

St Nicholas Catholic High School

Greenbank Lane, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1JW

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils' attainment across many subjects is high. The proportion of pupils who achieve a standard pass, or a strong pass, in English and mathematics is well above the national average.
- Provisional data for 2018 indicates that pupils made strong progress across a range of subjects, including science, religious education (RE), modern foreign languages and humanities. They made good progress in English. Current pupils across key stages 3 and 4 make good progress overall.
- Conversely, pupils' progress in mathematics declined significantly in 2018. Leaders have taken swift action to address the issues causing the decline. Nevertheless, there is still more to do to improve pupils' progress in this subject.
- Lower-ability and middle-ability pupils make very good progress from their starting points. However, teachers do not consistently challenge the most able pupils to excel.
- Disadvantaged pupils make very strong progress in English and science. However, although improving quickly, these pupils do not make the progress that they are capable of in some subjects.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make consistently good progress from their starting points. Children looked after make strong progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key strength.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress from their starting points. This is because of good-quality teaching, effective leadership and good standards of behaviour and attendance.
- The headteacher has ensured that the curriculum is well planned and meets most pupils' needs. An increasing proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, study the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).
- The quality of teaching across the school is consistently good. Leaders ensure that there is a continual emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness.
- Some governors have been too focused on the day-to-day issues facing the school. They have not had a strategic overview of school improvement.
- School improvement planning is sharply focused on the key actions that will further improve the school. However, plans do not contain enough milestones by which governors can measure the impact of leaders' work.
- Pupils' behaviour and attendance are good. Leaders have successfully improved the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance are excellent.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Pastoral support is a key strength.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the successful strategies that leaders have already put into place to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make the best possible progress across the curriculum.
- Further improve the progress that pupils make in mathematics.
- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school by ensuring that teachers prepare lessons that consistently challenge the most able pupils.
- Ensure that governors take a more strategic role in school improvement and that the school development plans contain more frequent milestones by which governors can challenge leaders about the impact of their work to improve the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has brought some much-needed change to the school and a realistic perspective of the quality of education that the school provides. He, with the support of the governing body, has restructured the senior leadership team and ensured that middle leaders and teachers have the right skills to improve the school further.
- School leaders at all levels are involved in a well-thought-out and effective programme of self-evaluation and quality assurance. Middle leaders are confident and competent in measuring the effectiveness of the quality of teaching and learning across their departments.
- The headteacher has worked effectively with senior leaders, middle leaders and governors to improve the process of self-evaluation. They monitor progress effectively and are realistic in their assessment of the school's performance. The findings of these evaluations link precisely to school improvement priorities.
- Notwithstanding these improvements, the school's development plans, including the pupil premium strategy, require further improvement. They do not contain regular milestones by which governors can challenge leaders about the impact of their work to improve the school.
- The use of pupil premium funding is increasingly effective. For example, leaders continue to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils apace. More recently, funding has been used more precisely to address individual disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning through the work of learning mentors.
- Those pupils who enter the school with literacy and numeracy levels below age-related expectations are well supported to catch up with other pupils. Literacy and numeracy development is a strong feature of day-to-day lessons. Pupils' spoken skills are particularly strong.
- The leadership of SEND is very strong. There have been significant improvements to the quality of provision for pupils with SEND. Additional funding is used effectively, including for those pupils in the school's autistic resource centre. The special educational needs coordinator offers tailored advice and guidance and excellent whole-school training to staff. Work scrutiny, for example in RE, shows that current pupils with SEND make strong progress from their starting points.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good. Staff receive a high-quality ongoing training programme that is closely linked to leaders' key priorities for improvement, for example mathematics. For example, leaders provide effective training so that teachers question pupils effectively. Teachers also have plentiful opportunities to share good practice across departments and across the school. For example, teachers examine the quality of pupils' work in subjects other than their own. They use this information effectively to reshape their own practice.
- Leaders' systems to track pupils' progress are strong. They have high aspirations for their pupils. Leaders regularly hold progress meetings with key staff, where pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are discussed in depth. Consequently, pupils make

consistently good progress across the school. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is improving quickly.

