

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic High School, Workington

Harrington Road, Workington, Cumbria CA14 3EE

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Ian Nevitt. The school is part of Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jacky Kennedy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Murray.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at this school. They benefit from a suitable range of enrichment opportunities, both in school and in the wider community. For example, pupils enjoy becoming school councillors. They take part in acts of kindness, such as by raising money for charity.

Pupils have high levels of trust in their teachers. They are happy to talk to them about any worries that they might have. Pupils learn that bullying is not acceptable. They explained that staff are vigilant to any incidents of bullying around the site. Pupils have confidence that any incidents of bullying will be dealt with effectively.

Pupils access a number of experiences throughout their time at the school to develop their interests in a range of careers. For example, they have had visitors to school from different employment sectors. Pupils have also enjoyed visiting various colleges and post-16 providers. This helps pupils to make informed choices for their next steps in education, employment or training.

The school is raising its expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. However, in some subjects, these aspirations are not realised in pupils' day-to-day learning. This is because some teachers do not design learning activities that fully meet pupils' needs. Pupils, including some with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), struggle to access learning in some subjects. Furthermore, some pupils do not behave consistently well, disrupting the learning of their peers.

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

The school has faced a range of challenges since opening as an academy. These difficulties have included securing enough new leaders across the school, including at senior leadership level. The school is also continuing to work to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local community. These challenges have hindered improvements to the quality of education that pupils receive.

The school accepts that pupils' achievement is not as high as it should be. Leaders have focused on developing a more ambitious and rigorous curriculum for all pupils. In the majority of subjects, leaders have set out the precise knowledge that they would like pupils to learn. They have also identified an appropriate order to deliver new knowledge, so that pupils can build on what they already know and can do. However, in some subjects, this new curriculum is not being implemented consistently well.

In some subjects, teachers do not select the most appropriate activities to help pupils to learn new information. Some staff do not have the knowledge and skills that they require to design learning activities as effectively as they should. As a result, some pupils struggle to connect new topics and concepts to previous learning.

Assessment strategies in some subjects are not used effectively enough to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge. Conversely, in other subjects assessment is over used. The weaknesses in assessment strategies mean that some teachers do not have the information that they require to modify the delivery of the curriculum to backfill any gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

The process that is in place to identify pupils who may have additional needs is secure. The school knows the individual needs of pupils with SEND. However, some teachers do not use this information as effectively as they could to adapt the delivery of the curriculum for pupils with SEND, or for pupils who are disadvantaged. This means that some of these pupils do not learn as well as their classmates.

The school has designed a strategy to engage pupils in a love of reading and literature. The school has a well-stocked library with specialist staff to help pupils to find the right book for their reading level. Opportunities for pupils to read a range of texts are in place in some subjects. The school has also identified an appropriate phonics scheme. Staff use this scheme well to support pupils who find reading more difficult. However, some older pupils are not confident and fluent readers. Nevertheless, leaders are beginning to address the shortfall in these pupils' reading knowledge.

Pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should, particularly pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged. There is a new attendance team in place that has begun to identify the barriers to pupils' attendance. There has been some improvement in the attendance of pupils who have historically been persistently absent. However, the journey of improvement for some pupils is at the early stages.

Leaders have set out clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. The behaviour of many pupils has improved since September 2023. However, a minority of pupils do not behave how they should in school. This has resulted in a higher-than-expected number of suspensions and exclusions.

Pupils do not always experience a clear and coherent programme of personal development. The school delivers some aspects of personal development, such as careers, online safety and financial management well. However, other aspects, including relationships, sex and health education, are disjointed in their delivery. This hinders some pupils' learning and development in these areas.

Trustees and governors do not have a sufficiently accurate understanding of how well the school is improving the quality of education for pupils. The systems to collect and evaluate information about how well the school is meeting pupils' learning needs are underdeveloped. For example, the trust was not aware of some of the issues identified with the personal development curriculum. This means that trustees and governors are sometimes unable to provide an appropriate level of challenge to improve the school.

Staff are appreciative of leaders' efforts to improve their workload and well-being. For example, staff are consulted about key changes to policies.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know when to report concerns about the welfare of pupils and they do so in a timely manner. Pupils said that they feel safe in school. The school works well with a range of external agencies to provide appropriate support for pupils and their families.

Although pupils are safe, the oversight of safeguarding procedures is not as secure as it should be. For example, some staff's routine safeguarding training has not taken place. Some actions following safeguarding incidents are not recorded as thoroughly as is needed. This makes it more difficult for the school to be assured that pupils are receiving all the support that they require.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The trust, and those responsible for governance, do not have a secure enough understanding of the quality of education that pupils receive. Neither do they have sufficient oversight of some administrative aspects of the school's safeguarding arrangements. This means that trustees and governors are unable to hold leaders fully to account. The trust should ensure that there are robust systems in place to gather an accurate and up-to-date understanding of the quality of education that pupils receive. They should improve the administration of safeguarding arrangements.
- Some staff do not deliver the curriculum as intended, nor do they design learning activities that fully meet pupils' needs. This includes pupils with SEND and some pupils who are disadvantaged. This hinders how well these pupils learn and achieve. The school should provide suitable training for staff to ensure that they deliver the curriculum as intended. The school should also train staff to design activities that enable pupils to learn new topics and concepts successfully.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough, particularly those pupils with SEND or those who are disadvantaged. These pupils miss out on important learning. The school should remove any barriers which prevent pupils from attending school each day.
- A minority of pupils do not behave appropriately enough. This disrupts the learning of their peers. The school should ensure that these pupils are supported to behave well in lessons and around the school site.
- Pupils do not experience a consistently well-designed programme of personal development. This hinders how well some pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain. The school should identify the key knowledge that it wants pupils to learn

in the personal development programme and support staff to deliver this information consistently well.

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	148703
Local authority	Cumberland
Inspection number	10294429
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	516
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Murray
Chief executive officer of trust	Jacky Kennedy
Headteacher	Ian Nevitt
Website	http://www.sjchs.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Joseph’s Catholic High school, Workington converted to become an academy school in September 2021. When its predecessor school, St Joseph’s Catholic High School, Business and Enterprise College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- This school is part of the Diocese of Lancaster. The school’s last section 48 inspection was in October 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place within eight years of the last inspection.
- A new headteacher has been appointed since the last Ofsted inspection.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's educational provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that 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 chief executive officer, the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and staff. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority and of the diocese.
- Inspectors met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector spoke to the chair of the trust on the telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and design, modern foreign languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in corridors, at breaktimes, at lunchtimes and in lessons. Inspectors also spoke to pupils about behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, leaders' improvement plans, minutes of trust board meetings, minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their programme of wider personal development.
- Inspectors considered the responses from parents to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility. Inspectors also spoke with parents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors also spoke with staff about the support that they receive for their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

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