

Inspection of a good school: St Leonard's Catholic School

North End, Durham DH1 4NG

Inspection dates:

9–10 October 2019

Outcome

St Leonard's Catholic School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Leonard's Catholic School is friendly and supportive. The younger pupils say that older pupils and sixth-form students make them feel welcome. Pupils say that they like the tutor groups. They also enjoy the friendly competition generated by the house system. The school's Catholic faith is also important. There are daily prayers and weekly liturgies. Pupils think that this helps to create a strong sense of community. Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and respectful.

The school has well-established, traditional values. The school is academic. Most teachers have high expectations. This means most pupils work hard and try their best. Many pupils stay on into the sixth form. Numbers going on to university are high.

The sense of faith and strength of relationships means pupils behave well. If pupils do misbehave, there is an expectation that they apologise and put things right. As a result, few pupils get excluded. In tutor time, pupils discuss issues such as bullying. This means they understand how harmful it is. Pupils say it does happen sometimes. It tends to be unkind comments made online. The pupils trust adults in the school to sort it out if they report it.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Many pupils join St Leonard's Catholic School having done well at primary school. Leaders know this and have an ambitious academic curriculum in place. In key stage 3, pupils cover all national curriculum content. In key stage 4, over 80% of pupils study the suite of subjects that make up the English baccalaureate. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get excellent help. Over half of pupils go into the sixth form. Throughout the school, teachers hold high academic expectations. Most sixth-form students take three A levels. A few combine A levels with vocational courses.

The progress pupils make varies across subjects. They do well in many subjects, including English, science and art. But they do less well in mathematics and geography. The

trustees have concerns about this. They have challenged the new headteacher to address it. Although only in charge for a few weeks, he has quickly set about the task. He is changing the school timetable to give teachers more time to plan their lessons. Mathematics will get more time and smaller classes. The headteacher has also created more time for teachers to share what is working well.

In English, science and art, subject leaders have thought hard about the order they teach subject knowledge. Over time, pupils build up detailed understanding. Many develop a deep interest and can discuss the finer points of literature or painting in a mature way. In subjects that do less well, some improvements have been made to curriculum planning. But these changes have not gone far enough. In mathematics, plans are not clear about what pupils should be able to do at the end of each topic. Plans do not show where and when pupils should practise solving problems. This means that pupils do not get enough practice in some essential skills.

Disadvantaged pupils need to do better. In the past, leaders have used the pupil premium to help disadvantaged pupils go on trips or to have music tuition. But this approach has not prevented them from falling behind other pupils. The new headteacher has recognised this and has quickly begun to change how the pupil premium is used.

The school provides a vast array of extra-curricular activities. There are numerous clubs available. Many pupils choose to support charities or get involved in the local community. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their interest in the arts or sport. Throughout the day, pupils behave respectfully towards one another. It is rare for disruption in lessons to occur through poor behaviour.

The trustees and new headteacher hold an accurate view of the school's performance. They have identified the weaknesses that need to be sorted out. Leaders take decisions in the best interest of pupils. The new headteacher has already done much to reduce the workload faced by his staff.

In the sixth form, students make average progress. They are conscientious and keep their work well organised. Over time, they build up a good level of understanding. Many students go on to university. A good proportion of pupils secure places in prestigious universities. There is excellent support for students with university applications. But some students feel they need more information about apprenticeships. There are rich opportunities for students' personal development. Many choose to help younger pupils with their studies. Teachers help students to start up societies. This helps them to meet like-minded students and pursue their interests. For example, students interested in medicine and engineering often meet up. This helps them to be well prepared for future study at university.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are vigilant. They make detailed checks on all adults who work in the school. Leaders provide the staff with excellent training. They make good use of local intelligence

from the police. This ensures that the staff identify pupils at risk. Procedures for reporting concerns are well understood and managed. Leaders keep a watchful eye on pupils who are more vulnerable. Where necessary, leaders work with social care. They push hard to resolve concerns and keep detailed records of the actions they take. Pastoral staff provide good support. Vulnerable pupils get help from the school's counselling service. Pupils who find school more challenging are looked after well in the nurture classes.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Although pupils finish key stage 4 with standards of attainment above the national average, their progress varies across subjects. In some subjects, pupils have not made the progress they should. Published performance information shows this has been the case for several years. Pupils limited progress in mathematics stems from a lack of rigorous planning. This undermines the precision of teaching, which prevents pupils from securing the skills to confidently apply their mathematical knowledge. Leaders should intervene in departments where curriculum planning is weaker. They should support subject leaders to refine their planning, drawing on the strong practice elsewhere in the school.
- Around 15% of pupils in the school are from disadvantaged backgrounds. In recent years, these pupils have finished key stage 4 having made less progress than they should. As a result, only around 6% of disadvantaged pupils go into the sixth form. Therefore, the school's use of the pupil premium has not done enough to overcome the barriers of disadvantage. Leaders should review how the pupil premium is used and ensure that disadvantaged pupils get more personalised help so that they do not fall behind other pupils academically.
- Leaders should ensure careers guidance includes good information about how to access apprenticeships.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Leonard's RC VA Comprehensive School, to be good in May 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	143583
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10110694
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1390
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	235
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Allan Horsburgh
Headteacher	Christopher Hammill
Website	www.st-leonards.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed by the board of trustees in December 2018. He took up post in September 2019. One of his deputies returned to the school in September after a year out of the school on secondment.
- St Leonard's Catholic School converted to become an academy school on 1 November 2016. When its predecessor school, St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good overall.
- The school provides a Catholic education.
- The school is within the Durham Martyrs Multi-Academy Trust. Responsibility for the school rests with the board of trustees.
- The school currently places five pupils in alternative provision. One pupil attends the Beacon of Light on a full-time basis. Four pupils attend Pinnacle Training North East on a part-time basis.

Information about this inspection

- We met the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. We also spoke with a representative of the diocese on the telephone.
- We focused on the quality of the curriculum in mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography and art. Inspectors met the curriculum leader of each subject, visited lessons, talked to pupils, looked at a sample of books and talked to subject teachers.
- We also met curriculum leaders from other subjects, including English, science and religious education. We looked at their curriculum planning. The inspection team also looked at other information about behaviour, extra-curricular activities and wider enrichment events.
- We met the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). We looked at several support plans together and visited the school's nurture class.
- We walked around the school at different times of the day to check on punctuality, behaviour and conduct. During these times, we held informal discussions with pupils. We also spoke to different members of staff, including kitchen staff, a teaching assistant and teachers new to the profession.
- We looked at the checks that the school makes on adults who work in the school. We talked to senior leaders responsible for safeguarding and looked at records of the actions they have taken to protect pupils at risk. We spoke to pupils to gauge how safe they felt and to what extent they know how to keep themselves safe. We also checked whether members of staff understand and abide by the school's safeguarding policy.

Inspection team

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