

Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

Colney Heath Lane, St Albans AL4 0TT

Inspection dates	22–23 June 2016
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 programme	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The leadership of the headteacher has ensured that the school and the wider community work well together. His leadership has led to widespread improvements since the last inspection.
- The executive headteacher and governors challenge leaders effectively to ensure that pupils are safe.
- Outcomes for pupils are good. Since the last inspection, leaders have ensured an upward trend of improvement. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is consistently above national averages.
- Leadership both of subjects and of pupils' pastoral care is good because the leaders of these aspects are supported well and held fully accountable for making improvements.
- Pupils make especially strong progress in humanities and modern languages due to good teaching and assessment practice.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress. The curriculum prepares them well for the next steps in their learning or careers.
- Personal development and welfare of pupils is a strength of the school. The school's ethos makes a strong contribution to a sense of community, to pupils' values, and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Leaders' actions have ensured that all groups of pupils attend school regularly. The proportion of pupils whose absence is a concern has been significantly reduced.
- Parents and carers value the education provided for their children. They praise the actions leaders take to communicate with them, to manage pupils' behaviour effectively and to promote a happy environment in which their children learn.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some pupils do not know enough about how well they are doing or about what will help them improve their work.
- Teachers in some subjects other than English do not support pupils as well as they could to fully develop their literacy skills.
- The good practice in teaching in humanities and modern languages has not been shared across the curriculum. Consequently, not all subjects, for example science, are taught as effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of all groups of pupils by:
 - developing pupils' literacy across the curriculum by checking regularly the standards of writing, spelling and grammar
 - encouraging pupils to read more widely.
- Improve teaching and progress in science so that outcomes match those in other core subjects by:
 - developing, sharing and promoting the best practice evident in the school
 - checking that teachers plan learning suited to the different needs and abilities of pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive headteacher and headteacher have worked together well to improve teaching and raise standards. They have dealt effectively with challenges and keep a firm eye on what needs to be done to provide a good education for the pupils.
- The headteacher's determination to instil in pupils the school's shared values of justice, peace, truth and love are evident in many aspects of the school's work. As a result, pupils respect their environment and each other.
- Actions to strengthen staffing and improve the progress of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in 2015 and 2016 have been effective. Pupils' achievement is good and they are taught effectively.
- Leaders have established a wide range of strong partnerships. These bring increased expertise and support to aid improvement. They have supported well the developments in teaching, which is now good.
- Senior leaders support and challenge staff at all levels. As a result, staff share the ownership of improvement and take responsibility for making sure that standards achieved by pupils are continually rising.
- Leaders at all levels have focused relentlessly on checking the standard of teaching. Their routine monitoring is robust and provides them with an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. In turn, this information is used to plan the training and support that enable teachers to improve their work.
- Teachers' performance is managed well. Pay awards are given careful consideration by leaders and governors. Weaker practice is tackled early and not allowed to continue if it affects pupils' learning. Teaching remains good because less experienced teachers and learning support assistants are given effective support to develop their skills.
- Subject leaders monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility effectively. They are closely supported by their line managers, and expectations of their work are high. They have the skills necessary to monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility independently, and contribute well to improving pupils' outcomes.
- Pupils' books show that teachers' assessments adhere to the school's policy, are picking up any misconceptions and are providing pupils with good advice on how to improve their work.
- Leaders have focused relentlessly on improving the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points. Close monitoring of their attendance, and follow-up actions, means levels of absence have fallen. Pupils' attendance is good.
- Parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were almost unanimously positive about all aspects of the school's work. In particular, parents are delighted with how well the school is led and with how happy and safe their children are.
- A broad and balanced curriculum enables pupils to pursue their interests and ensures that they attain the GCSE qualifications they need for the next stage of their education or training. The curriculum is enhanced well by a wide range of extra-curricular activities including sporting, artistic and personal development opportunities for all year groups.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils receive good guidance about their future career options. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 have a well-supported options process. Year 11 pathways into the shared sixth form and higher education are well established.
- Pupils show a good understanding of British values such as tolerance and democracy. They have recently been involved in a range of projects in which they have learned about current affairs. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their learning are thoughtfully considered so that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governors provide good strategic leadership. They have played a robust role in checking that the school is on track to become good.
 - Additional training over the last two years has helped governors to develop their skills and increased their ability and confidence to challenge school leaders.
 - Minutes of meetings show that governors ask challenging questions of leaders. For example, since the last inspection, governors have consistently asked about what is being done to improve standards of teaching and whether it has improved to be good.
 - Governors manage school finances carefully and address any deficit to ensure that funding is used effectively.

