

St Joseph's Catholic High School, Business and Enterprise College

Harrington Road, Workington, Cumbria CA14 3EE

Inspection dates	21–22 April 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher, other senior leaders and governors have taken determined action to strengthen teaching and subject leadership. As a result, most subjects are now well led and teaching continues to improve.
- The progress made by the majority of pupils currently in the school is improving strongly and rapidly. Their progress is now good.
- School leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching. They collaborate effectively with other schools in the local area to develop best practice, for example in assessment.
- Teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and they provide suitable stretch and challenge for pupils.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They take pride in their work and behave well in lessons and during social times.
- Pupils are safe and happy in school. The school's care, guidance and support are strong, enabling most pupils to thrive. Pupils show very good respect for one another, staff and other adults, and for their school environment.
- Governors make a strong contribution to the school. They are very well informed and hold senior leaders to account firmly.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Disadvantaged pupils are not making the same progress as other pupils and the rate of improvement is not as strong as it is for other pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is higher than the national average and this particularly affects disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders' written plans for improvement lack sharpness and rigour. It is not always clear from these how leaders can accurately check on the progress the school is making.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Take steps to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils by:
 - clearly identifying the purpose of interventions and support strategies for these pupils
 - ensuring that the impact of additional measures taken to support these pupils is fully evaluated.

- Take further action to reduce levels of persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils, by:
 - evaluating the effectiveness of existing systems and processes to raise attendance and revising or replacing those that are not effective
 - ensuring that senior leaders monitor the operation of these systems thoroughly and fully support those staff who work on improving attendance
 - reinforcing messages about the importance of good attendance to all pupils and parents.

- Make school improvement planning more rigorous by:
 - ensuring that all planned activities have defined timescales
 - including precise criteria by which leaders can measure the impact of their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has placed a firm emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning, for example through recruiting good-quality subject-specialist teachers. As a result, most pupils are now making better progress in the large majority of subjects. The staff have worked hard at raising the achievement of the school's most-able pupils, with the result that these pupils, too, are making more rapid progress.
- Leaders have provided extensive training to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders draw on best practice in other schools and also on the abilities of the school's own most skilful teachers. Teachers say that this has been very helpful in improving their effectiveness. Leaders check the quality of teaching extensively and have a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The headteacher and governors have successfully recruited dynamic subject leaders. Although several have been appointed relatively recently, the new team of heads of department has improved the school's capacity for further improvement. As a result, most subjects are now well led and managed. Leadership in mathematics is particularly strong; the new subject leader has a very good understanding of how to make mathematics teaching very effective and has put in place a number of new initiatives to raise pupils' achievement in the subject.
- Senior leaders hold subject leaders to account rigorously. Heads of department receive good support from senior leaders and respond well to their rigorous challenges where improvement is needed. Senior and subject leaders meet regularly to discuss the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Leaders at all levels ensure that suitable measures are taken to tackle identified underachievement.
- Arrangements for the performance management of teachers are strong. Where teachers do not meet the school's expected standards, leaders and governors withhold pay increases.
- Leaders recognise that some of the school's pupils have low aspirations; they have worked hard to counter these by providing pupils with a range of opportunities to develop their self-confidence and esteem. For example, pupils have been taken on university visits and have participated successfully in poetry, mathematics and modern language competitions.
- Leaders have created a very positive school ethos that enables pupils to thrive in a supportive and caring environment. Pupils told inspectors that they are happy in school, that they feel safe and that the school cares for them well. Pupils show respect for one another, visitors, staff and their environment.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively through its strong ethos, its curriculum, assemblies and the use of tutor time.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced, providing a wide range of subjects which largely meet the needs and aptitudes of pupils. The take-up of academic subjects as key stage 4 options is increasing so that many more pupils are well placed to attain the English Baccalaureate. The school adapts what it offers for individual students according to their needs, for example through appropriate vocational or life skills courses in Year 9 or in key stage 4. Pupils enjoy a variety of after-school clubs and activities, including the rock band, choir and art club. They have many opportunities to take part in sport.
- The quality of the school's provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is good. Staff are motivated and well trained, and the work they do enables pupils to make good progress.
- Parents, staff and most pupils expressed very positive views about the school in online surveys. Almost all parents who responded would recommend St Joseph's to other parents.
- The local authority has reviewed the school's progress and helped leaders to identify other schools where there is good practice. For example, colleagues in an outstanding local school have supported the relatively new head of the English department effectively with the accuracy of assessments.
- Leaders have more work to do to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. A number of initiatives are in place to do this, such as very positive small-group work for pupils in mathematics, but these have not yet closed gaps in performance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school and nationally. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in a number of subjects is not improving as strongly as it is for other pupils. Leaders and governors are aware of this issue and are evaluating the impact of the school's varied initiatives. Senior staff are not always clear, however, about the precise impact of the strategies the school is using to support these pupils. Leaders keep a close eye on the attendance and progress of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision. The headteacher is involved in its governance and leaders make sure that the teaching they receive is of good quality.

