

St Cuthbert's Catholic High School

Gretna Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE15 7PX

Inspection dates	26–27 April 2016
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Strong, uncompromising leadership has driven a programme of change and improvement since the headteacher's appointment in September 2013.
- The governors' pursuit of excellence and their determination to address inequality have been highly influential in the school's development.
- Pupils make rapid and sustained progress across different subjects and year groups. Where progress was less rapid in the past, action has been taken and improvements have been made.
- Disadvantaged pupils attain standards above those of other pupils nationally. Pupils that enter the school with lower levels of attainment and pupils who have special educational needs or disability make outstanding progress.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. Teachers' high expectations and strong subject knowledge ensure pupils make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils regularly receive helpful feedback from teachers that challenges their thinking and deepens their understanding.
- Pupils are ambitious and aspirational. They work hard and apply themselves diligently, developing excellent work habits.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. They are extremely courteous, polite and well mannered. As they progress through the school, they become increasingly confident and self-assured.
- Pupils value their education and rarely miss school. Overall levels of attendance are well above the national average.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is excellent. The well-developed house system ensures pastoral leaders know pupils well and take prompt action to support or protect vulnerable pupils.
- The broad curriculum meets pupils' needs and interests. Pupils receive good information, advice and guidance, enabling them to make informed choices about their next steps. Increasing proportions of pupils progress through the sixth form and on to university.
- 16–19 study programmes are outstanding. Learners make rapid and sustained progress and attain standards above those seen nationally. Learners are highly complimentary about the opportunities available to them to support their wider personal development.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Address weaknesses in a minority of pupils' spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting, so that they are well prepared for examinations and future life.

- Improve the rates of success of learners in the sixth form that resit GCSE mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Since her appointment in 2013, the headteacher has overseen a comprehensive programme of change designed to drive the school forward. Her uncompromising approach, coupled with a distinct moral purpose, has ensured weaknesses in performance are systematically tackled and barriers to achievement are removed. The vast majority of parents that responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire feel that the school is well led and managed.
- Leadership and management of the school have been restructured since it was last inspected. As a result, leaders at all levels are sharply focused on their responsibilities and objectives and there are clear and consistent lines of accountability. There are highly systematic arrangements in place to check the quality of teaching and achievement. As a result, prompt and decisive action is taken to address any identified areas of underperformance.
- The headteacher and governors have raised expectations and managed the performance of teachers robustly. Rigorous appraisal procedures ensure that effective teaching is rewarded. Teachers who do not meet the school's high expectations have the opportunity to join the developing teacher programme, through which they are supported by trained coaches. Although expectations of teachers are high, most feel well supported by the training and development they receive and describe the climate as positive and supportive.
- The curriculum provides a broad range of subjects slanted towards academic courses, reflecting the interests of the majority of pupils. For example, the school offers three different modern foreign languages and many pupils choose to follow separate sciences to GCSE level and beyond. In addition, the most-able pupils follow an additional, further mathematics qualification in addition to GCSE mathematics when in Year 11. Engineering, science and technology specialisms are particularly well resourced. There are appropriate vocational courses in place in key stage 4 and the sixth form. The school has been able to broaden the range of subject choices available to learners in the sixth form through collaboration with Sacred Heart Catholic Girls' School.
- The headteacher encourages creativity and is adept at spotting talent within the staff. Several members of staff hold additional responsibilities through which they provide innovative and exciting learning opportunities.
- High standards of conduct and mutual respect run through all aspects of the school's work. Pupils are unerringly polite and well mannered. Their personal development is strong because of the rich provision for their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. All pupils, no matter what their faith, benefit from the positive Catholic ethos that pervades the school.
- Leaders and governors show a strong commitment to equal opportunities. Their work to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils has been exemplary. Academic outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved rapidly because well-thought-out strategies have been consistently implemented. In addition, leaders have taken steps to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have equal access to costly extra-curricular activities, such as overseas trips. Year 7 catch-up funding has also been used effectively, and pupils that enter the school with lower levels of attainment make rapid progress.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are ambitious and forthright in their pursuit of excellence. They share a clear vision centred on the personal, academic and spiritual development of the whole child. Three years ago, they recognised more needed to be done to improve the school and appointed the headteacher with a mandate to make the necessary changes.
 - The well-organised committee structure ensures that governors scrutinise the school's performance effectively and hold members of staff at all levels to account. Where governors identify underperformance, they challenge leaders and push for improvement.
 - The governing body has reviewed its own skills and experience and recruited additional governors with professional expertise. As a result, finances are tightly managed and they are rigorous in checking that safeguarding arrangements are secure.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Members of staff receive very regular training and consequently know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. The house system ensures that pastoral leaders know pupils well and act in a timely manner to protect vulnerable pupils. The designated safeguarding leader and heads of house have well-established links with a range of external agencies and work effectively with parents to provide appropriate support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teachers have high expectations. They focus on teaching challenging subject content that is often above age-related expectations, and providing pupils with feedback that stretches and challenges them further. As a result, pupils make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils develop as confident learners because relationships with teachers are respectful and the climate for learning is aspirational. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary, which allows most lessons to move at a brisk pace. Most teachers are adept at targeting their questions to draw pupils into debate and discussion. Many pupils provide extended and well-considered answers to questions. As pupils move through the school, they become increasingly articulate and self-assured individuals.
- The teaching of the most-able pupils is typified by high expectations and challenge. In mathematics, for example, the most-able pupils study a further mathematics qualification in Year 11, in addition to GCSE mathematics.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and consistently in line with the school's policy. Teachers focus on providing 'closing the gap' questions that require a further response from the pupil. These questions are designed to stretch and challenge pupils' understanding. For example, inspectors noted examples of younger pupils being given GCSE mathematics exam paper questions to extend their understanding of topics.
- However, marking does not focus as effectively on pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar and inspectors found that some pupils repeatedly made the same mistakes, which went unchallenged. In addition, some pupils do not take sufficient care with the presentation and organisation of their work.
- Pupils' progress is systematically assessed through regular testing. All pupils know that their performance in tests can lead to promotion or demotion to higher or lower sets. Pupils respond positively to this challenge and apply themselves diligently. Pupils develop highly effective revision techniques that ensure they retain knowledge well.
- Homework is set and marked regularly, in line with the school's policy. Almost all parents that responded to Parent View believe their son is taught well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils show highly positive attitudes and real determination to better themselves. They participate confidently in lessons and are able to sustain their concentration and work independently when required to do so. In addition, they collaborate well and are mutually supportive of one another. They discuss and debate issues in a mature and considered manner, showing respect for one another's viewpoints. This, together with the strong programme of careers guidance, ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training and for adult life.
- Pupils take part enthusiastically in sport and enjoy competition. They appreciate the value of physical exercise. Older pupils show a strong commitment to sports leadership and regularly undertake coaching roles within local primary schools.
- Incidents of bullying and the use of derogatory language are extremely rare. When they do occur they are dealt with quickly.
- The programme of personal, social, health and economic learning led by the religious education department ensures that pupils are well informed about potential risks. Consequently, pupils feel safe and know how to stay safe. Pupils are well aware of the potential risks when online and know what steps to take to protect themselves.
- Many pupils contribute to charitable fund-raising and other community work through initiatives such as the John Paul II Award programme.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils move around the school calmly and with purpose. At social times, pupils of different faiths and cultural backgrounds mix together happily. They are highly respectful of the school site, do not drop litter and wear their uniforms with pride. Relationships with staff are warm and friendly.

