

# St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	108869
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	309823
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Blake HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1202
6th form	270
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Peter Wood
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Anthony McCourt
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 September 2004
<b>School address</b>	Willow Bank Road Ashbrooke Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 7HJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 5536073
<b>Fax number</b>	0191 5536077

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<b>Age group</b>	11-18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Aidan's, which is larger than average, is an all boys' specialist language school. The school serves a wide area across the south of Sunderland, which reflects a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, some of which have higher than average levels of social deprivation. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage, although there are around 30 students who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is those identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or those having a statement of special educational need. There are a few looked after children in school. The school holds the International School Award.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided School provides a good standard of education in almost all areas but its overall effectiveness is inadequate because the procedures for safeguarding students so that the school meets all current government requirements are not in place. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to ensuring that all Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are completed and recorded for all adults who work in the school, as part of the statutory requirements, and for inclusion on the school's single central register.

Although the school has successfully addressed the issues from the previous inspection, and is also showing continued improvement in most areas, its record of raising standards has been most noticeable in the recent 2007 results. This very positive rise in standards, especially the 18% increase in students achieving five or more A\* - C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has resulted from a determined course of action taken by the senior managers in the school, and also from the positive contribution made by teachers to improving the quality of teaching and learning in lessons. Overall, teaching is generally of a good quality in both the main school and sixth form, although the regularity and quality of marking students' work is too inconsistent across the main school. Furthermore, some lessons in the main school give too few opportunities to develop independent learning skills as an aid to helping the students make even better progress. This lack of independent learning is having a more noticeable effect on the progress being made by the higher attaining students and those identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although the issue affects all students to some degree. Where additional teaching assistant support is available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, it is used effectively, but in lessons without this support, the guidance these students receive is too inconsistent to ensure that sufficient progress is made relative to their capabilities.

The school's specialist language status has made a valuable contribution to the all-round improvements seen, especially in the broadening of curricular opportunities across the school, and the links with external partners in extending enterprise education and work-based learning opportunities.

Despite the failure of the school to comply fully with the statutory requirements in relation to CRB checks, the school's other systems for caring, supporting and guiding the students have many positive features, which enable the students to enjoy attending school and make good overall progress. This is most noticeable in the transitional arrangements made for students starting at the school in Year 7, and when students transfer into the sixth form, especially those who arrive from other local secondary schools.

The Notice to Improve that has been issued to the school should not diminish the many good features of leadership and management, including the contribution of middle managers and governors. Senior staff know the strengths of their school in most areas, and have combined effectively as a senior leadership team to provide a robust challenge to teachers and students to raise standards. Given the improvement in standards achieved by the vast majority of students during their time at the school, and the many positive features in supporting and developing

the social, physical and mental well-being of all students, the capacity to improve further is good, as is the overall value for money achieved.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The school is providing effective and challenging support that is helping the sixth form students to make good overall progress. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, provide good quality feedback to the students on what they need to do to improve, and stimulate them with resources that are current and topical. Students have a range of opportunities to develop their independent and communication skills, and there is particularly good use of pupil partners to develop thinking skills, which are helping the students to be more confident in putting forward their own ideas, using analysis and discovering things for themselves. The strong ethos in promoting personal development and well-being of students is evident in the very good relationships with both staff and peers. Students receive high quality guidance that enables them to make well-informed decisions about their future careers. The students are well motivated and actively involved in their own learning, and are developing a good range of personal skills that supports their progression into further education, employment or training. There is a good variety of curricular activities that have been enhanced by the school's specialist language status; for example, there are a number of language enrichment courses and external partnerships that provide students with a broad range of opportunities, locally and internationally. The performance of subjects is monitored rigorously and appropriate actions for improvement are identified. Sixth form managers make effective use of performance data to track and review individual student progress.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Compile a single central register to include all CRB checks for all adults who work in the school, in full compliance of the statutory requirements.
- Improve the regularity of marking students' work throughout the main school, ensuring that this includes guidance for further improvements.
- Develop further students' independent learning skills within all teaching and learning areas across the curriculum.
- Ensure consistent standards of support across all subject areas for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students are achieving good standards against suitably challenging targets in the main school. In the sixth form, students' work hard to meet the targets set by teachers and, overall, make good progress. Although standards at Key Stage 3 have generally been close to average since the previous inspection, the unvalidated results for 2007 were above the national averages in English, mathematics and science. Improvements were also made at Key Stage 4 in 2007, where there was 18% increase in students achieving five or more A\* - C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The average point score per student also improved from previous years. Overall, the school is now achieving above average results at the end of both key stages in the main school, and largely average results in the sixth form. Given that the standards on

