

# Saint Michael's Catholic High School

High Elms Lane, Garston, Watford, WD25 0SS

## Inspection dates

25–26 November 2014

| Overall effectiveness          | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected as an academy |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Outstanding</b>                     | <b>1</b> |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Outstanding                            | 1        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Outstanding                            | 1        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Outstanding                            | 1        |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Outstanding                            | 1        |
| Sixth form provision           |                      | Outstanding                            | 1        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- Students make outstanding progress and the vast majority achieve above-average standards in a range of subjects at GCSE, including English and mathematics.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers teach with authority because they have good subject knowledge. They plan interesting and enjoyable learning activities, which challenge students to work hard and achieve their best.
- Leaders have improved the quality of teaching and learning, behaviour and safety, and leadership and management, through coaching, training and personal target setting. This is raising standards for students.
- Disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs, make excellent progress and achieve well because the targeted funding is used effectively to support them. The most-able students are stretched and challenged in lessons, and participate in 'master classes' and visits to universities.
- Students feel very safe in school and have an exceptionally well developed sense of right and wrong.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are highly collaborative, courteous, polite and considerate.
- Adults and students show a high level of mutual respect. The school is an extremely calm, purposeful, peaceful and harmonious community.
- Attendance is above average. Students enjoy coming to school. They attend punctually and ensure that lessons are able to begin on time.
- The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. He receives strong support from a skilled, perceptive and effective governing body. Together, they have secured the dedication, loyalty and trust of staff who show willingness to 'go the extra mile' and ensure students receive exceptional pastoral care and achieve their best.
- The sixth form is outstanding. High expectations from leaders and teachers underpin students' commitment to strive to achieve high grades. There is an increase in the proportion achieving higher grades and progressing to good universities.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons. Eight of these observations were completed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed students at breaks and lunchtimes, and attended tutorial periods.
- Discussions were held with students, staff, governors, the headteacher, and a representative from The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust.
- Inspectors took account of the 106 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as letters received from parents. They also took account of the 47 responses to staff questionnaires.
- A wide range of documents was examined, including samples of students' work, information about students' progress, the school's development plan and self-evaluation, records of any poor behaviour, records of governing body meetings and safeguarding documents.
- Inspectors listened to students read, and observed reading support lessons and the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make).

## Inspection team

|                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Sherry Gladwin, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Sandra Teacher                 | Additional Inspector |
| John Ubsdell                   | Additional Inspector |
| Gillian Walley                 | Additional Inspector |
| David Westworth                | Additional Inspector |

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Saint Michael's Catholic High School converted to become an academy on 1 March 2012. When its predecessor school, Saint Michael's Catholic High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged outstanding overall.
- The school is part of The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of minority ethnic students is above average. Likewise the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- At around 11%, the proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is well below average. This is additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- About 15% of students are disabled or have special educational needs. This is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- Thirteen students in Key Stage 4 currently attend off-site courses at Oaklands College and Chesbrook Education Support Centre.
- The school works in partnership with the Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire Teaching Alliance to improve the quality of teaching in local schools.

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

- Raise achievement further by ensuring that all teachers provide students with clear guidance about how to improve their work and check that students respond to these helpful comments by making the required improvements.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's leadership is exceptional. He sets high expectations regarding all aspects of school life. His clear vision for school improvement is communicated to and understood by staff. He is not afraid to tackle poor performance. The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. This leads to continuous improvement because the school is quick to put into place actions that will lead to further improvement.
- One of the school's core values is to promote justice and equality. It promotes equality of opportunity exceptionally well. Students are free from discrimination and harassment. Students from all walks of life make excellent progress, hold high aspirations and progress to higher education, training or employment.
- The robust and systematic monitoring of teaching is supported by effective actions that help teachers improve their practice. Senior leaders are supported by subject leaders who are well trained and equipped for the role. They help to check the quality of teaching by regularly observing lessons, checking the quality of marking, and checking the quality of students' work. Subject leaders closely follow students' progress to ensure they stay on track and achieve the challenging targets that are set for them.
- Subjects available to students cover academic and vocational opportunities. Students of all abilities and interests can find something to engage their interest. Classroom learning is enhanced through assemblies, the work of the school council and eco council, and by visiting speakers and religious leaders. Further enhancement comes through a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs, including the many sporting competitions with local schools. In addition, the variety of residential trips – such as the ski trip to Austria, the geography trips to Iceland and Ireland, or the history trip to Berlin – contribute to students' academic, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Additional funding available through the pupil premium is used to provide a rich variety of supplementary learning activities which benefit eligible students academically, socially, culturally, spiritually and morally. Regular small-group and one-to-one sessions are available during lunchtime and after school to help students consolidate their learning on topics and prevent gaps emerging in their knowledge and understanding. The opportunity to attend a special 'retreat' allows students to focus on literacy and numeracy as well as other aspects requiring support. These occasions build students' personal confidence and good skills.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. The school's engagement with parents is outstanding. The school's website keeps them very well informed. Opportunities to engage with the school through the parents' forum and consultation days are very much appreciated by parents, and they are well attended. During the inspection, a number of parents wrote letters in praise of the school. One parent wrote, 'This is a unique school that does not have a unique building but staff build special relationships that enable children to maintain their unique identity and achieve their full potential.'
- The school's safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Leaders ensure that students are kept safe through effective recruitment and child protection procedures.
- Work in partnership with the local authority has resulted in good support for subject leaders and action planning to promote higher achievement.
- Students have access to impartial and good quality careers advice. There is a well-resourced careers room staffed by qualified persons. Year 11 students spoke highly of this provision and explained that they made good use of it.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance is outstanding. Governors are highly trained, enthusiastic and dedicated members of the community. They bring a range of knowledge, skills and experience to their role. Governors closely monitor students' behaviour and academic progress against the challenging targets that are set. They understand information on students' progress and performance and ask challenging questions of senior

