

# St Cuthbert's Catholic High School

Berrys Lane, Sutton, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 3HE

## Inspection dates

20–21 September 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- This is a truly inclusive school where every pupil is valued. All pupils receive high-quality support, particularly those who are vulnerable. Leaders have created a culture in which all are given the chance to be successful.
- The headteacher has a clear and ambitious vision which is shared by everyone in the school community. She leads with both rigour and humanity. She is ably supported by a very strong team of senior leaders.
- Governance is very strong. The chair of governors and his team have a deep knowledge of the school and have played a considerable part in bringing about the recent improvements.
- The resolute actions of the headteacher and governors have improved the quality of middle leadership. They are aware that the leadership of geography and religious education is not yet good.
- Leaders have made progress in all the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection, apart from improving pupils' literacy across the curriculum. Strategic leadership of this area is weak.
- The work that the school does to keep its pupils safe is exemplary. The welfare and personal development of pupils are a high priority for all staff.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have had a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Most pupils now benefit from good teaching that enables them to be successful in their studies.
- In key stage 4, pupils make better progress across a range of subjects than they have done in recent years. Progress of pupils in key stage 3 is not as strong. Outcomes for Year 11 pupils in 2016 were much better than in previous years. This was particularly the case in English.
- The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils improved markedly in 2016. Differences between the achievement of these pupils and that of other pupils nationally are diminishing.
- Pupils value the support that they receive from staff, which creates a positive learning environment. However, not all staff have high enough expectations of what their pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve if challenged.
- Pupils behave extremely well both in lessons and around the school. They are polite and friendly.
- Pupils' attendance has improved significantly over the last two years.

## Full report

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

- Build on the significant improvements already made in the quality of teaching and learning by making sure that all teachers:
  - have the highest expectations of what their pupils can achieve, particularly those in key stage 3
  - provide the right level of challenge for pupils, particularly the most able.
- Eradicate the remaining weaknesses in leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - there is effective strategic leadership of the important area of raising standards of literacy across the curriculum
  - effective leadership of geography and religious education leads to improved learning and outcomes for pupils in these subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher has been successful in creating an ambitious and aspirational culture at St Cuthbert's. Since taking up her post in September 2015, her determined leadership has enabled the school to make significant improvements. Particularly impressive is the way that she has taken the whole of the school community with her on this journey of improvement. She blends rigour with humanity, and consequently staff and pupils feel valued and positive about their school.
- She is ably supported by a strong team of senior leaders who lead their respective areas of responsibility very effectively. The skills and qualities of these senior leaders have resulted in clear improvements in pupils' attendance, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- This is a genuinely inclusive school. Leaders believe that every pupil should be helped to achieve their potential, regardless of their personal circumstances. Vulnerable pupils receive particularly high-quality support. Staff do not give up on any pupil, no matter how challenging the circumstances. Local authority officers speak very highly of this inclusive ethos. They know that the vulnerable pupils they place at St Cuthbert's are guaranteed a warm welcome. They are also full of praise for how staff work to support and meet the needs of these pupils to improve their life chances.
- The headteacher and governors have taken decisive action to improve the quality of middle leadership across the school. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes have improved in most subjects. Senior leaders are aware that this is not yet the case in geography and religious education, which is having a detrimental impact on pupils' learning and outcomes in these subjects. Senior leaders and governors hold heads of department to account effectively through the departmental review system.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is strong. Senior leaders have an accurate overview of the strengths and the remaining areas requiring further improvement in teaching across the school. There are very clear processes in place to monitor the quality of teaching. In the few areas where teaching is less than good, senior leaders provide the right balance of support and challenge to bring about improvement. As a result, most pupils are now benefiting from consistently good teaching.
- The headteacher has ensured that procedures for managing teachers' performance are now robust. Teachers have sharp, measurable targets that are linked to the school's development plan. Governors are now more involved in this process, particularly in cases where teachers are judged not to have met their agreed targets.
- Newly and recently qualified teachers speak highly of the support and guidance that they receive. They feel that a major strength of the school is the way that staff work collaboratively and that they can ask any colleague for support. The culture of the school encourages them to be reflective practitioners. The staff survey responses are overwhelmingly positive. They provide clear evidence that staff feel supported by senior leaders. They also show that staff are supportive of the headteacher's ambitious vision for the school.
- Responses to the online parent questionnaire and the school's own parental surveys indicate that parents are also extremely positive about the school. They particularly appreciate the support and care that the school provides. Indeed, a number of parents