entry to the school are average, this represents good overall progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good overall progress relative to their capabilities.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students' personal development and well-being are good in both the main school and sixth form. Within lessons, the vast majority of students enjoy their education and show positive attitudes to learning. They understand what is expected of their behaviour and are co-operative during lessons, which help them to achieve well. Exclusions are low and attendance is above average. Students have opportunities to take on responsibility and articulate their views, particularly through the school council and the 'suggestion box'. Students say that they feel safe in school because they are confident to go to a member of staff when occasional incidents of bullying occur, although a few reported that they felt some incidents were not always dealt with and that it was better to keep quiet and get on with school life. Year 7 students said they had few concerns about coming to the school and found the transition from primary school very positive. Students benefit from a wide range of healthy food choices available, and many participate in the good range of extra-curricular sporting activities on offer. Students' spiritual, moral and social development is good, with their cultural awareness developing well through the international dimension introduced as part of the school's specialist language status. There are satisfactory curricular opportunities to encourage students to consider and express their own feelings about many contemporary issues that may affect their lives, such as the seriousness of crime. Their understanding of the impact of living in a multi-cultural society is also developing satisfactorily.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Senior leaders have a clear understanding about the quality of teaching across the school, and have accurately assessed teaching and learning as good in both the main school and sixth form. In lessons where teaching is good, which is in the majority of lessons seen, teachers use a broad range of techniques to check students' understanding. These lessons have good pace and challenge, and encourage students to develop analytical, research and questioning skills through independent learning. Where teaching is satisfactory, work is not always sufficiently tailored to individual needs, especially for higher ability students and those with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These students, therefore, make slower progress than they should. Teachers show good subject knowledge, and when linked with challenging teaching techniques, students make good progress. Teachers' high expectations encourage good student engagement and behaviour in lessons, but where students are too passive this hinders their ability to question and test out their learning. Teachers' marking in the main school is inconsistent and, as a result, a number of students are not clear about how they can improve the quality of their work. The support received by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory overall, and good from specialist staff. Where teaching assistant support is available, it is used effectively, but in lessons without this support, the guidance

these students receive is too inconsistent to ensure that sufficient progress is made relative to their capabilities.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school has a good and varied curriculum, which assists in motivating students and in helping them to raise their standards. The school's specialist language status enhances the curriculum and enriches the learning experiences students receive. The languages department is playing a leading role in the development of the curriculum, both within the school and in the planning of shared projects and staff training with partner primary schools. Good links have been established with a number of local partners, including a college, skills centre and businesses in order to establish a number of new vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. These links are helping to broaden opportunities for work related learning, and place the school in a strong position to develop new diploma courses. Enterprise education is also being used as an effective tool to broaden the curriculum and is impacting, in particular, on curricular opportunities for gifted and talented students. The school is placing a clear priority on developing good literacy, numeracy and information and communication skills, which are contributing to the improvement of these key skills and the development of self confidence as a basis for post-school education, employment or training. The school is making good progress in improving the geography curriculum, following a visit from Ofsted earlier in the year, which judged it to be inadequate. Extra-curricular provision is good across the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Students and parents welcome the broad range of opportunities on offer, which adds significantly to the quality of the curriculum and the students' enjoyment of attending school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 4**