leaders, holding them to account because they have depth of insight.

- Governors have a clear understanding the school's strengths and areas for development because they visit the school, and communicate with staff, pupils and parents on a regular basis. Their robust checking on the quality of teaching helps to promote higher standards in teaching and learning.
- Governors understand the value of good teaching in securing high standards. They manage the headteacher's performance closely. The headteacher's own targets are used to determine the targets of other staff and help to drive improvement. Any pay rises or promotion for teachers are linked appropriately to students' progress.
- Governors make sure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet statutory requirements. They manage the finances prudently and can account for the use of the pupil premium.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. The school is a harmonious community where students develop a good understanding of right and wrong. They are mature, impeccably courteous, polite and friendly. Students behave with a high level of consideration, such as, holding doors open for staff, visitors and each other.
- Students' attitudes to their learning are highly positive and underpin their outstanding progress. They listen politely to teachers and one another in group situations, taking turns to contribute articulately and thoughtfully to discussions. Their highly co-operative attitudes contribute to the good rapport that exist between teachers and students.
- Students take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers encourage them to check their own understanding and that of other students. They record their own progress against targets which the teachers have discussed and agreed with them. Rewards in the forms of 'positives' (points) and wrist bands are used by staff to mark students' demonstrations of positive attitudes, effort and, or achievement. This approach helps to motivates students to continually want to do their best and excel.
- Students enjoy coming to school because teachers have transmitted a love of learning. They also enjoy school because it is a caring environment where they have good friendships. Students are good ambassadors for the school. During the inspection, members from the community praised the maturity of students from Year 8 who held a 'guard of honour' at the entrance to the crematorium at a classmate's parent's funeral. Students' spiritual development is very well supported by the school's chaplain.
- Attendance is above the national average. Students attend school punctually and move between classes quickly so that lessons start on time and continue without disruption. The pupil premium funding is being used to improve the attendance of eligible students. This had led to better attendance from disadvantaged students.
- There have been no permanent exclusions and fixed-term exclusions are low.
- Students benefit from opportunities to serve the school as prefects, school council or eco council members, and house captains. They welcome these opportunities and gain useful insight to life and leadership. For instance, some students spoke enthusiastically to an inspector of the 'fair trade' event they were organising and of the impact they hoped it would have on their peers. Over the years, students have raised about £340,000 for social justice work and in support of various projects in Rwanda.
- Students are very good ambassadors for the school. They are proud to be associated with the school and wear their uniform smartly. Annual retreats and trips to Lourdes provide opportunities to reflect, develop friendships with other students they would not usually speak with, and gain knowledge and understanding in relation to academic, social and moral aspects of life. Parents, staff and pupils are united in their view that the school promotes high standards of dress, attitudes, behaviour and achievement in line with the school's stated core values.

## Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students say that they feel very safe.
- Students have an exceptionally clear understanding of how to keep safe, including when using the internet. The school provides effective teaching on how to respond to and report cyber-bullying. Students understand how to use social media safely and make sensible use of privacy settings. Personal, social and health education covers a range of topics, including road safety, smoking, drugs and alcohol. Students have an excellent grasp of the dangers associated with these and the value of leading a healthy lifestyle.
- Students go through the school without experiencing any form of bullying including sexist, racist and homophobic name-calling. They express confidence in adults to quickly and effectively resolve such issues should they arise. Teachers and parents feel that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour.
- The school provides effective support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs because of their challenging behaviour. Good links with parents and external agencies, and the full involvement of students in decisions about the support they receive, result in well-designed individual support plans and consistent approaches to behaviour management.