- Governors are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding and have established a strong monitoring process to ensure the safety of pupils. Independent audits inform the governors of areas of weakness, and the experienced chair of the governing body is relentless in following up with school leaders any required actions.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Processes to ensure that staff are checked for their suitability to work with children and young people are extremely robust. During tutor-time and assemblies pupils are regularly taught about risks to their personal safety, including those posed by extremism, and staff are trained to identify and report any concerns they have about pupils' welfare. Through the school's pupil support centre, 'The Ark', good arrangements are in place with wider agencies to make sure that pupils and their families are well supported.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Actions taken by leaders have improved the quality of teaching since the last inspection and it is now good. Pupils learn in a supportive and purposeful atmosphere because their relationships with adults are strong.
- Teachers are adept at using their knowledge of pupils' different stages of learning to determine what they need to learn next.
- Leaders work with partners in other schools to check assessments and validate their accuracy. Senior leaders and governors have a detailed and reliable overview of how well pupils are progressing.
- Teachers use a wide range of resources and new technologies which engage and interest pupils in learning, and which help to accelerate their progress. For example, in mathematics, the use of new technology to visually support a teacher's explanation of concepts helped pupils to understand their learning well.
- Teachers provide the most able pupils with challenging tasks, including through homework, that stimulate their interest. Teachers have high expectations for the presentation of pupils' work. Pupils take full advantage of opportunities to review their work, engaging in helpful discussions with each other about how well they are doing, and helping each other to see how they can improve.
- Pupils make faster progress in modern languages because of the high-quality use of language by skilled teachers. Well-planned changes of activity keep pupils interested. Pupils make good progress when using the language being taught. They communicate well in a wide range of activities.
- In humanities, teachers' lessons meticulously develop pupils' understanding. Pupils achieve well in extending their written answers through learning how to compare and contrast different views.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to develop pupils' evaluation skills, testing out and extending pupils' understanding well. In an English lesson observed by inspectors, the pupils' abilities to justify a character's behaviour were clearly evident during a whole-class discussion.
- The profile given to developing reading across the school is underdeveloped. Very few of the older pupils talk enthusiastically about reading and it is not developed well in most lessons.
- In some lessons, lower-attaining boys do not receive the support and challenge they need to make accelerated progress because not all teachers provide the right activities for them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school's caring ethos and its inclusive approach to welcoming pupils of different faiths pervades all aspects of its work. Pupils learn to respect and tolerate the views of others and are well supported to develop an understanding of the consequences of their actions.
- Pupils value the times they have to share spiritual reflection and to engage in learning about the lives of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The opportunities are planned during assemblies, tutor-time and in their religious studies lessons.
- Pastoral leaders ensure that weekly personal, social, health and economic education lessons, including citizenship, equip pupils with the knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe in and out of school. Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety and understand how to keep themselves safe from other risks they might be exposed to.

- Leaders' robust records show that bullying, including homophobic and racist incidents, is rare. Pupils trust and value the online system, which allows them to report incidents and concerns directly to the headteacher.
- All pupils attend an annual retreat. They learn how to work cooperatively, build strong relationships and understand the values of the school as well as life in modern Britain. For example, in discussion with inspectors, they talked with empathy and understanding about the lives of refugees.
- Pupils play an active role in the life of the school. The pupil council has a high profile. Its leaders organise extremely well-attended events to celebrate the life of the school and to support charities.
- Leaders provide a comprehensive careers advice programme for pupils. This includes careers fairs, school trips and listening to visitors talk about their professions and the world of work. Interviews with an independent careers adviser ensure that pupils feel well prepared for the next steps in their education.
- Leaders plan a wide range of events and activities to welcome primary-aged pupils before they join the school in Year 7. When asked by inspectors, pupils currently in Year 7 praised how the arrangements made them feel welcome and supported.
- Pupils are taught about the importance of leading healthy lifestyles, particularly through their lessons in food technology, science and physical education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct around the school is exemplary. They are welcoming to visitors, socialise well at break and lunchtimes and are keen to talk, with pride, about their school.
- Staff use the new arrangements to manage behaviour well. Pupils respond positively to guidance, and behaviour in lessons during the inspection was seen to be good. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in lessons and around school is typically always good. Occasional instances of poor behaviour in lessons are dealt with effectively by teachers, and do not affect the learning of other pupils.
- Parents overwhelmingly consider that behaviour is well managed at the school. They say their children are happy and progress well.
- Leaders have increased the rewards for good behaviour. This has led to pupils becoming more confident learners because those who behave well are recognised in assemblies and tutor-time for their achievements and contribution to the school community.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is seen by their good levels of attendance and punctuality to lessons. Systems to reduce absence are robust and have led to leaders identifying and successfully improving the attendance of a small group of usually poor attenders.
- Exclusions are above average but are used appropriately to manage the behaviour of the most challenging pupils when all other sanctions have been exhausted. Records show that pupils rarely repeat poor behaviour after an exclusion has been applied.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Overall outcomes in key stage 4 are good and improving because good teaching, higher expectations and greater rigour of assessment are leading to improved progress across all year groups.
- Middle leaders have clear roles in raising achievement and are increasingly accountable for pupils' outcomes. Their timely interventions have led to rapid improvements in key stage 4 outcomes since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, has improved for three years and was above the national average in 2015. Assessment information and pupils' work suggest that pupils are on track to achieve good outcomes again in 2016.
- Pupils' current progress is good in the vast majority of subjects and in each year group. Leaders at all levels intervene to ensure that slower progress in a particular year group or subject does not become a pattern.
- Pupils achieve well. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English has been above the national average for two years. The proportion making expected progress in mathematics has increased significantly since the last inspection and is now also well above average. The proportion of pupils making better than expected progress across the school in both English and mathematics is high.

