

Inspection of St Leonard's Catholic School

North End, Durham DH1 4NG

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 January 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The experiences that pupils have at St Leonard's are contrasting. Most attend regularly, enjoy learning and have good relationships with their teachers. However, some pupils, notably those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), encounter less consistency. Their needs are not fully identified and understood, and as a result, the support in place for them lacks precision.

The school environment is calm and controlled. Incidents of poor behaviour are infrequent. Within lessons, pupils are engaged and focused. Teachers do not accept passivity from pupils. Teachers are knowledgeable and committed. Despite having lacked direction from leaders of SEND, learning support assistants also enhance pupils' learning.

Pupils feel safe. They do not think that bullying is a problem. When it happens, they know whom to talk to and trust that it will be sorted out quickly. This is in line with school records. Pupils wear their uniform with pride. They respect each other, and the school surroundings. Older pupils are involved in the school's delivery of important topics, such as those linked to equality and diversity.

Pupils have access to a wide range of subjects and extra-curricular activities. However, it is not clear to what extent all pupils are benefiting from these opportunities.

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

There are many strengths to this school. Many pupils have a seamless experience here. However, in some respects, leaders' effectiveness in driving whole-school improvement has been inconsistent and has lacked sufficient rigour and coherence. This has not been helped by the high levels of staff turnover that leaders have had to manage.

Leaders have identified some of the weaknesses in the school and worked to address these. However, some aspects of strategic oversight are vague. Improving some areas, such as the school's provision for pupils with SEND, has not been appropriately prioritised by leaders. Although improving, the approach for supporting disadvantaged pupils has not always been cohesive. School policies have not always been reviewed regularly. Until recently, those with responsibility for governance have not challenged leaders on matters such as these. They have not fully evaluated these aspects of the school. Their knowledge of current priorities for school improvement varies.

The new chair of governors and colleagues from the multi-academy trust (MAT) are now taking a more active role in supporting leaders with school improvement. One stakeholder described the school as 'a sleeping giant', a comment that resonated with the inspection team, who recognise the school's capacity to improve. Staff are

fully committed to the school and its leaders. Staff say that leaders are very mindful of their well-being and workload. They enjoy working at the school.

The curriculum structure is well thought through, including in the sixth form. Pupils access a wide range of challenging subjects in all year groups. Pupils benefit from well-sequenced lessons, delivered by passionate and committed teachers. Low-level poor behaviour is not tolerated by staff, and consequently lessons have a real sense of purpose. Leaders have high academic ambitions for pupils, including those students in the sixth form.

Pupils have a good understanding of what they have been taught. Most pupils have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their next stage of education, employment or training. This is less so for pupils with SEND. In addition, the small number of pupils who are not confident readers are not supported as effectively as they could be.

Plans to deliver personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) have recently been updated. Pupils receive important lessons about growing up in modern Britain. They are taught about the risks they may face in life. Pupils are now taught about the importance of healthy relationships, and diversity and equality. Sixth-form students have opportunities to be involved in the delivery of this to younger pupils. Leaders have not, however, consulted with parents and carers prior to the teaching of a new relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum.

More widely, leaders have not engaged with parents as actively or effectively as they might when taking steps to improve the school. This has led to significant frustration in some quarters. Leaders do not regularly canvass opinions, and methods of communication between home and school are sometimes fragmented. It does not help that some information on the school website is out of date.

Leaders have not always involved parents in the statutory reviews of pupils with more complex needs. Owing to both internal and external factors, there have also been a series of delays with many of these reviews. As a result, some of the information that the school holds on these pupils is out of date, and appropriate adaptations to school life are not always being made. A new special educational needs coordinator, very recently appointed, has plans to address these shortcomings. Nevertheless, these shortcomings are a legitimate concern for some parents.

The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. However, some older pupils want even more information on the options open to them after life at school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

School leaders have recently been supported by the new chair of governors and colleagues from the MAT to improve operating procedures in order to ensure that these are more effective. These improvements include ensuring that procedures are followed, without ambiguity, when reporting concerns and seeking advice.

Records show that leaders undertake all statutory checks on new members of staff. All staff are clear about the importance of safeguarding. They receive regular training. They know the signs to be aware of when children may need support. Pupils spoken to also told us that they felt safe. They know whom to go to if they have concerns. They told us that they are confident they would be listened to, and that their concerns would be addressed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is a lack of clarity about priorities for school improvement. Leaders do not always focus on the areas of school that need most attention. Although leaders' attention has recently focused on responding to the pandemic, it is currently unclear who is responsible for leading some important initiatives. Work must commence to ensure that all leaders, and those responsible for governance, understand their respective roles and perform these in a way that enhances the effectiveness of the school, ensuring that statutory duties are fulfilled.
- Some aspects of school improvement lack effective oversight and monitoring. This is particularly the case with the provision for pupils with SEND. As a result, some pupils are not getting the support to which they are entitled. Leaders and those responsible for governance must embed improvements in their quality assurance work, not least linked to the provision for pupils with SEND.
- The programme to support pupils who struggle to read lacks precision. Some pupils are not receiving the support they need in order to become confident readers. Leaders must review the way in which pupils are identified for this help, monitor the effectiveness of the support, and ensure that those delivering this support are appropriately trained.
- Parents are not always fully involved in their child's experiences at school. The school has not consulted with parents about its new RSE curriculum. Parents of pupils with SEND have varying levels of involvement in their child's regular reviews. Some parents find it difficult to get the answers to the questions they raise when they contact the school. Leaders must engage more effectively with parents and the wider community in a way that cohesively supports pupils' education.

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

Unique reference number	143583
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10216642
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,386
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	240
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of board of trustees	Martin Gannon
Chair of governing body	James Cunningham
Headteacher	Christopher Hammill
Website	www.st-leonards.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 and 10 October 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Leonard’s Catholic School joined the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust on 1 April 2020.
- The new chair of governors took up post during the autumn term of 2021.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, most recently in November 2017. The timescales for reinspection have been extended in the light of the pandemic.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 on 18 January 2022. Additional evidence was gathered on 26 January 2022. At this stage, the inspection was deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They also met the chair of governors, other governors and the chief executive officer of the MAT. Telephone conversations were held with a representative of Durham local authority and a representative of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- To evaluate the quality of education, inspectors conducted deep dives in English, computer science, art and geography. This involved meeting with subject leaders, looking at curriculum plans, reviewing pupils' work, talking to pupils about their work, and talking to teachers. The school's PSHE curriculum, including plans for teaching RSE, was also reviewed.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met leaders with responsibility for safeguarding. They reviewed the actions taken to keep pupils safe, and reviewed several case files. They also reviewed the way in which the school handles allegations against adults. The checks that the school makes when appointing new staff were reviewed. Inspectors talked to a wide range of pupils and staff about safeguarding. Inspectors also examined staff training records.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including policies for behaviour, safeguarding and SEND. They reviewed the school's records of behaviour and bullying incidents, and spoke to pupils about their experiences.
- This inspection was carried out following complaints made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors initially sought to establish whether leaders were taking effective action to secure a robust safeguarding culture.

Inspection team

James Duncan, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Eleanor Belfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Graham Findlay	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kirsty Godfrey	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Malcolm Kirtley	Her Majesty's Inspector

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