- The curriculum is well planned and it increasingly meets pupils' needs. Senior leaders, ably led by the headteacher, have undertaken a full review of the curriculum at both key stages 3 and 4 to ensure that schemes of work are delivered effectively and that teachers plan and sequence lessons well. At key stage 4, there has been an increase in academic rigour alongside the addition of some vocational pathways that are on offer to a small number of pupils. In 2018/19, the proportion of pupils studying for the EBacc is very high. This is because leaders believe that it is the right choice for the school's pupils who have high starting points.
- An extensive extra-curricular programme effectively supports the formal curriculum offer.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is a strong feature of this school. There is a comprehensive and well-designed programme of activities that cover all aspects of SMSC education, and these are interwoven into day-to-day lessons and registration at the start of each day. The school's Catholic mission and ethos underpin the SMSC programme. 'Everyone matters' underpins all aspects of the school's SMSC education.
- Leaders take account of staff workload. The teachers and middle leaders with whom inspectors spoke said that senior leaders support them well. They also value the work that senior leaders do to reduce their workload.
- Newly qualified teachers and recently qualified teachers feel well supported by leaders. They, alongside more established staff, are extremely proud to be a part of the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate about the school and its pupils. They are dedicated to ensuring that the school continues to improve apace.
- Nevertheless, some governors have been too focused on the day-to-day issues facing the school. They have not had a sufficiently wide-ranging oversight of leaders' work.
- Since the appointment of the current headteacher, governors have restructured their committee meetings to make them more effective. For example, there is now a much stronger focus on pupils' outcomes and governors know that mathematics requires further improvement.
- Nonetheless, the governing body does not use all the information that it has to challenge leaders to improve the school. Improvement planning documents, for example, contain too few milestones by which governors can check the impact of leaders' work.
- Governors fulfil their statutory safeguarding duties effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. They make use of external audits to maintain high standards of safeguarding. Staff receive regular safeguarding training which links to national priorities and local contextual issues. All staff have undertaken the 'Prevent' duty training and leaders ensure that staff understand challenges and barriers to learning, for example attachment disorder.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. There is an effective system of pastoral support, including learning mentors who work with each year group. Pupils know who to talk to if they have any concerns. Record-keeping is a strength and leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders, including parents, carers and those from a range of agencies.
- Appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place to protect pupils when online. Governors oversee the checks on monitoring and filtering systems.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to motivate pupils and to plan interesting and engaging lessons. They use resources very effectively to promote consistently good or better learning and progress across most subjects and key stages.
- In mathematics, senior leaders have appointed new middle leaders to improve further the quality of teaching. Inspectors found mainly good-quality teaching, learning and assessment across key stages 3 and 4 in mathematics. However, leaders recognise that more focus and support are required to ensure that pupils make even better progress in this subject.
- Most teachers use questions effectively to address misconceptions and promote good-quality learning and progress. In RE and humanities lessons, teachers' questioning was very strong.
- The school's assessment and feedback policies are applied consistently across subjects. Pupils take the time to respond to teachers' feedback. This enables them to take the next steps in their learning and address any errors in their work. Pupils' responses are particularly good in English.
- Teachers' use of additional adults in classrooms is excellent. For example, teaching assistants are extremely proactive in working with pupils who need additional support. Consequently, pupils, including those with SEND, make good progress in their learning.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Pupils focus closely on the tasks that their teachers have prepared for them. That said, some teachers do not consistently stretch and challenge pupils to excel, particularly the most able pupils. Where this happens, pupils can occasionally lose interest because they are waiting for the next activity.
- Pupils' communication skills, including their oracy skills, are well developed. Pupils enjoy taking part in discussions and debates. They are willing to volunteer their mature and well-considered points of view. Teachers in English, RE and humanities are particularly adept at sparking exciting and engaging discussions with pupils.
- Teachers promote pupils' literacy skills very successfully throughout key stage 3. Consequently, they are well prepared for the demands of key stage 4.

- Relationships between pupils and teachers are good. Pupils value the work that their teachers do to support them in their learning. Practically all pupils with whom inspectors spoke are complimentary about their teachers. They say that most teachers go the extra mile to support them to achieve well.
- Homework is set regularly across most subjects. Pupils say that it helps them to reflect on what they have learned and to consolidate new knowledge. Most pupils think that it is a valuable part of their learning.
- Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, highlights that most parents are satisfied with the quality of feedback that they receive about their children's progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' mental health and well-being are taken seriously at this school. Learning mentors and the pastoral support team provide strong support for pupils and offer tailored advice and guidance. Effective programmes are in place to build resilience in pupils by developing their self-esteem and by helping them to manage and understand their emotions.
- Learning mentors and pastoral leaders use a wide range of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils and address individual barriers to learning. However, some of the strategies in place have not had enough time to become embedded in order to enable these pupils to make the best possible progress.
- Pupils display good attitudes to learning overall and most take pride in their work. However, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged to excel.
- The quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance is very good. There is a well-thought-out programme of lessons and activities across Years 8 to 11. The proportion of pupils who are in sustained education, employment or training post-16 is very good.
- There is an effective programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education that is taught through the 30-minute registration period each day. Pupils value the wide range of topics that teachers cover because they are interesting and relevant.
- Pupils have access to an extensive extra-curricular programme. There are school productions, national and local speaking competitions, an extensive range of sporting activities, science and technology clubs, university mathematics challenges, retreats, overseas trips, Fairtrade conferences, access to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and a robot club.
- Leaders ensure that British values are interwoven into school life. Pupils learn about different religions and they embrace the school's mission statement, which states that 'Everyone matters'. They also have plentiful opportunities to learn about democracy through involvement in the school council, year councils, subject ambassadors and the Cheshire West and Chester Youth Parliament. Pupils also have a range of opportunities