- Pupils also behave impeccably in lessons and show excellent self-discipline. They respond quickly to the teacher's instructions and apply themselves diligently across the day. Disruption to learning from inappropriate behaviour is extremely rare.
- Levels of attendance in the main school and sixth form are well above the national averages. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by weaker attendance. Pupils are punctual in the morning and to lessons during the day. They arrive at lessons with the right equipment and settle quickly.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Since converting to an academy, the school has sustained a high level of performance that has compared favourably with outcomes seen nationally. Pupils typically enter the school with levels of attainment that are in line with or above the national average. From this sound foundation, they make consistently rapid and sustained progress across different subjects and year groups so that, by the end of key stage 4, outcomes are significantly above the national average. In 2015, the proportion of pupils that attained five or more GCSE A* to C grades was 14% above the national average. Almost all groups of pupils made significantly better progress than that seen nationally.
- The concerted efforts of leaders have ensured that any areas of weaker performance have been addressed. For example, the most-able pupils in the school did not make as rapid progress as other ability groups last year, particularly in mathematics. The most-able pupils currently in the school are now making strong, sustained progress because leaders have ensured that they are stretched and challenged more explicitly. Current assessment information, together with the work in their books, show that the most-able pupils are on course to make stronger progress than last year.
- Pupils work hard in lessons and apply themselves diligently. Most take pride in the presentation of their work, although a minority of pupils do not give enough attention to the quality of their handwriting. Pupils take part maturely in discussions and many make extended and well-reasoned contributions, reflecting their depth of knowledge and understanding. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment or training.
- In 2015, achievement in mathematics was not as strong as it was in English. However, direct action from leaders has ensured that pupils currently in the school are making similarly strong progress in both core subjects. Recent changes to the leadership of mathematics and the appointment of some new mathematics teachers have improved the quality of mathematics teaching. Current assessment information indicates that outcomes in 2016 are on course to surpass those seen in 2015.
- Disadvantaged pupils made strong progress and attained standards above those achieved by all pupils nationally last year. All teachers know who the disadvantaged pupils in their classes are and have effective strategies to draw them into discussions and debate during lessons. The progress of these pupils is tracked carefully and additional support provided, if needed, to ensure they do not fall behind. In 2015, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils that attained five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was only 3% behind that of other pupils in the school. The gap in attainment in English and mathematics between disadvantaged and other pupils currently in the school is also small across different year groups, indicating that the school's strategies are highly effective.
- Pupils who enter the school with lower levels of attainment or with special education needs or disability make rapid and sustained progress, particularly in the development of reading and writing skills. Their particular needs are quickly identified and the impact of extra support provided for them is carefully evaluated.
- The school promotes reading effectively. Pupils are all expected to engage in quiet, sustained reading every Friday and all pupils are provided with a free book when they join the school in Year 7. Inspectors observed many boys reading for pleasure in the library and around the school at social times.