- Some of the school's written documentation lacks rigour. For example, the success criteria in the school improvement plan, by which leaders and governors measure how successful their actions have been, lack sharpness. It is not clear, for example, by when or by whom some actions need to be finished or reviewed, and some criteria suggest only that actions will be completed rather than identifying what actual improvement is expected.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have effective oversight of the school. They are well informed about the school and its priorities for improvement and have a good grasp of how well pupils are achieving. They ask searching questions about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching in the school. Consequently, they hold leaders closely to account for the school's performance. Governors are aware of the importance of pupil premium funding and of how this money is spent, and they know that narrowing achievement gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is a key issue for the school.
 - Governors support and challenge the school effectively. They have sought to secure high-quality appointments to leadership and teaching posts. Through their work as 'link governors' to departments, they ask questions of subject leaders that make it clear the governing body is determined to bring about improvement.
 - Governors ensure that the headteacher manages the performance of the staff so that only good teaching is rewarded by pay increases and weaker performance is tackled effectively.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning. They arrive at lessons willing, equipped and ready to learn. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are strong and support their learning effectively.
- Teachers have responded keenly to the imperative to raise expectations. They mostly plan challenging work for pupils, using skilful questioning to probe their responses and deepen their understanding. An English teacher, for example, prompted pupils in Year 9 to work out the hidden messages in Robert Browning's poem, 'My Last Duchess', but without ever telling them the answers. This approach kept the pupils fully engaged in the task as they were very keen to solve the riddle, and many volunteered their own inventive suggestions. Other examples of successful questioning were seen in mathematics, French, physical education, drama and music. Teachers use lesson time productively and their planning of learning is effective.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Several teachers, including those who are in the early stages of their careers, spoke warmly of the opportunities they have had for professional development. They also valued the support received from school leaders, both from colleagues in school and externally through productive links with other local schools. Training has been tailored to meet a variety of needs and is seen by staff to be effective and valuable. Programmes are linked closely to whole-school priorities and to the outcomes of teachers' performance management.
- Staff have done considerable work in recent times to boost the achievement of the most-able pupils. Pupils' books show that they have received good levels of challenge that has been sustained over time. Many pupils told inspectors that teaching makes demands on them most of the time and that they are 'driven hard' by the school.
- The school's own evaluation of teaching is that it is typically good. The improving progress for pupils in all year groups and in most subjects confirms this view.
- Both the English and mathematics departments have benefited from recently improved staffing and the skills of a team of specialist teachers. In mathematics, teachers are helping pupils to apply skills in new ways and extend their mathematical reasoning. Pupils in Year 11, for example, worked with determination to solve a number of testing geometrical puzzles. The mathematics department is boosting the achievement of disadvantaged students by creating small, separate groups of pupils taught by skilled teachers and teaching assistants. In English, too, staff have offered pupils additional opportunities to broaden their understanding, such as their participation in the Wordsworth Trust poetry competition. Both departments are working jointly with local primary schools to enhance the quality of the transition experienced by pupils when they move to secondary school.
- The teaching of pupils with low ability and those who have special educational needs or disability is effective. For example, the strong support from the teaching assistant backed up the teacher's probing

questions effectively and enabled pupils in a Year 11 photography class to consolidate their learning.