took the time to write at length to the inspectors, detailing how happy their children are and how well they are progressing, often after moving here from another school. They praise, in particular, the time staff take to really get to know each individual and the personalised support that they then provide.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a high priority for leaders and is evident in the warm relationships that are prevalent throughout the school community. Pupils are encouraged to be respectful and think of others, particularly through the assembly programme. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to turn these thoughts into actions, for example, by volunteering and fund-raising. In many ways, the work the school does is preparing pupils well for life in modern Britain. However, leaders do not give enough consideration to developing pupils' understanding of different faiths and beliefs.
- Pupils have the opportunity to be involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities in areas such as sport, music, art, technology, history, dance and debating. Leaders are aware that they should ensure that disadvantaged pupils are benefiting from this wealth of enrichment activities.
- Senior leaders have redesigned the curriculum to ensure that pupils are well prepared for both national examinations and life beyond school. The curriculum is now designed to raise the aspirations of all pupils while allowing flexibility to ensure that it meets individual needs. Senior leaders work closely with the parents of pupils in Year 8 to guide their children onto one of the three key stage 4 pathways at the start of Year 9. Since the introduction of this new curriculum, the percentage of pupils progressing to sustained education, employment or training has increased significantly and now stands at 98%.
- Leaders have not made the development of pupils' literacy a high enough priority. With the exception of English, too many opportunities are being missed to improve pupils' confidence in this important life skill. There has been a lack of effective strategic leadership of this area to ensure that pupils' literacy and oracy are being developed at every opportunity. Senior leaders outlined to inspectors the action they would be taking with immediate effect to remedy this situation.
- Information provided by the school indicates that those pupils who are supported by the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium are making accelerated progress. Leaders know that they need to track more carefully how they use the funding in order to understand which actions and interventions have the most impact.
- In 2016, the differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally diminished. These improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are evidence that leaders are now using the pupil premium funding more effectively. The school's own information indicates that the funding is having more impact in key stage 4 than key stage 3. Leaders are not looking carefully enough at how the funding could be targeted more specifically at these younger pupils.
- Leaders ensure that special educational needs funding is used effectively. Pupils supported by this funding make good progress during their time at St Cuthbert's.
- The headteacher and governors value the support that they receive from the local authority. Officers from the local authority have provided specific support for senior leaders alongside reviews of aspects of the school's work. They have also brokered a link with an outstanding school in a neighbouring authority. The collaborative work that has taken place with this school has contributed to the improvements made,

particularly at middle leadership level.

### **Governance of the school**

- The school benefits from strong governance. The chair of governors and his team have played a significant part in bringing about recent improvements in the school. They have not been afraid to take decisive action to ensure that the school benefits from strong teachers and leaders. They are a highly committed group who know the school extremely well and share the headteacher's resolute ambition for all of its pupils. They have got the balance right between their strategic role and closer involvement in the working of the school. They also provide the right balance of support and challenge to senior and middle leaders.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The work the school does to keep its pupils safe is exemplary. Safeguarding is very much at the heart of this school and the leadership of this area is very impressive. The school's approach to safeguarding is summed up by one senior leader, who says that their aim is to make sure that there is an 'arena of safety' for all pupils. Staff engage very effectively and appropriately with parents, carers and other stakeholders to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe. Procedures to ensure that all staff receive relevant training are extremely robust, as are the protocols and practices for record keeping.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- The overall quality of teaching in the school has improved since the last inspection. Most pupils now benefit from good teaching across a range of subjects, which enables them to be successful in their studies. The very positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils, based on mutual respect, clearly make a contribution to the learning in the vast majority of lessons.
- In most lessons, teachers use their expertise and passion for their subjects, coupled with their knowledge of their pupils, to enthuse and involve them in their learning. They use questioning skilfully to check understanding and develop pupils' thinking. Teachers assess pupils' progress effectively and use this information to plan the next stages of their learning.
- In key stage 4, teachers focus on developing the skills that pupils require to be successful in examinations. Alongside this, they focus on developing pupils' deep understanding of the subjects. This is particularly evident in English, where teachers impress on pupils the importance of looking for layers of meaning when responding to texts. 'Always look deeper,' was how one English teacher summed this up to her Year 11 class.  
In key stage 3, there are a few occasions when teachers pitch the learning at a level that is not challenging enough. Some pupils are coming from primary school having made very good progress and achieving high levels of attainment at the end of key stage 2. Not all teachers are building on this to ensure that this strong progress is sustained.
- The majority of teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve. They provide the right level of challenge for the most able in order for them to achieve the highest possible grades. However, senior leaders are aware that this is not yet

happening in all lessons, particularly in key stage 3, and this is a high priority in the development plan for this year.