**Grade for sixth form: 4**

Although the school makes at least satisfactory, more often good provision in almost all these aspects, the overall quality of care, guidance and support is inadequate because the school does not comply fully with all legal requirements for safeguarding its students. The overall quality of provision is underpinned by a strong Roman Catholic ethos, which values all students. There is an effective pastoral system where teachers know the students well. There is very little anti-social behaviour or reported incidents of bullying. The transition arrangements for students into the school, and from the main school into the sixth form are good. New students to the school, especially the increasing number entering the sixth form from other secondary schools, are warmly welcomed by teachers and fellow students. The increasing emphasis on learning targets in all subjects across the school is helping most students to know what, and how, they are expected to achieve their potential in most subjects. Procedures for target setting and reviewing are satisfactory overall, and good in Year 11 and the sixth form. However, there are inconsistencies across the main school in some important areas, particularly in the regular marking of students' work, and in the provision of constructive advice for further improvements. Although there is good quality specialist support for those students with a statement of special educational need, the contribution they make to their individual education plan is underdeveloped. Students receive helpful additional support prior to examinations and national tests, through programmed study sessions out of school time.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 4

#### Grade for sixth form: 2

In almost all respects, leadership and management are generally good, including the sixth form. However, leadership and management are inadequate overall because of the failure to ensure that all CRB checks are completed and recorded for all adults who work in the school, as part of the statutory requirements, and for inclusion on the school's single central register. The headteacher has worked effectively to restructure the responsibilities of the leadership team, which has strengthened management capacity and ability to bring about sustained improvement. The headteacher has established a clear strategic vision that uses specialist language status very effectively to broaden curricular opportunities, and raise standards through greater student engagement with the full range of learning activities on offer. He is very well supported by a committed senior leadership team, all of whom make a considerable contribution to school improvement. Middle leaders enthusiastically support initiatives that provide students with high quality learning experiences, but not all of these are consistently implemented across the whole school, or within separate subject departments. The monitoring of teaching and learning is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form; as it is for the monitoring of subject performance. As a consequence, the school sets challenging yet realistic targets. The school's self-evaluation of its performance is generally accurate and is founded on a shared understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. Senior managers take appropriate action to address areas of concern through focused developmental planning and well targeted action plans in key curriculum areas. There are good links with a wide range of external agencies and partners, including schools, further and higher educational institutions, and businesses. These are used beneficially to extend opportunities for students and contribute to the school's ongoing improvement. Governors know the school well and are aware of what needs to be done to secure further improvements. They provide appropriate challenge and support to the senior leadership, and are helping to keep a close eye on expenditure, which is helping to reduce the current budget deficit.



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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	4

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Annex A**

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

## Annex B

### Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School, Sunderland, SR2 7HJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we recently visited your school. We were extremely grateful to all of you who spoke with us over the two days, and to those of your parents who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire.

In almost all respects, the school is providing you with a good standard of education. Teaching is good in the main school and sixth form, and the levels of support, care and guidance provided by the staff is appreciated by you, and is helping the majority to make good progress and achieve above average standards at both the end of Year 9 (end of Key Stage 3) and Year 11 (end of Key Stage 4). Although the standards in the sixth form are closer to average, the progress that students make throughout Years 12 and 13 is good. The curriculum is also good, and is benefiting from specialist language status. Your teachers and senior staff are well aware of what improvements are needed within the school, and they have taken some decisive action over the last year to help all of you achieve closer to your potential. You also deserve some credit for the recent improvements in standards—well done to you all.

However, the school is legally required to ensure that all adults who work in the school have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check to confirm that they are 'fit and proper' to work with you, and that this information, and some other important details, are kept on a single central register that can be checked by inspectors when they visit the school. In this respect, the school failed to provide the inspection team with the correct information, so we have issued the school with a Notice to Improve. This means that the school must compile a single central register to include all CRB checks, in full compliance of the statutory requirements. More inspectors will visit the school within the next six months to ensure that this issue has been fully resolved.

In addition to this very important aspect, the inspection team found a few areas where the school could improve further. These are as follow:

- improve the regularity of marking your work throughout the main school, ensuring that this includes guidance for further improvements
- develop further your independent learning skills within all teaching and learning areas across the curriculum
- ensure consistent standards of support across all subject areas for those of you with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

We hope that all of you will continue to play your part in helping the school to make further improvements and raise standards even further.

We wish you all the very best.

Brian Blake

Lead inspector

On behalf of the inspection team