- The school's work to support pupils who join with weak reading skills is effective. Teachers pay close attention to helping these pupils to develop comprehension and spelling skills. In a class in Year 7 containing a number of pupils with special educational needs, pupils practised their reading as part of a wider support programme. They made good progress in comprehension and told the inspector that this programme had helped them improve their reading and their spelling.
- Occasionally pupils' attitudes are less positive, for example when the pace of the teaching is not brisk enough to maintain their interest or where there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Most teachers provide pupils with constructive feedback, in line with the school's policy. This is effective in supporting pupils' learning. Occasionally, feedback is less helpful where it does not identify misconceptions or errors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils are very happy with how well teachers and staff support them. They are confident that if they are worried about anything they can approach any member of staff for help. Pupils feel that staff genuinely care for them. One pupil told inspectors that 'the school feels like a family'. Another spoke warmly of the support he had received from pastoral staff, which had boosted his self-confidence considerably.
- Pupils feel entirely safe in school and the parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire agree that the school is a safe place. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare and that staff deal with it effectively when it arises. The school has no recorded instances of racist or homophobic bullying. The school teaches pupils about respect for people's differences.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Leaders ensure that safeguarding messages are clearly understood by staff and pupils. Staff keep careful records, work well with parents and involve other agencies to help pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Staff are well trained to identify any pupils who may be at risk. The school has taught its pupils about the dangers of possible radicalisation and extremism and has placed a strong emphasis on British values. Pupils have been taught and know how to keep themselves safe, for instance when using the internet.
- Pupils take pride in their school and their work. They dress smartly in their school uniform, respect the school's facilities and drop very little litter.
- Staff and pupils relate very positively towards one another. These supportive relationships underpin pupils' good attitudes to learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally very positive and they are ready and willing to learn. Behaviour in lessons is typically good. Pupils are generally polite and patient. Teachers deal effectively with rare instances of misbehaviour and feel well supported by senior leaders in setting the tone of the school's calm environment.
- Pupils' conduct at social times and when moving between lessons is orderly, mature and responsible. Pupils respect and rise to the school's expectations of them. They move promptly to lessons without needing to be reminded by staff. Teachers are on hand at lesson changeover times, when they give helpful encouragement to pupils as well as supervising their movement.
- The rate of exclusion is low. The school very rarely excludes any pupil permanently. Fixed-term exclusions are taken very seriously and effectively dissuade pupils from misbehaviour.
- Attendance is average overall and is improving. The school's attendance officer is doing effective work to raise attendance, often with individual pupils. Several pupils described to inspectors how the school's work with them had really improved their previously poor attendance. Nevertheless, despite these positive indications, the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils remains too high. Leaders recognise that if these pupils are not in school, they cannot learn. Their evaluation of the actions they have taken to reduce persistent absence is, however, not yet precise enough.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' achievement in 2015 was disappointing. The percentage of pupils achieving good GCSE grades A* to C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics dipped and fell significantly below the national average. At the same time, the percentage of pupils making the expected progress in English was well below the national average. The proportions achieving more than the expected progress in both English and mathematics were also below national averages in 2015. Several other subjects also underperformed compared to national figures.
- Senior leaders, supported and challenged by governors, have made strenuous efforts to improve achievement at all levels. As a result, current pupils in Years 7 to 11 and in most subjects, including English and mathematics, are making much faster progress this year. The school predicts that both progress and attainment will rise substantially in 2016 and will be much closer to national averages. Inspectors verified the accuracy of the school's assessment processes, which have been checked rigorously by senior leaders and also externally by colleagues working in other local schools. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are making the progress expected.
- The percentage of pupils likely to achieve the highest grades at GCSE is predicted to improve significantly this year, as are the proportions likely to make more than the expected progress in English and mathematics. This reflects the considerable work done by the school to raise the achievement of its most-able pupils. Levels of challenge for the most able are suitably high and staff are doing all they can to ensure these pupils achieve as well as they should.
- Outcomes require improvement, however, because the progress made by disadvantaged pupils is not improving as fast as it is for other pupils. Although the school succeeded last year in narrowing the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally, it remained too wide. Disadvantaged pupils achieved almost a grade lower than other pupils in the school in English and just over a grade lower in mathematics. Against other pupils nationally, these gaps were wider still. Despite the school's positive work to support its disadvantaged pupils, and despite significant improvements in achievement overall across all year groups, disadvantaged pupils are not making the faster progress that would close the gap in their achievement.
- The school provides a wide range of effective careers education and guidance, both in lessons in all year groups and through a number of sessions offered by external providers. The school is designated as a centre of excellence in financial education, in recognition of its success in preparing pupils to be financially literate citizens.
- The school encourages pupils to read widely, for example through its use of a well-structured reading programme which younger pupils relish, and through a number of competitions and author events organised by the librarian. Many pupils borrow books regularly from the school library. The school's efforts to improve the literacy of pupils whose reading is not as good as it should be when they arrive in Year 7 are also proving largely successful. The majority of the twenty pupils who are following the government-funded 'catch-up' programme are making strong progress with their reading, and the school has put in place further measures to support those who need more help. Additional work to support pupils who have special educational needs with literacy and numeracy has meant that these pupils make rapid progress in these areas.

School details

Unique reference number	112401
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10002260

This inspection 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	654
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Patrick Leonard
Headteacher	Mr Thomas Ryan
Telephone number	01900 873290
Website	www.st-josephs.cumbria.sch.uk/
Email address	head@st-josephs.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 November 2013

Information about this school

- St Joseph’s Catholic High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is a little below national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support through the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals and those in local authority care.
- At key stage 4, three pupils currently receive full-time alternative educational provision at the West Cumbria Achievement Zone.
- The school meets the government’s current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- St Joseph’s is a member of the Cumbria Alliance of School Leaders, which provides mutual support for teachers and leaders in other schools. The school is linked for professional development purposes with a number of local schools, including one outstanding school. St Joseph’s also takes a leading role in supporting other schools, especially primary schools, through the local teaching alliance.
- The school has been chosen to become a centre of excellence in financial education, accredited by a financial charity, the Personal Finance Education Group.
- The school is a lead school in the Network of Teaching Excellence in Computer Science, awarded by BCS, the Chartered Institute of IT. It is a designated Fairtrade school and a strategic partner in the Cumbria West Coast Teaching Alliance.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons, four of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. They also carried out brief visits to lessons in English and science. Inspectors visited tutor time and an assembly and observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons. They scrutinised some pupils' exercise books across subjects in more depth. They also looked at information on pupils' current progress and attainment.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, other leaders, class teachers and governors. They also spoke with representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with three groups of pupils formally and spoke with many more pupils informally. They studied the 36 responses to the online pupil survey.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of documents. These included: development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; policies; information and reports provided for parents; safeguarding procedures and records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils.
- The inspection team took account of the 33 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 61 free-text responses received from parents. Inspectors also considered the 63 responses to a questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Clive Hurren, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Marcia Harding	Ofsted Inspector
Derek Kitchin	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Ofsted Inspector

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