

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Highford Lane, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 2DD

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are very polite and respectful and they take a pride in their school. They greatly enjoy their lessons and their positive attitudes play a substantial part in their successful learning.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students feel very safe and they promote safety very well for others.
- Teaching is good overall and some is outstanding. This results in all groups of students making good progress.
- Students leave at the end of Year 8 with attainment that is consistently above and sometimes well above that expected for their age.
- The headteacher is a very effective leader. He has a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve the school further. He delegates responsibility to other leaders well, capitalising on their expertise.
- Since the previous inspection, students' achievement has improved in many areas. The quality of teaching has also improved and leaders in charge of subjects are working together increasingly effectively to share best practice.
- Governance of the school is good. Governors have close contact with the school and offer a good degree of support and challenge.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well, through many opportunities to enrich their learning. As a result, students have a good understanding of the values of modern Britain and they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Parents hold the school in very high regard and staff are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. Students told the inspectors they would not change anything about the school as they like it just the way it is.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not lead to outstanding progress, particularly in mathematics.
- Occasionally, teachers do not plan activities that enable all students to learn as effectively as they might. Sometimes students are not given sufficient guidance about how to improve their work.
- Currently, individual teachers are not always given high quality of feedback on how to improve the quality of their teaching.
- Not all subject leaders have the necessary expertise to check and evaluate the quality of teaching and students' progress in their areas.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed lessons in all year groups in a wide variety of subjects across the school. One lesson was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspectors examined information about current students' learning and progress, as well as information about the learning from the previous year. The inspectors also looked at current work in the students' books.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders, including some who are in charge of subjects.
- A meeting was held with three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- A phone call was held with the current local authority school improvement partner.
- Several meetings took place with students. In addition, inspectors took many opportunities to talk with students in classes, at breaks and at lunchtimes.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, the school's development plans and some minutes of the governing body meetings.
- The inspectors also looked at records of attendance and behaviour, as well as information about the quality of teaching and the performance of staff.
- The inspectors took account of the 113 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and letters and calls received from parents. They also took account of the 31 responses from members of staff to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alison Thomson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Linda Davies	Additional Inspector
Anne Smedley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This middle deemed-secondary school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by the pupil premium, is lower than average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is lower than average.
- No students are educated off-site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for the students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school is a specialist Arts College.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure more teaching results in outstanding achievement for all groups of students across the school, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - always planning activities for lessons that result in all students making the maximum progress
 - providing clear ways for students to be able to judge for themselves how well they are learning
 - improving the standard of marking to match that of the best so that students always know clearly how to improve their work.
- Improve aspects of leadership and management in order to accelerate improvements by:
 - providing teachers with personalised high-quality feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching
 - ensuring all subject leaders develop the necessary skills to rigorously check and evaluate the quality of teaching and students' progress in their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management, including governance are good. Leaders and governors are ambitious for the school. They have a clear vision for development and are well on their way to achieving this.
- The headteacher leads the school very effectively, delegating responsibility to his senior leaders that matches their expertise well. The quality of teaching and the progress students make have improved considerably since the previous inspection.
- Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the school. This is illustrated in the inspection questionnaire that was completed by a large number of staff.
- Parents are also very positive about all aspects of the school. There was a high return on Parent View and some parents wrote to the inspection team to express just how much they valued the work of the school.
- The quality of teaching is improving and much is good or better. Staff are given advice on how to improve their teaching, although this has not always been as personalised as it might have been in the past.
- Subject leaders are sharing best practice much better, an area for development at the previous inspection. As a result students' progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2 is accelerating and is now good. However, the role of subject leaders requires further development. Currently, not all are sufficiently skilled at holding the staff in their areas to account for the progress that students make or for the quality of teaching.
- Systems for checking how well students are achieving are extremely thorough. Any student who is in danger of underachieving is identified early and helped to catch up well. Additional funding, including the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up money has been used to good effect. As a result gaps between the performance of different groups are closing rapidly. This reflects the inclusiveness of the school, its promotion of the equality of opportunity, tackling of discrimination and fostering of good relationships.
- The school uses some of the money from the primary physical education and sports funding to increase staff coverage and to buy in additional equipment. As a result, students' physical development and their achievement in physical education are good.
- The curriculum has been skilfully adapted to the needs and interests of all the students. This has resulted in the improved performance in mathematics and in the very high standards that students attain in English and science. There is a wide array of clubs and visits, including those relating to the school's arts specialism.
- The range of experiences, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision that the school gives its students ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education and life in modern Britain. British values are addressed well through assemblies, religious education and other lessons. Students hold mock elections to reflect what is happening in the nation as a whole.
- The school's safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements and are effective. The school is vigilant in looking after all its students, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- In the past, the local authority has provided a light-touch support. That has been stepped up recently and the authority is providing a good level of challenge.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is very strong. Governors are highly ambitious for their school, work very closely with it and have a clear vision for the future of the school. They offer a good degree of challenge and get involved first-hand in helping to secure improvement. For example, they been fully involved in drawing up and implementing an action plan to successfully improve performance in mathematics. They undergo training, including training on the use of data about students' performance. They have a good knowledge of the quality of teaching and they ensure that teachers' pay is linked well to performance and results. They know how the school's finances are used and to what effect. They are particularly knowledgeable about the impact of the use of the pupil premium for disadvantaged students. Governors are not complacent; they are reflective about their own performance and are keen to improve this even further.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Long-serving members of staff and school records indicate that it has been so for some time.
- Students are very proud of their school and say that there is nothing they would want to change. They are respectful towards each other and towards adults. They take a pride in their surroundings, which are

virtually litter-free.