- The school has well-planned systems to assess how well pupils are progressing. Parents receive regular and clear information about how their children are doing in school.
- Teachers in the English department make developing pupils' literacy a high priority. However, this does not happen consistently across all subjects. For example, some teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' confidence in accurately using key terminology.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. There is a nurturing ethos in the school that creates an environment in which pupils can thrive. Staff work extremely well with parents and external agencies to make sure that pupils' welfare needs are managed sensitively so they can flourish.
- Staff know their pupils very well and they are willing to go 'above and beyond' in the level of care that they provide. Pupils value this support that they receive from staff. All pupils are cared for well at St Cuthbert's, but particularly those who are vulnerable. Children looked after are given extremely effective personalised support and the local authority speaks very highly of the provision for these pupils at the school.
- This is a school that values individuals, recognising that everyone is different but equal. This creates an environment in which pupils feel safe and comfortable. It also gives them confidence, for example, to be open about their sexual orientation and identity.
- There is a tangible culture of respect in this school. Consequently, incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils who spoke to inspectors feel that on the few occasions where it does occur, it is handled very effectively. Parents also share this view.
- Leaders ensure that the welfare and emotional well-being of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision are given the highest priority. There are robust procedures in place and effective communication between school staff and the providers.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and friendly, and behave very well around the school. During break- and lunchtime, whether socialising inside or outside, their behaviour is mature and calm and they interact well with each other and staff.
- Behaviour in lessons is typically good, with pupils demonstrating positive attitudes to their learning. On the few occasions where this is not the case, this is usually linked to the quality of teaching. Pupils told inspectors that the worst behaviour occurs in religious education lessons.
- The Minerva Centre provides effective support for a very small number of pupils with challenging behavioural issues. Only a very low number of pupils are ever excluded from school.
- Staff have worked extremely hard to improve the attendance of pupils. Over the last two years, there has been a significant increase of almost 2% in the overall attendance figure, which is now close to the national average. The number of pupils who are

persistently absent has also declined significantly. However, too many pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those who have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs, are still not attending school regularly. Leaders are taking action to address this and the attendance figure for this group of pupils is much higher at the start of this academic year.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- In 2016, outcomes for pupils in Year 11 were much improved on recent years. Pupils made better progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. The achievement of pupils in English was significantly better than in the previous year.
- The school's assessment information indicates that Year 11 outcomes will continue to improve in 2017. Leaders have confidence in the accuracy of teachers' predictions as they are based on formal assessments that are moderated and quality assured.
- In 2016, Year 11 disadvantaged pupils made much better progress than in previous years. Consequently, differences in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils compared with those of other pupils nationally diminished significantly. For current pupils, actions taken to reduce progress differences between disadvantaged and other pupils with the same starting points are having more impact in key stage 4 than they are in key stage 3.
- Leaders had identified that, apart from in mathematics, the progress and attainment of boys were not as strong as for girls. Actions taken to improve boys' achievement have had impact. The improved outcomes for boys in 2016 mean that the gaps between boys' and girls' achievement have narrowed.
- Leaders also recognised that expectations of what pupils could achieve were not high enough. All pupils now have aspirational targets, regardless of their prior attainment. Although there is an increased focus on ensuring that the most able attain the highest possible GCSE grades, some teachers are still not providing sufficient challenge for these pupils.
- In 2016, Year 11 pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made much better progress than in the previous year, particularly in English. Gaps between the progress of these pupils and that of their peers have become smaller. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and children looked after, receive high-quality support to enable them to achieve their full potential.
- Staff monitor closely the progress of the small number of pupils attending alternative provision off the school site. These pupils are taking accredited courses appropriate for their abilities and interests. The qualifications they are set to achieve are designed to help them move smoothly on to further education, training or employment.
- Destination information for pupils leaving Year 11 shows that pupils are being well prepared to move into further education, training or employment. The strategic leadership of careers education, information, advice and guidance is very effective. There is a real focus on raising aspirations from Year 7 onwards. This happens through, for example, assemblies, university trips and a varied programme of visiting speakers.
- Across a range of subjects, teachers are not focusing effectively enough on raising pupils' standards of literacy, despite this being an area for improvement at the last inspection. Teachers are also not giving enough priority to developing pupils'

confidence when communicating verbally.

## School details

Unique reference number	104835
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10012150

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	723
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Philip Swanson
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Twist
Telephone number	01744 678123
Website	<a href="http://www.stcuthberts.com">www.stcuthberts.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:catherine.twist@stcuthberts.com">catherine.twist@stcuthberts.com</a>
Date of previous inspection	17–18 June 2014

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and, therefore, supported by the pupil premium, is well above the national average.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average.
- At the time of the inspection, seven pupils follow alternative education provision off the school site at the following providers: The Beacon, MPH Training, Launchpad Centre, Instant Training and Aspire Training.

- The school is host to the Minerva Centre, which is a centre for pupils with behavioural issues. This provision is used by other local schools as well as by pupils from St Cuthbert's.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across a range of subjects, including some joint observations with senior leaders. They carried out a work scrutiny with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with five groups of pupils, and talked with others informally during breaks and lunchtimes. Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders, classroom teachers and newly and recently qualified teachers. A meeting was held with the chair and three other members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 23 responses to Ofsted’s online Parent View survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school’s self-evaluation and development plan, information about the school’s performance and a selection of policies.

## Inspection team

Anne Seneviratne, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Mary Myatt	Ofsted Inspector
Denah Jones	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Osama Abdul Rahim	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Farrent	Ofsted Inspector

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