across a range of subjects. This includes both academic and vocational subjects.
- Students mostly make good progress because the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form is typically good. Teachers' planning is usually effective in stretching most students to achieve. Indeed, the students spoken to by inspectors said that, typically, every lesson presents stretch and challenge to them, pitched at the right level.
- Strong careers education, information, advice and guidance is effective in ensuring that the proportion of students who are retained from the end of Year 12 into Year 13 is

high. To a substantial degree, this is because the quality of careers guidance when the students are in Year 11 is effective at making sure they begin the sixth form on the right courses. Very few students left Year 12 in 2017/18. Those who did were all guided and supported onto appropriate courses elsewhere. Of the current Year 13, no students have left the sixth form, with all expected to complete their courses and progress to appropriate destinations. A growing number of students now apply to university, with an increasing number securing places at the most competitive institutions, including Cambridge.

- Students benefit from a broad wider curriculum, so that their personal development is nurtured effectively. Students are mostly committed to improving their own performance as learners, as a result of leaders' focus on personal aspiration. Additionally, through their 'pastoral' lessons, students learn about e-safety, British values and the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Rates of attendance are strong and close to those of the main school. Leaders' effective systems and expectations of students means that there are no unauthorised absences and no truancy. Standards of behaviour are high.
- Work experience forms an integral part of students' study programmes. All students complete a placement during Year 12, with a close match to career aspirations a necessity. Students in Year 13 attest to the value of these placements in their wider, personal development and preparedness for life after the sixth form.

## School details

Unique reference number	137702
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10087311

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 Comprehensive
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	1381
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	220
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Anthony Byrne
Headteacher	Lisa Byron
Telephone number	01388603246
Website	<a href="http://www.stjohnsrc.org.uk">www.stjohnsrc.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:staff@stjohnsrc.org.uk">staff@stjohnsrc.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school is a larger than average-sized school. It converted to an academy in December 2011 and joined the Romero Catholic Education Trust in December 2016. Responsibility for governance rests with the trust board.
- St John's School and Sixth Form – A Catholic Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 December 2011. When its predecessor school, St John's Catholic School and Sixth Form Centre, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be

outstanding overall.

- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who receive support for their SEND.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is below the national average.
- The school has links with several providers of alternative education: 5Palms, Haggrid, Education Plus, DELTA and Open Arms.
- Leaders have brokered support from Durham local authority to assist them with the development of middle leaders, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. They also draw on the support of schools within the Hexham and Newcastle Catholic Diocese in the development of systems for assessing pupils' progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 46 lessons. At times, inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders. During these visits, inspectors spoke with pupils and students about their opinions and experiences of school and looked at their work.
- Four scrutinies of pupils' and students' books and folders were carried out, covering a wide range of years, subjects and abilities.
- Meetings were held with three groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4. An inspector met with a group of students from the sixth form. In addition, inspectors spoke with pupils and students around the site at different times of the school day.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher. They also met senior leaders with responsibility for: safeguarding; teaching, learning and assessment; personal development, behaviour and welfare, including attendance and bullying; careers education, information, advice and guidance; the pupil premium funding; pupils' literacy; the sixth form and the curriculum. Inspectors also met with: trust board members and governors; a group of middle leaders; a group of teachers at different career points, including newly and recently qualified teachers and a group of non-teachers.
- An inspector met the local authority education development partner for the school and a representative of the Catholic diocese.
- An inspector spoke on the telephone with two of the providers of alternative education used by the school.
- Inspectors considered a range of school documents. These included: records of checks undertaken on the suitability of staff to work in the school; records of child protection cases and other safeguarding information; information about pupils' attendance and behaviour; bullying logs; pupils' progress information; minutes of governors' meetings and governors' visits to school; curriculum schemes of work, including pupils' personal development and welfare; support for pupils' literacy; information about pupils' next steps after Year 11 and Year 13 and records of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Inspectors took into account the 115 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View.

## Inspection team

Steve Shaw, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Debbie Redshaw	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Horn	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Booth	Ofsted Inspector
Carl Sugden	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Gammack	Ofsted Inspector

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