

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic High School

Digby Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3NJ

Inspection dates: 21–22 January 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

St Alban's is a Catholic school where Christian values have a positive influence on its members. Pupils understand the importance of the school community. They are polite, mature and considerate towards others. They respect and look after each other. Staff and pupils help new pupils to quickly become part of the school.

The school's motto is 'learning, respecting, caring'. All staff want pupils to do these three things well. Pupils want to do well because they are told they can. Adults listen to what they have to say. Pupils say that they appreciate the support they are given.

Pupils feel safe at school. Most pupils say bullying does not happen often but, if it does, it is tackled quickly. Pupils attend school regularly. They want to learn, so they work hard and behave well. Pupils' work is of a good or improving quality.

The school offers pupils things to do outside of lessons. There are many clubs and activity days that allow them to explore their other interests. Pupils are proud of their charity events and enjoy being given the opportunity to make a difference in society.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum offers a wide range of subjects for pupils to study. Most curriculum plans are detailed. For example, in mathematics and science, leaders and teachers are clear on what knowledge should be taught, the best order in which to teach it and ways to make learning interesting. Pupils told us how their knowledge builds up from lesson to lesson. We saw good examples of this in many subjects. In science, the curriculum helps pupils to remember more about the subject, in the longer term. In physical education, leaders aim for pupils to maintain an active lifestyle beyond school. In technology subjects, a mixture of skills and creativity helps prepare pupils for future employment opportunities.

However, this is not the case in all key stage 3 subjects. Some plans are not as clear as others. For example, in history, the plans include too much content to be taught. As a result, teachers rush through the work rather than teaching it in appropriate depth.

At key stage 4, pupils are advised to choose subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. Not all pupils choose a modern foreign language as there have been a limited number of classes made available to them. However, French is popular. Pupils enjoy their French lessons and their examination grades are high. Leaders have arranged for Spanish to be offered next year too. This is because they want all pupils to have the opportunity to study a language.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and high expectations. They receive regular training which they say is improving their practice. Teachers use assessments well. They adapt their lessons to support those who misunderstand. Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes help them to achieve. Pupils listen well in lessons and are quick to respond to teachers' instructions.

The special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) team is highly effective. The key stage 3 'foundation learning' curriculum addresses gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. A few pupils with SEND study alternative subjects at key stage 4, such as functional skills and entry level mathematics, which help them to progress to the next stage in their education. Teachers have high expectations for disadvantaged pupils and provide extra time and resources to help them to do as well as they can.

Leaders ensure that all pupils know the importance of good attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance is good. The pastoral team works with individual pupils to provide whatever support they need. A small number of pupils attend alternative education placements. This provision helps them to attend regularly and continue to learn.

There is a detailed programme in place for pupils' personal development. It focuses on developing character and values, and links are made with the school's Catholic ethos. Pupils explore a variety of topics including social media dangers and coping with anxiety. Pupils say they value these activities and find them useful. Pupils benefit from a careers programme that helps them to get ready for the next steps in education or employment and training.

Sixth-form leadership and teaching have improved since the last inspection. Students are very positive about the sixth-form community. They receive advice about employment from local business and more students are achieving places at high-ranking universities. However, some students are not as punctual to school and to lessons as they should be. This means that they miss the learning or revision activities at the start of lessons which could help them to achieve higher grades.

Leaders have ambitious plans for improvement and are committed to the school, its staff and the pupils. Strong and supportive governors are also mindful of staff workload and they find ways to reduce it. However, some parents and staff do not always understand leaders' intentions. They feel that leaders' communication around school improvement could be clearer.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Leaders and teachers are vigilant in their checks and actions to keep pupils safe. Regular training ensures that staff know what to do if they have concerns. Leaders ensure that pupils are aware of risks to their safety in the local area and that they learn how to avoid them.

There is a large team of staff in school who are specially trained to help pupils with concerns. They take prompt action to protect pupils and to support them. Pupils are confident that there are adults they can talk to if they need help.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In most subjects, leaders have planned the key stage 3 curriculum well. However, in history, plans include too much subject material to be covered in too short a period of time. This means that teachers rush through content so that some pupils cannot remember what they have learned. For pupils to be better prepared for key stage 4, leaders must make sure that all subject plans are of the same high quality as they are in subjects such as mathematics and science.
- Some sixth-form students do not arrive in school or to lessons on time. This means that they are missing important work. Leaders must ensure that their high expectations of punctuality for the rest of the school are equally clear in the sixth form.
- Some parents and staff do not feel that leaders communicate effectively. They say that they do not fully understand leaders' ideas for improving the school. As a result, some parents and staff feel that leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the weaker aspects of the school, and what needs to be done to improve them. We found that this is not the case. Leaders have a firm understanding of what needs to improve, and how to improve weaker areas. However, they do not communicate this knowledge well enough. Leaders must ensure that school improvement plans are shared appropriately with the wider school community.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137849
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10121366
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	956
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	109
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Tuttle
Headteacher	Matt Baker
Website	www.st-albans.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Alban's Catholic High School converted to an academy in September 2013.
- The school is a member of Our Lady of Walsingham Catholic Trust.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative education provision at Montgomery Road Campus, Ipswich (Raedwell Trust), Parkside, Ipswich (Raedwell Trust) and New Skill Centre, Ipswich.
- The school receives support from the Suffolk Peer-to-Peer Scheme for Learning and Improvement Network.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with: senior leaders, including the head of the sixth form; subject leaders; the special educational needs coordinator; teachers; and representatives from the governing body, including the chair.
- We spoke to leaders for safeguarding to discuss the actions taken to keep pupils safe. We also checked staff members' understanding of how to keep pupils safe from harm.
- We visited lessons across a variety of subjects. We looked in detail at art, English, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. We spoke with pupils about their work and about other aspects of life in school.
- We also met with the trust chief executive officer. We held telephone conversations with diocesan and local authority representatives, and the headteachers of the alternative provision.
- We talked to staff, including the newly qualified teachers, about their workload. We also talked to them about the amount and quality of training and support they receive from leaders.
- We reviewed 28 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and 52 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- We took into consideration the 113 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 53 free-text comments.

Inspection team

Kathryn Herlock, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
James Dyke	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Pardy	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Leonard	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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