

Inspection of a good school: St Aidan's Catholic Academy

Willowbank Road, Ashbrooke, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7HJ

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 June 2023

Outcome

St Aidan's Catholic Academy 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 graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The core values of trust, hard work and fairness are woven through every aspect of school life at St Aidan's Catholic Academy. Pupils trust adults to help them. Behaviour is exemplary because pupils strive to meet adults' incredibly high expectations. Pupils are not concerned about bullying. The school has a strong culture of respect. Pupils know that derogatory language would not be tolerated if it were heard.

Pupils' aspirations are raised by the high standards that infuse all aspects of school life. Leaders ensure that pupils are motivated to meet their expectations. They are encouraged, every day, to 'climb the mountain'. These small, daily steps encourage pupils to believe in themselves. The 'CLIMB' approach to developing pupils' character outlines a range of activities to help pupils develop beyond the academic. This, alongside the academic rigour of the curriculum, ensures that pupils are incredibly well prepared for life after they leave the school.

Pupils feel safe. The information technology (IT) curriculum ensures they develop a growing awareness of issues around cyber security as they get older. They are happy at school and confident when speaking about their experiences in lessons. One pupil told inspectors that teachers 'want to get the best from us'. Inspectors agree.

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

The ambition of the curriculum is exceptional. Leaders have identified the foundational knowledge that all pupils need in each subject area. This information is shared with pupils and class teachers through, for example, knowledge organisers. Planning takes account of what pupils learn in primary school and then extends from Year 7 to Year 13. Governors ensure that they test the information they receive from leaders. They visit the school and speak to pupils and staff to gather their views. This approach ensures that there is

absolute clarity about what pupils should learn and when. In English, for example, pupils develop an excellent understanding of the context in which texts are written due to the chronological design of the literature curriculum. When talking about what they have learned in modern foreign languages, pupils were confident in speaking Spanish to inspectors.

Pupils understand the importance of homework in helping them to remember what they learn. In lessons, teachers consistently use whole school strategies such as 'SMART starters' to check what pupils have remembered. There is a strong focus on key subject vocabulary, spelling and the origins of words. This gives pupils the knowledge they need to express themselves fluently when talking about what they have learned.

Teachers receive clear information about pupils with special educational needs and or/disabilities (SEND). They use this to help them to adapt lesson approaches when, for example, scaffolding pupils' attempts at writing.

The reading curriculum is highly ambitious. Pupils engage with scholarly texts in lessons. Pupils read with their form tutors every day. Books are chosen which link to fundamental British values. This helps pupils to develop high levels of respect and understanding in relation to, for example, protected characteristics. Leaders identify those pupils that need further support with reading. Targeted, regular intervention delivered as part of the school literacy strategy helps these pupils to access the planned curriculum.

Leaders' desire to instil the core values for all pupils is exemplified in the way that pupils' wider development is considered. The morning meeting provides a positive, purposeful start to the day. It focuses on spelling, mathematical skills and homework retrieval, and ends with powerful messages closely linked to the school's Catholic ethos. Many pupils, including those in the sixth form, spoke about the quality advice they receive when considering the choices that affect their future. Pupils are well supported to identify, prepare for and access high-quality university courses and apprenticeships.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are kind, respectful and caring. At dinner times, many teachers eat with pupils. Conversations are relaxed and the atmosphere is positive. In lessons, pupils are completely focused on learning. They follow teachers' instructions with enthusiasm. Questions that pupils ask teachers show that they are curious about the topics they are learning.

Staff are proud to be part of the school. Recent approaches to reduce workload around marking are appreciated by class teachers. Leaders' focus on ensuring a calm, purposeful and respectful atmosphere means that teachers can focus completely on delivering the planned curriculum. Leaders support the development of staff through regular, high-quality training. They encourage staff to complete nationally recognised qualifications. As a result, staff feel highly valued.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders for safeguarding are knowledgeable about systems in place to identify and support pupils. Parents, staff and pupils are confident that staff with responsibility for safeguarding are approachable.

Staff training is effective in ensuring that local risks are well known. Pupils talk about assemblies on rail and water safety. Leaders work closely with external agencies to support the most vulnerable pupils. Checks on adults employed by the school are robust. Leaders keep meticulous records relating to safeguarding, for example in relation to the checks at the alternative providers of education used by the school.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2018.

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.

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	139538
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10255800
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	852
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	158
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Daniel O'Mahoney
Headteacher	Glenn Sanderson
Website	http://www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	9 and 10 January 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection in January 2018, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed. There have also been other appointments to the senior leadership team.
- The school provides sixth-form education with a girls' school in the same trust. When pupils attend the sixth-form, male pupils are registered at St Aidan's Catholic Academy and female pupils are registered at the girls' school.
- The school uses four alternative providers for a small number of pupils. One of these is an unregistered provision.
- St Aidan's Catholic Academy has a Catholic religious character. The last section 48 inspection took place in June 2018. Section 48 inspections are usually carried out every three to five years. Due to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the next section 48 inspection will be within eight years, rather than the usual three to five years.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. They also spoke with the chief executive officer of the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust and representatives from the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- Inspectors spoke with representatives from the board of trustees and the local governing council, including the chairs of both these bodies.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, modern foreign languages and IT. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised records relating to safeguarding, including the single central record. Inspectors also spoke with pupils and staff about safeguarding.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for the sixth form, personal development and careers education.
- Inspectors also met with leaders to look at attendance, including the school's use of alternative provision.
- Inspectors met with pupils, observed social times and visited reading lessons and the morning meeting.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, pupils and staff through surveys, including Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Matthew Vellensworth, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Bernard Clark

Ofsted Inspector

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