

Inspection of St Leonard's Catholic School, Durham

North End, Durham DH1 4NG

Inspection dates:	8 and 9 October 2024
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Chris Hammill. 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 Martin Gannon.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Leonard's Catholic School proudly states that 'all pupils are known and loved'. This spreads through the culture of the school. Pupils thrive in this academic and nurturing environment. Pupils' warm, respectful relationships with staff set solid foundations for learning.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well in public examinations. Results at the school have improved year-on-year. Pupils enjoy a curriculum that is skilfully designed and taught. Expert staff teach students in the sixth form to become experts themselves. Students relish this academic challenge. They use the knowledge they gain to progress on to impressive next steps.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They are highly motivated. Pupils overwhelmingly appreciate the high-quality teaching they receive. Pupils are keen to contribute to class discussion. They are not afraid to try, even if they make mistakes.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority in the school. A deep and rich offer is in place. It helps pupils develop character, resilience and a broad understanding of the world. Throughout the school, pupils read engaging and thought-provoking texts. In form time, they explore ethical dilemmas. This helps them to develop a mature outlook on the world. It also improves their communication and confidence.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has made significant improvements for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). An ambitious and inclusive curriculum is in place for all pupils. Subject specialists are exceptionally knowledgeable and well trained. They use educational research to create a highly effective curriculum journey. This journey runs seamlessly from Year 7 to Year 13. Alongside this, the curriculum is enriched in meaningful ways. For example, sixth-form physics students excitedly share their experiences. This includes visiting a particle accelerator in Switzerland. Trips such as these enhance pupils' passion for the subject.

The school sequences pupils' learning with precision. Subject specialists carefully consider the steps that build a rich and secure body of knowledge over time. For example, lesson sequences in modern foreign languages are highly impactful. Staff make sure each unit secures the basics in phonics, vocabulary and grammar. In this and other subjects, pupils only move on when core learning is embedded. Pupils quickly build confidence with their subject-specific skills. They enjoy the success they achieve.

The school is committed to identifying and supporting pupils' reading ability. Staff assess pupils in reading before they join in Year 7, or as soon as possible afterwards. This informs rapid and effective intervention. In addition, a comprehensive and effective reading curriculum runs throughout the school. Trained form tutors read aloud from ambitious and stimulating short stories. Tutors model fluency and expression well.

Students in the sixth form enjoy a wealth of academic wider reading. This helps them develop a breadth of knowledge that supports their further studies.

Pupils love coming to school. Their high attendance rates are evidence of this. Pupils are effusive about the range of opportunities the school provides. Students in the sixth form listen to talks from a multitude of guest speakers. These speakers cover a range of fascinating topics. Each talk is tailored to the interests, ambitions and age of the students. Across the school, pupils are taught how to stay safe in a range of different contexts. They also learn about other cultures and faiths in a coherently planned way. Pupils are articulate when discussing this learning. It helps them to stay safe but also to embrace and celebrate difference in the wider world.

Careers information integrates seamlessly into the curriculum at the school. In subjects, pupils learn about a range of careers they could pursue. Sixth-form students learn about apprenticeship pathways. They also enjoy student-led societies that help them prepare for their next steps. For example, budding medicine undergraduates enjoy comprehensive support. This enables them to prepare for the application process.

The school has experienced significant disruption over recent years. This is due to the national Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) issues in school buildings. It is testament to exceptional leadership that educational standards have improved during this time. Staff have maintained a culture of positivity and success. This has happened in the face of unprecedented challenges. Staff are highly consistent in their work. They enjoy coming to work and feel valued. Parental engagement has improved significantly from the last inspection. Most parents would now recommend the school. Leaders, including trustees and governors, have a strong vision for the school. They implement this with unwavering determination. There is an exceptional culture of high expectations. As a result, pupils flourish academically and socially.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	143583
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10323088
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	1265
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	210
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Gannon
CEO of the trust	Nick Hurn OBE
Headteacher	Chris Hammill
Website	www.stleonardsdurham.bwcet.com
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- A small number of pupils attend two registered alternative providers of education.
- The school's religious character is Catholic. It's last section 48 inspection took place in November 2017.
- Due to RAAC in the school buildings, the school currently operates a split site. Some pupils learn in new classrooms on the separate site.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and other leaders from the trust over the course of the inspection. The lead inspector also met with the senior director of standards and performance for the trust.
- The lead inspector spoke with the vice-chair of the board of trustees. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the local governing body and six other governors. They reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from governor meetings.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, art, modern foreign languages, geography and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also discussed the history curriculum with the subject leader and looked at a sample of pupils' work in this subject.
- An inspector met with the leader responsible for sixth form. The inspectors also spent time in sixth-form lessons across the course of the inspection.
- The inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator. They also reviewed documentation relating to SEND.
- The lead inspector met with the leader responsible for personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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 groups of pupils and staff formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- A range of school documents was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Hannah Millett, lead inspector

Christina Jones

Sarah Hubbard

Mark Hassack

Kieran McGrane

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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