

# Inspection of a good school: Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

Colney Heath Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 0TT

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Inspection dates: 19 and 20 October 2021

## **Outcome**

Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a section 5 inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at Nicholas Breakspear School (NBS) receive a high-quality education. From the very beginning of their time at the school, they learn what they need to be successful in their future lives. In all subjects, pupils benefit from the high aspirations of leaders for them to achieve well.

Pupils share the same passion for their school as the leaders, staff, and parents and carers. Pupils talk with pride about the NBS values to 'nurture, believe, succeed'. Pupils consistently demonstrate these values in the way they act and learn.

Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They are very committed to their learning. Pupils engage in class debate with fervour but consideration for their peers.

Pupils show high levels of respect for each other. They celebrate differences and learn to understand those from other backgrounds. Pupils say that there is very little bullying. When pupils do have concerns, leaders make it easy to report these. As a result, pupils feel safe, and any issues that occur are resolved quickly.

There are many opportunities for pupils to develop themselves personally. Pupils at NBS play an active role in the school. Older pupils successfully help younger ones with their well-being.

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

The curriculum at NBS is aspirational. Leaders ensure that from the start of key stage 3, pupils study a wide and challenging range of topics to prepare them for future learning and work. For example, in science, they learn about astrophysics. Leaders are ambitious

for a high proportion of pupils in key stage 4 to have equal opportunity to study the more challenging subjects. This is because leaders aspire for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to have the knowledge they will need to apply for the best universities or to be successful in securing the best jobs.

Leaders' ambition is also shown in how they have put in place a coherently planned curriculum. Teachers share this ambition, and in all subjects they identify the knowledge pupils should learn. What pupils learn builds on their prior knowledge. Teachers then revisit this so that pupils understand it and use it confidently in complex tasks. Pupils talk with maturity about how what they learn applies in other situations. For example, Year 9 pupils describe how Gandhi's actions provide a model of resilience and respect for themselves but also for leaders in society today.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. For example, in the sixth form, teachers show expertise in correcting students' misunderstandings. Leaders ensure that teachers continue to develop their skills. On the rare occasions that non-specialists teach a subject, they get the training and support they need.

Pupils with SEND benefit from the same high aspirations as other pupils. Leaders carefully manage the transition of these pupils from primary school. Leaders identify and review their needs skilfully. Leaders train staff effectively so they are able to support pupils with SEND effectively. Leaders go above and beyond to ensure that these pupils receive the same learning as their peers and understand it. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve exceptionally well.

Leaders have high expectations that all pupils can read fluently so they have the skills to be successful in the school and beyond. The weakest readers in Years 7 and 8 receive skilled and effective support. Because of this, their reading improves quickly, and they understand their learning better. Leaders help pupils in all year groups to read texts that broaden their knowledge about the different subjects they study.

Leaders ensure that pupils attend well. When pupils leave the school, including mid-year, leaders make sure that all appropriate information is shared so that they know pupils are moving smoothly on to a positive destination.

Staff say that leaders consider their well-being. Leaders give staff opportunities to voice concerns and contribute to plans. Because of this, leaders respond quickly to help staff with any workload issues.

Governors are passionate about improving the school. Governors are knowledgeable both about their roles, and the school. They support leaders to think more strategically about their long-term plans for the school. Governors monitor leaders' work on the curriculum closely. They have continued this during the pandemic. The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust (the trust) works effectively with governors to support leaders. Leaders give support to other school leaders within the trust.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. Leaders train staff thoroughly in how to keep pupils safe. Leaders make sure that important information is shared appropriately. They keep detailed records of cases. Referrals to agencies, when needed, are prompt.

Leaders find out about the experiences of pupils so that they are able to support them more effectively. Leaders include pupils in their decision-making when applying safeguarding processes.

The curriculum contains content that ensures that pupils gain the knowledge about how to stay safe online. Pupils also develop understanding about how to keep themselves safe in various contexts and situations.

## 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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2016.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137938
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10199877
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of students in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	971
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	100
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Patrick Leeson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Declan Linnane
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.nbs.herts.sch.uk">www.nbs.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	22 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The chief executive officer of the trust was appointed in April 2021.
- The proportion of pupils on free school meals is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is higher than average.
- Slightly less than half of the cohort is from a White British background.
- The number of pupils at the school who have education, health and care plans has increased in recent years.
- The school has had pupil movement that is higher than average in recent years, in terms of pupils either leaving or joining during the school year.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

- The school's religious education and collective worship were last inspected by the Westminster Diocese under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 on 5 and 6 May 2016.

## Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other leaders, staff, pupils and those responsible for governance.
- English, science, history and mathematics were considered in detail to evaluate the quality of education. Inspectors carried out meetings with subject leaders, and undertook lesson visits and discussions with staff and pupils. They also looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation form, the school development plan, curriculum plans and school policies.
- Inspectors reviewed the 144 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 109 free-text responses from parents. They also considered the 57 responses to the staff survey and the 219 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Damian Loneragan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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