to learn about the rule of law, for example through anti-bullying work and contribution to the design of school policies.

- Inspectors found that leaders take effective action to support any pupils who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. A wide range of support is available to pupils through the PSHE, citizenship and assembly programme. Any discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated. The school also makes use of nationally recognised external agencies to provide enhanced support, advice and guidance as required.
- Pupils have a very strong knowledge of how to stay safe online and in their local community. They understand the importance of staying healthy and fit.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are proud of the school's '4 Rs', which encourage them to respect themselves, respect each other, respect the school and be ready to learn.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is good. However, until recently, too many disadvantaged pupils were regularly absent from school. Leaders' new attendance strategy and the introduction of learning mentors have had a very positive effect on improving the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils.
- In previous years, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils that were temporarily excluded from school was very high. Leaders have acted to reduce this number and they have effective plans in place to continue to promote high standards of behaviour for this group of pupils. Overall, exclusion rates are broadly in line with the national averages and continue to reduce for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils feel safe in the school and they care for the environment. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and their conduct around the site during breaktime, lunchtime and between lessons is good. Pupils also behave well in lessons.
- Pupils who are educated at alternative providers are safe, behave well and are well supported to make good progress in their learning. Alternative providers value the strong communication between themselves and school leaders.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is higher than is seen nationally. Over time, pupils' attainment is high. The proportion of pupils who achieve a standard pass and a strong pass in English and mathematics is above the national average. Pupils attain extremely well in modern foreign languages, separate sciences, performing arts, drama and art and design.
- Provisional data for 2018 indicates that pupils made good progress in English and progress that was significantly above the national average in humanities, modern foreign languages and science. Conversely, in 2018, pupils' progress in mathematics declined from previous years and was much weaker. Leaders have taken swift action to address the issues affecting progress in mathematics. However, there is still more to do to ensure that pupils' progress improves further.

- In 2018, provisional data highlights that, by the end of key stage 4, lower-ability pupils made very good progress in most subjects from their starting points. Middle-ability pupils made outstanding progress across many subjects. In contrast, the progress made by the most able pupils was not as strong, especially in mathematics. This is because teachers do not consistently challenge the most able pupils to excel.
- Across key stages 3 and 4, current pupils make good progress from their starting points. Pupils' work confirms that they develop knowledge well because lessons are well sequenced and well planned.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in science and English is excellent. However, disadvantaged pupils do not make the same strong progress in several other curriculum areas, including mathematics. Leaders have effective plans in place to address the issue and current progress for disadvantaged pupils is improving quickly. Nevertheless, there is more to do to ensure that these pupils make the best possible progress across the curriculum.
- Children looked after make good progress from their starting points. This is because of high-quality support and good-quality teaching. The school is highly regarded by external agencies for its work with children looked after.
- Across the school, pupils with SEND make consistently good progress from their starting points. Over the last three years, the progress of pupils with SEND has improved considerably.
- Pupils in the autism resource centre make very good progress from their starting points. This is because they follow an appropriate curriculum, are well cared for and are supported by a team of dedicated and highly skilled staff. Pupils in alternative provision also make good progress.
- In the current Years 10 and 11, the proportion of pupils studying for the EBacc is much higher than the national average. This is because leaders have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. They are highly ambitious for their pupils. That said, the most able pupils can and should achieve more.
- By the end of key stage 4, pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their lives. In 2018, every pupil went on to education, training or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Except for one vocational qualification, St Nicholas Catholic High School offers purely academic A levels in the sixth form because these qualifications meet students' needs. It is, therefore, not possible to make a comparison between the progress that students make on vocational pathways and that made on academic pathways.
- Students make good and improving progress in the sixth form across a wide range of subjects. Students make particularly good progress in art and design, business studies, economics, English literature, geography, physics and computing. However, provisional data in 2018 highlights that progress in biology is weak and progress in chemistry is poor. Leaders have taken swift and effective action to remedy this weakness.

- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is also good and improving. Care is taken to make sure that they are on the right courses. Appropriately challenging targets, coupled with effective care, guidance and support, enable them to achieve well.
- Almost every pupil enters the sixth form with a standard or strong pass in English and mathematics. On the rare occasions where this is not the case, students are well supported on an individual basis to improve their grades.
- Until more recently, the proportion of students that dropped out of courses between Years 12 and 13 was too high. However, improved information, advice and guidance to pupils during key stage 4 have reversed this trend. The proportion of students who complete their courses is now above the national average.
- A rich programme of spiritual and moral education provides all students with a strong platform for debate and discussion about the challenges facing society in modern Britain. Recently, students discussed the Grenfell Tower disaster, the crisis in the National Health Service and whether it is right to vote ethically.
- All students participate in a good-quality programme of work experience.
- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They prepare engaging lessons that challenge pupils to make consistently good progress in most subjects.
- Students enjoy their lessons and they participate well. In humanities, for example, students discussed and debated key concepts with enthusiasm and maturity. Where necessary, timely and bespoke support is offered to students who are in need of extra support. Teachers work effectively with students to keep them on track.
- Students' behaviour and attendance are good. They are kept safe.
- Students make a very good contribution to the school community and develop a wide range of employability skills. They adopt leadership roles, become senior prefects, lead and support assemblies and charity work, support and mentor younger pupils with their learning, take part in overseas expeditions and participate in a valuable enrichment programme.
- Excellent careers education, information, advice and guidance ensure that progression from the sixth form to higher education, further education, employment or apprenticeships is a key strength of the school. On average, around 95% of students progress to higher education, further education, employment or an apprenticeship. Just over 65% progress to university.
- The leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders have an honest view of the strengths and areas requiring further improvement across the sixth form. Accurate self-evaluation leads to the formulation of appropriate key priorities in development plans.

School details

Unique reference number	111450
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10058105

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,223
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Perls
Headteacher	Mr Richard Woods
Telephone number	01606 706 000
Website	www.st-nicholas.cheshire.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@st-nicholas.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 July 2011

Information about this school

- St Nicholas Catholic High School is larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form.
- A new headteacher was appointed to the school in 2017.
- The school has a specialist resourced provision. It is a local authority funded provision for pupils with autism who have an education, health and care plan. There are currently 12 pupils on roll from ages 11 to 16. However, overall, the proportion of pupils with SEND in the school is lower than that found nationally.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than that found nationally.
- A small number of pupils are educated at alternative providers. The school makes use of Reaseheath College and Fermain Academy.
- The school is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided school that is part of the Diocese of Shrewsbury. The school was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in May 2017.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out following concerns relating to pupils' outcomes, including the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, the progress made by pupils in mathematics and standards in the sixth form. There were also several complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors followed up concerns about pupils' behaviour, personal development and welfare, safeguarding arrangements, outcomes for pupils and the provision for pupils with SEND.
- This inspection was conducted with notice. However, following wider concerns about the quality of education that the school provides, the inspection was deemed a full section 5 inspection under section 9 of the Education Act.
- Inspectors formally observed teaching in a wide range of lessons across key stages 3, 4 and 5, some jointly with senior leaders. Shorter learning walks across a series of lessons were also undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors undertook an in-depth analysis of pupils' work in several subjects across the school and across key stages. Inspectors also focused on disadvantaged pupils' work. Scrutinies of pupils' work were jointly conducted with either senior leaders or middle leaders. In addition, inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' work in lessons. Inspectors also reviewed the work of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and the most able pupils. An inspector spoke with pupils in the autism resource centre and reviewed their work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, members of the governing body, middle leaders, subject leaders, the coordinator for special educational needs, other middle leaders, teachers, newly qualified and recently qualified teachers, pastoral leaders and learning mentors. A meeting was also held with the director of schools from the Diocese of Shrewsbury, and a telephone call was held with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team considered one additional complaint from a pupil that was received during the inspection.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised by the inspection team, including: safeguarding documentation; the school's own self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; an external review of pupil premium funding; the current pupil premium strategy; documentation relating to pupils with SEND; information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; information about ongoing teacher training; minutes of the meetings of the governing body; information about how well current pupils are progressing in their learning; analyses of past pupils' performance; and behaviour and attendance records.
- Observations of pupils' behaviour were undertaken at the start of the school day, during the school day, between lessons, during breaktimes and at lunchtimes. Inspectors met formally with a range of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5, including most-able pupils and those with SEND.
- The inspection team considered 186 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Jonathan Smart, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kath Harris	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Kelly	Ofsted Inspector
Alyson Middlemass	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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