

Inspection of a good school: St Joseph's Catholic Middle School, Hexham

Highford Lane, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 2DD

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 October 2023

Outcome

St Joseph's Catholic Middle School, Hexham continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Nicholas Wood. This school is part of The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Nick Hurn OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Angela Boyle.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is an enthusiasm for learning and a sense of enjoyment at St Joseph's. Warm relationships and a supportive environment are evident throughout the school. Pupils feel well looked after and safe here. They know that if they face any problems or challenges, there is someone they can turn to for help. Pupils demonstrate very positive values. They show respect and tolerance. As a result of the school culture, pupils behave very well and they are kind to one another.

All pupils learn a broad and ambitious curriculum. Pupils benefit from having specialist teachers for subjects such as design and technology and modern foreign languages. This specialist teaching, particularly in key stage 2, is enthusing pupils and developing their subject knowledge.

The school promotes pupils' wider development very effectively. The school encourages pupils to pursue their talents and interests through art, music, drama and sport. This extra-curricular offer extends to areas such as technology. Pupils have formed the 'rusty cogs' club. The club compete, and succeed, in national robotics competitions. Older pupils enjoy leadership opportunities, such as sport and house leaders. They also support their younger peers with their mathematics and reading.

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

Pupils benefit from a curriculum that carefully considers where they start in Year 5 and where they need to be by the end of Year 8. The curriculums in English and history are

good examples of this sequencing. In English, pupils develop an understanding of different characters, voices and viewpoints through studying a rich range of texts. The history curriculum is structured to ensure that pupils develop increasingly complex knowledge of important themes, such as the development of civilisations.

Some pupils require additional support to improve their reading. Leaders have made this a priority. These pupils receive valuable additional teaching to catch up with their reading. The school has established a very positive culture of reading. Pupils speak confidently and knowledgeably about the novels they read. The school introduces them to a range of poetry, with mature and challenging themes. Pupils enjoy performing poetry that they have written.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from high-quality support. The school correctly identifies the support that pupils with SEND require to be successful. Staff break down learning into smaller steps to make it accessible. As a result, pupils with SEND follow the full curriculum and they achieve well.

The school has a significant strength in the way that it develops pupils' character and values. Pupils behave very well because relationships with adults are strong. Pupils know how to treat each other with kindness. The breadth of the school curriculum, along with enrichment activities, supports pupils to develop an appreciation of arts and culture.

The school is in the early stages of developing a careers programme. The careers programme for Year 8 pupils is limited. Consequently, pupils do not have the right information to be ready for the decisions they will make about subject choices in Year 9. Leaders are aware of this gap in pupils' knowledge. They are working in partnership with other schools and colleges in the area to put this right during this academic year.

The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) provides pupils with important knowledge about how to be safe and healthy. Pupils' understanding of topics, such as e-safety, is very well developed. What pupils learn about e-safety becomes more complex as they move through Year 5 to Year 8. In some other areas, such as an understanding of other faiths and cultures, pupils' knowledge is less secure. This is because the new PSHE curriculum has not yet revisited some topics regularly enough to embed the core knowledge. Leaders are aware of this issue and they have adapted the curriculum to address it.

Staff enjoy working at the school because of the positive ethos. They appreciate the support of school leaders in managing workload and the support of the trust in developing their subject expertise. Governors and trustees support leaders to act in the best interests of the pupils. Governors know the community well. In the Ofsted survey, a significant number of parents expressed very positive views about the culture of the school and how much their children enjoy being here.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils do not have enough understanding of the world of work, or the options that are available to them beyond school. This means that they are not well prepared for the decisions that they will make in Year 9, when they will choose subjects for further study. The school should establish a careers programme that provides pupils with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their future.
- Pupils do not have a secure knowledge of some topics in the personal development curriculum. They have not secured their understanding by revisiting knowledge. As a result, they do not know enough about some aspects of diversity and other faiths and cultures. The school should ensure that topics in the PSHE curriculum are revisited in increasing depth as pupils move up through 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Joseph's Catholic Middle School, to be good in February 2015.

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' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school

meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148260
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10269161
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Angela Boyle
Headteacher	Nicholas Wood
Website	www.hexhamstjosephs.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Joseph's Catholic Middle School converted to become an academy in December 2020. When its predecessor school, St Joseph's Catholic Middle School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is part of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in June 2016.
- The school does not meet the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with trust leaders and governors, and held a telephone conversation with representative of the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history and design and technology. For each deep dive, the inspectors met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record and looked at how safeguarding is managed. Inspectors spoke to leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils about safeguarding in the school. Inspectors considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector studied a variety of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, attendance information and safeguarding records.
- The views of parents and carers, staff and pupils were gathered through Ofsted's surveys and face-to-face discussions.

Inspection team

Carl Sugden, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Ashcroft

Ofsted Inspector

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