

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Alban's Catholic High School

Digby Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3NJ

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 April 2025

Outcome

St Alban's Catholic High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The acting headteacher of this school is Jade Goddard. This school is part of Our lady of Walshingham Catholic Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Flavio Vettese, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Bergin.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this welcoming and inclusive school. They say that school is 'as near perfect as it could be'. Their behaviour strongly reflects the school's high expectations of 'learning, respecting, and caring'. Pupils behave extremely well at all times. They show deep engagement in their learning and value the support of staff. Pupils achieve well in their learning.

The school provides pupils with a variety of opportunities which enrich their learning. For example, pupils visit the theatre, attend lectures at universities and work with drones as part of workshops about ecology. Pupils participate in local singing festivals and take part in the 'linguistics Olympiad'. These activities enhance their talents and interests.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports clubs, problem-solving club and 'alive in faith'. These activities are well attended. Pupils set up and lead their own clubs for their peers to enjoy, such as the 'nerd' club. Pupils have a wealth of purposeful leadership opportunities. These include school councillors, prefects, sports leaders and the interdenominational chaplaincy team. The prefects chair school council meetings and the chaplaincy team completes fundraising activities. These opportunities encourage pupils to develop as confident and responsible leaders of the future.

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

The school has experienced a period of significant change. However, the school has embedded an ambitious curriculum across all key stages. The school's curriculum is well embedded and ambitious in all parts of the school, including the sixth form. The school sets high expectations for pupils' achievements and supports their all-round development well.

This curriculum aims to prepare pupils 'to engage confidently, compassionately and meaningfully in society'. Important subject content is carefully sequenced to help pupils to build up their knowledge in a sensible order. Staff check pupils' learning effectively to ensure that pupils know and remember more over time.

The school makes reading a high priority to ensure that all pupils can access the curriculum. Weaker readers are quickly identified and supported to become confident and fluent readers.

Staff use their subject expertise well to present information to pupils and to address any misconceptions they might have. Pupils benefit from well-considered opportunities to think in detail about their learning, such as through debates related to the topics they study. In a few subjects, occasionally, teaching does not build well on pupils' prior knowledge, and this affects how well some pupils learn the curriculum. It also prevents some pupils from deepening their knowledge.

The school's approach to supporting vulnerable pupils is tenacious in every aspect. For example, the school is unfailing in its work to identify and secure appropriate support for pupils. Expertly trained staff provide adaptations in lessons that enable pupils with SEND to work independently and successfully. Consequently, pupils with SEND achieve well.

The school works effectively with families to ensure pupils attend school regularly. As a result of the school's actions, pupils' attendance and punctuality have improved significantly.

The school provides pupils with well-considered opportunities to share their views and think about how they can contribute to society. For example, pupils build strong skills in oracy to debate moral and ethical topics. Pupils learn about the importance of democracy. For example, pupils run mock elections, visit the Houses of Parliament and vote for their school councillors.

Diversity days provide pupils with the chance to celebrate their own culture and heritage. Religious observances, such as Ramadan and the celebration of Eid, for example, take place in the school chapel to raise pupils' awareness of other faiths and beliefs. The school's own 'register and read' programme enables pupils to study texts relating to belonging, identity and diversity in depth.

The school helps pupils to prepare for their next steps in education. The careers programme provides pupils from Year 7 onwards with meaningful experiences to explore

future employment. For example, pupils take part in careers carousels and workshops about further education, apprenticeships and different professions.

Staff enjoy working at this school and know that they are valued members of the community. Staff say that leaders take their well-being and workload seriously. The trust keeps detailed oversight of the school's work. It is very clear about the priorities for further development. The trust provides the school with the support needed to continually drive improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, in some subjects, teaching does not build well on some pupils' prior knowledge. This affects how well some groups of pupils learn the intended curriculum. It sometimes affects how deeply pupils learn subject-specific knowledge. Where this is the case, the school should ensure that learning activities build well on pupils' prior knowledge and that pupils develop a strong and deep body of knowledge in these subjects.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2020.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137849
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10345326
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	1,001
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	181
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Bergin
CEO of the trust	Flavio Vettese
Headteacher	Jade Goddard
Website	www.st-albans.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 and 22 January 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a Catholic religious character. The school had its last section 48 statutory inspection in September 2019.
- The school is a member of Our Lady of Walsingham Multi Academy Catholic Trust. The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses seven unregistered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher and other school leaders.
- The inspectors met with representatives of the trust, including the CEO and the chair of the board of trustees, as well as members of the local governing body.
- The inspectors scrutinised the school's records of behaviour and attendance and spoke with several groups of pupils to understand their experiences of school.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online pupil and staff surveys. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Rowena Simmons, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ruth Brock

Ofsted Inspector

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