16 to 19 study programmes

are outstanding

- Achievement in the sixth form is outstanding. Overall, learners make significantly better progress than that seen nationally and attain standards well above the national average. Most learners follow AS- and A-level courses. Their progress is consistently strong across a wide range of different subjects and has been significantly better than that seen nationally in four of the last five years. Outcomes on vocational courses are broadly similar to the national average, but have improved steadily since their introduction, because of the focused efforts of leaders.
- Disadvantaged learners make similar progress and attain similar outcomes as other learners in the sixth form.
- Around 65% of pupils choose to enter the sixth form. They receive good independent careers information and guidance before deciding on their study programme. Consequently, very few learners change course or fail to complete their chosen study programme. An increasing proportion of learners progress to university. In 2015, half of learners went on to study at high-performing Russell Group universities.
- Learners' personal development while in the sixth form is strong. They conduct themselves very well and act as excellent role models for younger pupils through, for example, acting as reading partners or sports leaders. The enrichment programme develops high levels of confidence and aspiration. Many take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's or John Paul II Award schemes. In addition, the tutorial programme ensures that learners know about potential risks and understand how to keep themselves safe. A number of learners benefit from scholarships and bursaries linked to engineering and science and technology courses.
- All learners undertake work-related learning activities linked to their chosen career aim. For many, this involves a sustained work-experience placement.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good and often outstanding. The combination of strong teaching, very positive relationships and learners' ambition ensures that rapid and sustained progress is made. Teachers are skilled in using incisive questioning to check learners' degree of understanding and they provide effective additional support to help learners that fall behind and need to make up lost ground. An increasing proportion of learners undertake an extended project as an additional qualification.
- Relatively few learners enter the sixth form without a GCSE at grade C or better in English or mathematics. Those that do receive further teaching and have the opportunity to re-join Year 11 lessons. Around half of learners improve their GCSE grade in English, but learners that re-sit GCSE mathematics have been less successful.
- Attendance in the sixth form is particularly high, reflecting the high levels of satisfaction expressed by learners and their parents.
- The sixth form is well led and managed. Leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and have clear plans in place to improve provision further. They have a good track record of targeting weaker areas, such as vocational programmes, and bringing about improvement. The school meets the minimum standards for 16–19 study programmes.

School details

Unique reference number	137900
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10011031

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
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,080
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bridget Rutherford
Headteacher	Carol Davison
Telephone number	0191 2744510
Website	www.st-cuthbertshigh.newcastle.sch.uk
Email address	lesley.caffull@scchs.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Cuthbert's Catholic High School became an academy in March 2012 and retained the same name as the predecessor school. When the predecessor school was last inspected, it was judged to be good.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school and caters solely for boys.
- The large majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above the national average, with the largest group being from a Pakistani background. Most pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is slightly above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor targets, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Sixth-form provision is delivered in conjunction with Sacred Heart Catholic Girls' School in order to broaden the range of subjects available to learners.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision. The website meets requirements for the publication of information.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2013.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 part-lessons, of which a number were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During lesson observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate the quality of their current work. Inspectors also attended tutorial time and undertook a number of shorter visits to lessons to gauge the climate for learning and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors scrutinised in detail a sample of pupils' English, mathematics and science books. In addition, inspectors scrutinised learners' books and folders from a wide range of subjects in the sixth form.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, a group of middle leaders and a group of teachers. In addition, inspectors met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors and a representative of the local authority who provides support and challenge to the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and learners in the sixth form.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including school policies, assessment information, records of checks on the quality of teaching, the school's own self-evaluation and its plans for improvement. The minutes of governing body meetings and a range of safeguarding information were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors took account of the 62 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and of the school's own regular surveys of parents' opinions.

Inspection team

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