

Inspection of a good school: St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College, Washington

Biddick Lane, Washington, Tyne and Wear NE38 8AF

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 October 2023

Outcome

St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College, Washington continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Dean Juric. This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Nick Hurn OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Angela Boyle.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Robert of Newminster School achieve well. This is because the school has high expectations for the quality of education pupils receive. There is a strong culture of positive relationships. Pupils are happy and safe.

Pupils benefit from the school and wider trust's sharp focus on high standards of behaviour. Learning in lessons is supported by clear routines that all staff apply consistently. The school's 'gold standard' behaviour expectations are the foundation of these routines. Pupils strive to live up to these expectations. If pupils do misbehave, staff and pupils are confident this will be resolved quickly.

Pupils embrace the school's motto of 'let your light shine'. Around school, they are polite, courteous and well mannered. Pupils appreciate the work the school does to promote tolerance. This is reflected in the rare instances of bullying and pupils' respectful attitudes towards different faiths and beliefs.

The school ensures that pupils can access a curriculum beyond the academic subjects. Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities, including the school production and sporting clubs. Students in the sixth form have a wide range of age-appropriate opportunities, including mentoring, 'medical club' and joining the sixth-form leadership team.

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

Leaders ensure there is a strong focus on the quality of education. They have carefully sequenced content in each curriculum area. This means pupils become increasingly skilled in each subject. For example, in technology, pupils develop engineering skills from Year 7. They progress from basic drawing to more complex software-based design by the end of Year 9. Leaders are committed to ensuring pupils develop skills for life and for further study.

The curriculum identifies the most important knowledge pupils need to know. Teachers bring this knowledge to life through their excellent subject knowledge. For example, in a Year 12 English literature lesson, pupils could confidently speak about the conventions of Greek tragedy in Shakespeare's 'Othello'. They did this by connecting new learning to their study of 'Macbeth' in Year 10.

Leaders share information with teachers about the individual targets for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use this information well to support pupils with SEND to access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. The school monitors the progress and attendance of these pupils regularly. However, some aspects of this monitoring lack precision. This means that some support strategies are not closely matched to pupils' specific SEND needs.

Leaders have ensured there is a structured approach to supporting pupils' reading. Where necessary, pupils receive targeted support to catch up with their peers. For pupils who lack confidence in reading, a sixth-form 'reading mentor' programme helps them to improve.

Low-level disruption in lessons is rare. This is due to the positive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are confident that poor behaviour will not disrupt their learning. They know this assists their good progress through the curriculum. However, for some pupils, including those with SEND, the number of suspensions increased following the pandemic. Leaders' actions to improve this are resulting in some positive impacts.

The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development. It teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Some elements of this curriculum are new. This includes the approach to checking pupils' understanding. This means pupils are not always clear about parts of the personal development curriculum they have learned. Pupils across the school can access an extensive range of clubs and enrichment activities that are tailored to their interests. However, some older pupils and some students in the sixth form do not make best use of these opportunities.

The school has an established, extensive careers programme. This supports pupils well in their next steps. The school ensures pupils engage with a wide range of employers. The school adapts the careers programme regularly to take account of local labour market information. Most pupils speak positively about careers education in school. Some sixth-form students feel guidance could be more tailored to their individual needs.

Trust leaders and those responsible for governance ensure they provide good support to

the school. Trust leaders work alongside school leaders to target this support where it will make the biggest difference. In school, leaders at all levels focus on ensuring they create an environment where all pupils can succeed. Staff are proud to work at this school. They appreciate leaders' support. They are confident that if they do have a concern, it will be listened to and acted upon swiftly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas of provision for SEND and personal development, monitoring and evaluation are not as sharp as they could be. This means that the school does not have a precise understanding of the impact of some aspects of its work. The school should ensure that it continues to develop and refine its monitoring and evaluation systems to support leaders to sustain continuous improvements.
- Some pupils do not engage with the school's enrichment offer. This impacts the breadth of experiences these pupils have in school. Leaders should continue to raise expectations of participation so that all pupils, including those in the sixth form, benefit from these opportunities.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 predecessor school, St Robert of Newminster Roman Catholic School, to be good in January 2017.

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	147142
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10268494
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
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	1,642
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	425
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Angela Boyle (Interim Chair)
Headteacher	Dean Juric
Website	www.strobertofnewminster.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College converted to become an academy school in July 2019. When its predecessor school, St Robert of Newminster Roman Catholic School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. Two providers are unregistered.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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 their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders over the course of the inspection. The lead inspector also met with an executive leader from the trust.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the interim chair of the board of trustees. They also met with the vice-chair of the local governing body and two other local governing body members. They reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from trust board meetings.
- The lead inspector held a telephone call with a representative from the Diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, geography and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator and considered the support given to pupils with SEND during lesson visits.
- 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.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for personal development and visited tutor sessions.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and students formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents and staff gathered through Ofsted's questionnaires.

Inspection team

Hannah Millett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Bernard Clark

Ofsted Inspector

Geoff Lumsdon

Ofsted Inspector

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