

# Inspection of St Aidan's Catholic Academy

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

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|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Inspection dates:         | 18 and 19 February 2025 |
| The quality of education  | <b>Outstanding</b>      |
| Behaviour and attitudes   | <b>Outstanding</b>      |
| Personal development      | <b>Outstanding</b>      |
| Leadership and management | <b>Outstanding</b>      |
| Sixth-form provision      | <b>Good</b>             |
| Previous inspection grade | Good                    |

The headteacher of this school is Anne-Marie Whitten. This school is part of the Bishop Chadwick 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 (CEO), Brendan Tapping, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Daniel O'Mahoney.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

St Aidan's is a thriving and happy place. Pupils are extremely proud to be part of this highly ambitious school. Leaders have the highest expectations for the pupils. Pupils meet these expectations consistently. The school's values are visible through all the work done, particularly in pupils 'making excellence a habit'.

The relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally strong. Pupils feel cared for and know that staff have their best interests at heart. Pupils demonstrate kindness, both in and out of lessons. They treat everyone with courtesy and respect those with different lifestyles and backgrounds.

Staff consistently engage pupils in thinking about their personal development. Pupils readily work through the 'CLIMB' approach to develop their own high aspirations. They grow to understand their potential impact on the world, through both small and large actions. Almost all pupils achieve highly and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve exceptionally well.

Pupils welcome opportunities to extend their experiences wherever possible. Almost all of them participate in the wide range of activities the school provides. Pupils and students in the sixth form actively contribute to the life of their peers. Staff encourage all pupils to take part, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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

The school provides a highly ambitious curriculum that prepares pupils incredibly well for their next steps in education, training or employment. The school ensures that all pupils, study the same curriculum and benefit from equal opportunities. The swift and accurate identification of the needs of pupils with SEND enables the school to put in place highly effective support so that all pupils can excel. Pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, achieve highly across the curriculum.

Pupils take every opportunity to learn through the highly consistent experiences that they have. They regularly realise the high ambitions of the curriculum in place. The school has ensured that all aspects of the curriculum are thoughtfully integrated at the right time for the most impact. Teachers have strong knowledge of the subjects they teach. Pupils' understanding is checked thoroughly to ensure they are succeeding in each aspect of their learning. They are completely engaged in lessons and are ready to contribute.

Reading is a fundamental part of the school's provision. Pupils read a range of highly interesting texts in all subjects. They are exposed to the rich 'Reading Canon' selected to enhance their experience regularly. There is effective support for those who are in the earlier stages of learning to read. Pupils are helped well to catch up with their peers.

Pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes towards their learning. They discuss their ideas articulately and produce high-quality written work. They say that on the rare occasion

that learning is disrupted, it is dealt with quickly and resolved. Attendance levels are high. They enjoy coming to school.

The school's personal development offer is extraordinary. During their time at the school, pupils develop a deep understanding and respect for other faiths and cultures. They are exceptionally well prepared for life beyond school. For example, pupils can explain how the protected characteristics are important in modern Britain. Pupils receive a broad and comprehensive careers programme. As a result, pupils have a clear sense of direction for their future. They have many opportunities to lead aspects of school life. For example, sixth-form students play an active role in collaborating with pupils and the wider community alike.

In the sixth form, students benefit from a broad range of subjects. Implementation of the curriculum is highly consistent, and most students rise to the challenge well. However, some students do not achieve as highly as they could. Leaders at all levels are aware of this and have detailed actions in place that are beginning to have an impact. Generally, students are very well prepared for their next stage in education, employment or training. They are able to make informed decisions about their future. Many choose to go to university, but increasing numbers are now opting for apprenticeships.

The school has taken practical steps to manage staff's workload and to look after their well-being. Staff are very proud to work at the school. The school is led by example, with sensitive and calm authority demonstrated by all leaders. They know what is best for their pupils. They prioritise professional development for staff so that they too can do their best. Consequently, staff are highly competent in delivering what is asked of them.

Governance is a strength. Governors know the school very well. They hold leaders to account very well and ensure that the school fulfils its statutory duties.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The curriculum does not have a consistent impact for some students in the sixth form. Therefore, some students are not achieving as highly as they could. The school should continue to embed and develop the curriculum in all subjects so that all achieve 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

|                                                   |                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 139538                                                                                   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Sunderland                                                                               |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10323053                                                                                 |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Secondary                                                                                |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Academy converter                                                                        |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 11 to 18                                                                                 |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                           | Boys                                                                                     |
| <b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>   | Boys                                                                                     |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>        | 990                                                                                      |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 143                                                                                      |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                      | Board of trustees                                                                        |
| <b>Chair of trust</b>                             | Daniel O'Mahoney                                                                         |
| <b>CEO of the trust</b>                           | Brendan Tapping                                                                          |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Anne-Marie Whitten                                                                       |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | <a href="http://www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk">www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk</a> |
| <b>Dates of previous inspection</b>               | 7 and 8 June 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005                             |

## Information about this school

- The school is part of the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust.
- 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 three alternative providers for a few 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 2023.

- 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. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, trust staff, including the CEO, and other senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with trustees and governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, history, science and PE. For each of these subjects, inspectors met with subject leaders, carried out visits to lessons, spoke to pupils and looked at some of their work.
- Inspectors visited the morning meeting that pupils attend on arrival and reviewed the provisions for personal development and extra-curricular activities with leaders.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils at various points in the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at records and spoke to staff in relation to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding. To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.

## Inspection team

|                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Richard Wakefield, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Anne Vernon                       | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Julie McGrane                     | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Nikki Heron                       | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Tristan Keates                    | Ofsted Inspector        |

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