- The students themselves rate behaviour as nine out of 10. They told the inspectors one of the reasons they liked the school so much is because everyone is so friendly and people get on really well with each other. The inspectors observed the excellent relationships students had with each other during the inspection, not only in the playground but also in class.
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They work very well together in groups and eagerly try to improve their work when they are given the opportunity to do so.
- Attendance is consistently above average.
- The staff questionnaires showed that staff agree strongly that students behave well. This view was echoed by parents in the online questionnaire and by those who wrote to the inspectors in support of the school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Adults look after the students exceptionally well. As a result all groups of students feel extremely safe.
- The school has very effective systems in place to ensure that students are kept very safe, such as rigorous assessments for visits out of school.
- Students have a very keen awareness of different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and the different types of prejudiced-based bullying. They were adamant that nothing like that ever happens at their school.
- Students promote safety for others extremely well. Year 8 peer mentors take their duties of looking after Year 5 students very seriously and there is much interest in applying for these coveted roles. Some of the mentors act as bus buddies, escorting the younger students to the buses that leave from the nearby high school at the end of the day. Parents spoke very warmly of the way the children look after each other and said that this had helped their children settle into school life quickly.
- Parents agree strongly that the school keeps their children safe and looks after them very well.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching over time is good and results in all groups of students making good progress. Some teaching results in students making outstanding gains in their learning, but not consistently so at present.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations. They capitalise well on students' eagerness to learn both individually and in groups. They encourage students to assess their own learning, but occasionally teachers do not give clear enough guidance on how to do this.
- Students enjoy the opportunity to work out things for themselves, and when they get some choice in the tasks they do often pick the more demanding option. This supports their good and sometimes outstanding progress. This was exemplified well in a Year 6 mathematics lesson.
- The most able students are stretched well in lessons with tasks that make them think deeply. This is also apparent in the homework that they are set. As a result the most able students make good progress.
- Teaching assistants work with groups of students, some of whom have additional needs. They are highly skilled at breaking down the work into smaller chunks so that their students can access it. This enables students with additional needs to make good progress in line with their peers.
- Occasionally, teachers do not set tasks that are accessible to all students. As a result, some of the students, mainly those of middle ability, do not progress as well as they might do.
- Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are incorporated well into many tasks, such as Year 5 using an art program to create tribal art from Papua New Guinea and the use of the computerised whiteboard to correct French grammar in Year 7. Increasingly good attention is given to spelling, punctuation and grammar, through focused sessions in form time. This is resulting in students' attainment rising much more rapidly in this area this year.
- Students' work is marked regularly and accurately, but the quality of marking is not of a consistently high quality in the way it informs students well enough how they can improve their work.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well, for example in helping students to reflect on what it is like to live in countries not so advantaged as our own or in relating the Beatitudes, the eight blessings given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, to modern day life.
- Parents agreed that teaching is good and that their children make good progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students generally enter Year 5 with attainment that is above that expected for their age and leave in Year 8 with attainment that is at least above and sometimes well above that expected for their age.
- The progress across the four years in school is good or better, especially in reading and writing. This is because students are encouraged to have plenty of practise in writing in many other subject areas. A love of reading has been instilled through initiatives such as striving for the coveted 'reading passport'.
- Progress in mathematics in the past has not been as strong in Key Stage 2, although it has been improving. Following a rigorous analysis by the school and a revamping of the curriculum, progress in mathematics in this key stage is good for all groups of students and matches the consistently good progress in Key Stage 3. This is confirmed by the school's data and inspection evidence in lessons and in students' books.
- The progress that the most able students make is good. This is true in all subjects across the school. They are challenged well with work that makes them think hard. Their excellent attitudes to learning means they work together very effectively to solve difficult problems. This was seen in many lessons but exemplified particularly well in a practical Year 8 science lesson where students had to relate the structure of lungs to their function.
- The progress that disadvantaged students make is good. Any gaps between their progress and that of non-disadvantaged students in the school are minimal or closing strongly. This is also true when comparing the progress of disadvantaged students in school with the progress of non-disadvantaged students nationally. In 2014, at the end of Key Stage 2, the attainment of disadvantaged students in school was two terms behind other students in mathematics and reading and three terms behind in writing. Compared to non-disadvantaged students nationally, disadvantaged students in school were about half a term behind in reading and writing and nearly two terms behind in mathematics.
- The progress that students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is good in all subjects, including mathematics, English and science. Their progress is helped greatly by the good support they receive from very effective teaching assistants and the work they receive usually stretches them appropriately.
- Literacy is reinforced particularly well throughout the school, including the promotion of reading, and this accounts for the students making particularly good progress in English. Listening to some Year 5 students reading confirmed to the inspectors just how high the standard of reading is.
- Performance in the arts subjects, the school's specialism, is good.
- Students are prepared well for the next stage in their education. Their confidence and independence skills are built up through residential trips, involvement in orchestras, theatre and dance groups and the opportunities to look after others. There are excellent links with the high school and also with the feeder first schools.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122369
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	453398

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	333
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Pyle
Headteacher	Alan Hodgson
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2011
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