

Inspection of St Nicholas Catholic High School

Greenbank Lane, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1JW

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Previous inspection grade	Good
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy in the caring community of St Nicholas Catholic High School. Students in the sixth form value the personalised support that they receive from their teachers. This helps to prepare them well for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

The school has high expectations for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils benefit from a well-designed, ambitious curriculum. They enjoy learning. Most pupils apply themselves in lessons and achieve well.

The school's values underpin pupils' respectful behaviour. Pupils said that they are kind to each other. They know that they will be listened to by staff if they have any concerns or worries. As a result, pupils feel safe in school.

Many pupils value the range of clubs and activities on offer to them. The diverse experiences that the school provides help pupils to nurture their wider talents and build their leadership skills. Pupils develop a strong sense of the importance of citizenship and helping others, for example by raising money for local charities.

In the sixth form, students benefit from global travel opportunities, for example some students spoke enthusiastically about a planned expedition to Vietnam and Cambodia.

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

All pupils follow the same broad and balanced curriculum, including those in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. The school has addressed previous weaknesses in a small number of subject curriculums through the strengthening of training and support for staff. Staff are empowered to carry out monitoring and evaluation of the subject curriculums to ensure they remain current and effective.

Typically, teachers implement the curriculum well. They have detailed subject knowledge and explain concepts well. Students in the sixth form benefit from teachers' expertise and enthusiasm for the subjects that they teach. Teachers regularly check what pupils know and remember. They identify pupils' misconceptions and, in the main, rectify these quickly.

The school has recently introduced strategies to improve reading. It has accurately identified pupils who find reading more difficult. However, the additional support that the school has put in place to help these pupils to catch up quickly is relatively recent. The school is also in the early stages of implementing initiatives to increase pupils' exposure to rich texts. Some older pupils have not benefited from the various reading strategies put in place.

The additional needs of pupils with SEND are identified well. The recent strengthening of the training and information that staff receive relating to pupils with SEND has improved how these pupils are supported to access the curriculum. Staff understand the needs of pupils with SEND and make suitable adaptations in their teaching where necessary. Consequently, most pupils with SEND achieve well.

Some pupils, including some who are disadvantaged, do not achieve as well as they should. The school is not clear enough about the impact of the curriculum for these pupils. Added to this, the school does not fully analyse how these pupils' attendance and behaviour contribute to their lack of achievement.

Most pupils attend school regularly. The school has systems in place to address low attendance and to support pupils to be in school as much as possible. Despite this, a small number of pupils, including some who are disadvantaged, do not attend school as often as they should. This hinders how well some of these pupils achieve.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is calm and courteous. Pupils and staff said that the behaviour system is fair. Pupils value the rewards that they receive for their positive behaviour and attitudes.

The school has designed a strong curriculum for personal, social and health education. Pupils can recall a range of knowledge that helps them to keep safe, build healthy relationships and make positive contributions to the wider world. This continues for students in the sixth form. Pupils receive a wide range of information and guidance about careers education and their future opportunities. Pupils are aspirational for their future education and employment.

Leaders are ambitious for the future developments of the school. Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They ensure that they provide appropriate support and challenge to the school as it continues to develop. Most parents and carers were positive about the information that they receive about how well their children are learning.

Staff said that the school carefully considers their workload. For example, staff are consulted on any changes before they are introduced. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's strategies to support pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge are at the early stages of development. This means that some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not read as well as they should. The

school should ensure that staff are suitably equipped to support pupils to catch up with their reading. This will help these pupils to build fluency in their reading and access all areas of the curriculum.

- The school lacks a coordinated approach to evaluating the impact of its work to support pupils who are disadvantaged. This means that some disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they should or benefit from all that the school has to offer. The school should ensure that it makes effective use of the information that it has so that it is better placed to remove the barriers to success that some disadvantaged pupils face.

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	111450
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10321325
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,199
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	154
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Chris Mottram
Headteacher	Craig Burns
Website	st-nicholas.cheshire.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Shrewsbury. The most recent section 48 inspection of the school's religious character took place in May 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place during the academic year 2024/25.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider for a small number of pupils.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for 12 pupils aged between 11 and 16 with SEND. The provision provides specialist support for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- 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 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, psychology and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils from Years 7 to 13 about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Eleanor Overland, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Glennon	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Meldrum	Ofsted Inspector
Niamh Howlett	Ofsted Inspector

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