

Inspection of a good school: St John's Catholic School & Sixth Form College

Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL14 6JT

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 May 2024

Outcome

St John's Catholic School & Sixth Form College continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Lisa Byron. This school is part of Bishop Hogarth 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), Michael Shorten, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Yvonne Coates.

What is it like to attend this school?

St John's Catholic School and Sixth Form College's clear vision is underpinned by its distinct Catholic ethos. The school is committed to serving its pupils, to provide them with a high-quality and well-rounded education. This vision is lived out. Many pupils and parents told inspectors how grateful they are for the staff, who go 'above and beyond' to help them. This is a school where pupils are safe and cared for well.

The school has high aspirations for pupils. It provides them with a wide range of exciting and worthwhile educational experiences. These enrich learning and support pupils' personal development. For example, pupils attend clubs in a range of sports, sign language, debating, mindfulness, and diversity and equality. Pupils have benefited from the school's successful bid to the Turing Scheme. This has provided pupils with unique opportunities for cultural visits this year to Canada, America and Europe.

The school has high expectations for behaviour. Most pupils meet these expectations. The school is calm and orderly. Bullying sometimes happens. Incidents are dealt with effectively by the school. Pupils tend to work hard in lessons and enjoy positive relationships with their teachers. Most pupils achieve well.

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

The school offers pupils a broad curriculum. Across all subjects, the school has identified the most important knowledge and skills it wants pupils to learn and remember. Teachers deliver the curriculum using strong subject knowledge. They explain concepts well and

show pupils what high-quality work looks like in their subject. For example, in English, pupils benefited from a clear explanation of the divine right of kings as pupils studied Shakespeare's Macbeth. In physical education (PE), pupils learned well from their teacher's explanation and modelling of how to throw a discus for maximum impact. In the most effective lessons, pupils learn new concepts step by step. Teachers check pupils' understanding and, when they need to, adapt their teaching to help ensure pupils secure the intended knowledge. In some lessons, there are inconsistencies in the way the curriculum is implemented.

The school has recently developed a model for teaching. This is referred to in school using the acronym 'ASPIRE'. Aspects of this model are well embedded. For example, lessons typically begin with recall tasks to help pupils remember what they have been taught before. Other aspects of the model are new, such as the strategies, or scaffolds, to support pupils as they apply what they have learned in more challenging tasks. These aspects are being embedded to ensure that teaching has a greater impact on pupils' achievement.

St John's is an inclusive community where diversity is valued. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well. 'Pupil passports' provide teachers with clear information about the ways to support individual pupils with SEND during lessons. These are reviewed regularly. Leaders have recently created additional capacity in the school to develop the SEND provision. This is to ensure greater consistency in the support that pupils receive.

The school quickly identifies those pupils who need support with reading at the start of Year 7. The school implements appropriate interventions. These include a phonics programme for those pupils at the earliest stages of reading. The school promotes reading for pleasure through dedicated reading lessons at key stage 3, author visits and attendance at local literary events, such as 'The Big Book Bash'.

Students in the sixth form study a wide range of subjects and qualifications. They are supported very well to meet the increased academic demands of sixth-form learning. Students study a programme that helps them to make informed decisions about their future learning, training and/or employment.

The school is calm and orderly. Lessons are productive and disruption to learning is rare. At social times, pupils mix well together. Pupils are polite and courteous. Leaders monitor and implement a range of strategies to support attendance. Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough and some are persistently absent. These pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils are supported with their personal development extremely well. The school's pastoral programme ensures that all pupils learn about a range of important topics in an age-appropriate way. For example, pupils know how to stay safe online. Students in the sixth form learn about rental contracts and budgeting. Pupils have a secure understanding of the protected characteristics. They are proud that everyone is equal and welcome in their school.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders support them well with their workload and well-being. The 'I heard a whisper' initiative has been well received by the staff. It recognises and celebrates the contributions that staff make to the school community. Governors and trustees are highly ambitious for the school. They provide the school with regular support and challenge. They are clear about their responsibilities and fulfil their statutory duties well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not attend school often enough. These pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge. For older pupils, this is hindering their ability to do well in public examinations. The school should further develop its strategies to improve attendance for those pupils who are persistently absent from school.
- The school's ASPIRE model for teaching is implemented inconsistently in some lessons. This means, on occasion, teachers do not check pupils' understanding and/or adapt the curriculum to help pupils secure their understanding. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress that they could. The school should embed its ASPIRE model fully.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2019.

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	137702
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10297358
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,305
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	179
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Yvonne Coates
Headteacher	Lisa Byron
Website	www.stjohns.bhcet.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 and 30 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in October 2019.
- The school uses three unregistered and one registered alternative provision.
- 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

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.
- The inspection team held meetings with the CEO, headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and members of the local governing body.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography and PE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- Inspectors met with the leaders in charge of the personal, social, health and economic curriculum and pupils' personal development.
- The lead inspector spoke to leaders at a sample of the unregistered alternative providers used by the school.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- The inspectors observed pupils during social times.
- 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.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. He also took into consideration the responses to the surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Dan McKeating, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Joanne Owens	Ofsted Inspector
John Downs	Ofsted Inspector

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