- While progress and attainment have improved in English and mathematics, improvement is less pronounced in science. There is a mixed picture because outcomes in additional science have improved rapidly and are now close to national averages. However, in core science, actions taken to improve the quality of teaching have yet to impact on pupils' progress, and standards have not improved.
- New leaders are ensuring that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. As a result, their progress has improved and is good from their different starting points.
- The proportion of the most able pupils making more than expected progress is rising and is now in line with that of similar pupils nationally. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they are rigorously challenged and make good progress as a result.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved significantly. It is now above the 2015 national average but remains below that of other pupils nationally. There are still gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others in mathematics because attainment has risen across the school for all groups and disadvantaged pupils have not yet caught up.
- All Year 11 pupils are progressing onto sustained education or training as a result of the good careers advice and support they receive.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The high standards and good progress made by students, noted at the time of the last inspection, have been sustained. Overall, students' performance by the time they leave the sixth form is above the national average.
- Leadership and management are good because an experienced director oversees a rigorous monitoring system that accurately judges the strengths and weaknesses of all aspects of the sixth form.
- Provision consists mainly of A-level courses. From their average starting points, students make good progress and achieve AS- and A-level results that are above national averages. The proportion of A* to B grades has increased for the last three years and is now broadly in line with national averages.
- A small proportion of students join Year 12 without a C grade in either GCSE English or mathematics. Leaders ensure that most of them attain these qualifications by the time they leave the sixth form.
- Students make very good progress in French, government and politics, chemistry, computing and history. Leaders have taken action to improve teaching where students have achieved less well, for example in English literature and biology. Reorganisation of subject leadership to support improvement has led to increasingly strong teaching across all subjects.
- Post-16 students achieve best in subjects where teachers plan activities that enable students to explore and challenge concepts, and also have high expectations for the standard of extended writing.
- Students have a comprehensive curriculum that includes tutor-time, religious studies, enrichment courses and two weeks of work experience. This provides good personal development opportunities and, as a result, students know how to keep themselves safe and are well prepared for their future lives in modern Britain.
- Post-16 students say they value the regular information and advice given to them about future career opportunities, and the help they receive from form tutors and other staff in completing applications for university. All students have access to an independent careers adviser who provides them with specialist advice for higher education and work-based routes such as apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	137938
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10017772

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	574
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Graham
Headteacher	Declan Linnane
Telephone number	01727 860079
Website	www.nbs.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@nbs.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 November 2014

Information about this school

- Nicholas Breakspeare Catholic School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has a sixth-form partnership with John Henry Newman Catholic School in Stevenage.
- The current headteacher took up post in September 2014 and has been supported by an executive headteacher who has been leading the school since September 2013.
- The number of pupils on the school roll has fallen since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of girls on roll is significantly below the national average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language are above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding, which is additional funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and children looked after, is average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils learning in 36 lessons, six of which were seen jointly with a senior leader. In addition, several short visits were made to a range of lessons.
- At the time of inspection, pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 were involved in public examinations so it was not possible to observe the full range of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, headteacher, and senior, subject and other leaders. Inspectors met three groups of pupils and a group of sixth-form students.
- Inspectors met the chair and three members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 74 responses to Parent View.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised data about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. Inspectors also looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, reviewed minutes of meetings of the governing body and scrutinised pupils' work in lessons.

Inspection team

Simon Webb, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
John Mitcheson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bruce Clarke	Ofsted Inspector
Kevin Sadler	Ofsted Inspector

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