## The quality of teaching

### is outstanding

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They plan learning activities which are stimulating and which engage students' interests. The purpose of each lesson is made clear, which allows students to work with understanding and make excellent progress. Work is matched well to students' abilities so that those who need to be challenged are stretched and those who require support are helped to progress at a suitable pace.
- Classrooms are calm, harmonious places. Teachers set high expectations. They ensure high levels of co-operation and respect from students. Teachers model the school's values and contribute much of their own time to ensure that students achieve their best. They invest a great deal of time in lunchtime, after-school and holiday revision sessions. Year 11 students spoke highly of the 'walk and talk' revision sessions which covered examination questions in detail so they gained clarity and skill in examination technique.
- Routine and rigorous checking of students' progress ensures that all students make excellent progress. Students identified as requiring additional support in order to close gaps in their learning are supported by excellent teaching. Teachers' quick actions designed to help students improve their work are effective. They result in students catching up quickly and growing in confidence. The close involvement of parents and students in this process creates an effective three-way partnership that is one reason why so many students do so well.
- During lessons, teachers use probing questions to check students' understanding, extend their learning and identify gaps. Students are keen learners and readily engage in class, group and paired activities. They respond to teachers' questions spontaneously and thoughtfully, showing good command of the spoken language. They speak with maturity, fluency and good articulation.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught very effectively. Students are supported in making excellent progress across a range of subjects and through some creative approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy. For instance, students who are eligible for the pupil premium funding have been supplied with e-readers and texts to encourage reading. This is having a good impact. Some Year 10 students explained that they used *The Woman in Black* as a class reader during form tutor periods and went to the theatre to see the performance. Across all subjects, teachers mark literacy well. They follow the school's marking policy and consistently correct spelling errors, grammatical mistakes and punctuation.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely to plan small-group sessions and in-class support for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs. These are successful, particularly in English and mathematics, and ensure the excellent progress of these students.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and accurately, in line with the school's marking and assessment

policy. They provide helpful comments to students. Marking is particularly good in some subjects like English. However, not all teachers provide helpful comments that clearly indicate to students how they should improve their work. Teachers do not always check that students follow their advice and make the required improvements.

### **The achievement of pupils**

**is outstanding**

- Students join the school with broadly average prior attainment. Consistently good teaching, supported by students' own positive attitudes to learning, results in outstanding progress. The vast majority of students make good and outstanding progress in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. There are no significant differences in the progress of different groups.
- In 2014, students achieved well above-average standards in a broad range of GCSE subjects including English and mathematics. There was good improvement in English so that results were exceptionally high. The results in mathematics were not as high as in 2013, when they also were exceptionally high.
- The progress of disadvantaged students was excellent but their attainment was not as good as that of other students in the school. In 2014, they were around a GCSE grade behind their classmates in English and mathematics. However, their attainment in these subjects was in line with all students nationally. School information currently shows that the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their classmates is narrowing.
- In 2014, the most-able students made good or outstanding progress in line with their ability. This is due to the challenge they experience in lessons and the rich additional programmes they experience. For instance, students benefit from mathematics 'master classes' provided for them.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make excellent progress.
- 'Catch up' funding is used to provide support for students who are behind in English and mathematics when they start in Year 7. This extra supports enables these students to close gaps in learning so that they catch up with their classmates.
- The progress of minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language is outstanding. Students' positive attitudes support their learning. They benefit from very effective teaching and additional support in reading and writing, which helps them to quickly acquire excellent reading and writing skills.
- Students attending vocational courses off-site for subjects such as hair and beauty are carefully checked on each week for good attendance. Records show that students' attendance is in line with that of peers in school. The school also records these students' progress. School information shows that these students are well motivated and make excellent progress.

### **The sixth form provision**

**is outstanding**

- The leadership and management of the sixth form is outstanding. Leaders have remodelled the curriculum so that it caters for all abilities and interests.
- Students benefit from studying academic or work-related subjects, as appropriate. They have good impartial careers advice and all students progress to university, employment or training. The school carefully tracks the destination of leavers. An increasing number gain entry to Russell Group universities.
- Retention rates are good and achievement is rising on both academic and work-related courses. Level 3 results are well above the national average. About 88% of students achieved A\* to B grades in 2014.
- The behaviour and safety of students is outstanding. Sixth form students make a significant contribution

to school life and set a good example to younger students. Over the past year, they have raised about £6,000 for charity. Students are smart in their appearance and behave with maturity and consideration. They have high aspirations. Attendance is good and they are punctual to school and lessons.

- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers plan learning that challenges students' thinking, knowledge and skills. Students develop the good study skills required at university.



## 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

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 137922        |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Hertfordshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 449422        |

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.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Type of school</b>                         | Secondary                                |
| <b>School category</b>                        | Academy converter                        |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                    | 11–18                                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                       | Mixed                                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>     | Mixed                                    |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>    | 1126                                     |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 220                                      |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                  | The governing body                       |
| <b>Chair</b>                                  | Kevin Rylett                             |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                            | Edward Conway                            |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>     | Not previously inspected as an academy   |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 01923 673760                             |
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