

Inspection of Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

Colney Heath Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 0TT

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 November 2023

| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding |
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| The quality of education | Outstanding |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Sixth-form provision | Outstanding |
| Previous inspection grade | Good |

The headteacher of this school is Declan Linnane. This school is part of Diocese of Westminster 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, Patrick Murden, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Patrick Leeson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Nicholas Breakspeare School receive an exemplary education. They are cared for deeply by all school staff. Pupils also show high levels of mutual care and respect for one another. This positive school culture enables pupils to be and feel safe. One parent described the school as a 'treasure'. It is a view typically shared by many.

All pupils are unwaveringly polite, kind, confident and thoughtful. They welcome visitors and share their school experiences enthusiastically. Adults constantly model the positive behaviours they want to see in the pupils. Pupils respond incredibly well to this. Lessons and social times are consistently calm. In corridors during lesson changeover, pupils enjoy talking about what they have learned.

Staff's expectations of pupils are very high, both academically and in their everyday school life. Pupils meet these expectations, not because they have to, but because they value the teaching and support they receive.

The inspirational opportunities pupils have to achieve the school's aim to be a 'better person' are extensive. These include extra-curricular activities and visits abroad, including pilgrimages to Lourdes. Individual personal development is threaded all the way through the school's ethos.

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

The school's curriculum is ambitious across all subjects. The delivery of this curriculum is consistently precise across the school and staff are aspirational for all pupils. As a result, the quality of work the pupils produce is of a high quality. The thorough way in which teachers check pupils' knowledge enables pupils to really understand where they could improve their work. Pupils act upon this feedback immediately, so misconceptions are addressed. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to access and thrive in lessons. Staff working with pupils with SEND are fully informed as to how best to help them succeed. The high expectations of all pupils' learning are the same. This means all pupils, including those pupils with SEND, achieve exceptionally well.

The school considers reading to be hugely important. There is a comprehensive range of reading programmes, which ensures that the weakest readers keep up with their peers. These programmes also include regular library lessons and support from trained sixth-form reading mentors.

Pupils' behaviour is a major strength of the school. The school is tenacious in ensuring that, on the rare occasion things go wrong, pupils are supported to understand and learn from the consequences of their actions. Pupils do this well. As a result, levels of suspension are extremely low and pupils can learn without any disturbances. Sixth-form students act as role models of confident and good-mannered individuals to younger pupils.

Pupils attend school regularly. Lateness to lessons is not something that happens. This enables pupils to engage effectively in the high-quality education provided by the school.

The school provides a huge range of out-of-class activities to enable the pupils to grow as individuals. For example, sixth-form students describe a range of enrichment activities that frequently provide them with the opportunity to develop their character. Students also give their time to support pupils in lower school through a well-developed mentoring programme. The personal development curriculum is extraordinary. This programme extends far beyond what is required. The 'NBS Way' is a thread which runs through all elements of school life. Pupils have the opportunity to experience a variety of visiting speakers. They also arrange and participate in a range of highly successful charitable events. Sixth-form students are able to attend a retreat prior to their examinations. All pupils receive regular and appropriate information in relation to careers and education options.

Strong, principled leadership has been fundamental to the school's improvement. Governors, trustees, and school leaders are relentless in their drive to ensure that pupils receive the highest quality education. They fulfil their statutory duties well.

The passion that the school has for ensuring pupils succeed, in all aspects of their school and wider life, is mirrored by the unstinting support they receive from parents. School staff, including those at the very beginning of their careers, are proud to work at the school and feel their well-being is taken seriously. They describe the support from leaders as second to none.

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

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| Unique reference number | 137938 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10240211 |
| 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 | 1071 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 163 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Patrick Leeson |
| Headteacher | Declan Linnane |
| Website | www.nbs.herts.sch.co.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 19 and 20 October 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school is part of Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust.
- The last inspection of the school's religious character took place in March 2023.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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.
- The inspection team met with governors and representatives of the trust, including trustees and the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, history, mathematics, geography, science and modern foreign languages. 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.
- 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 inspection team met with pupils from different year groups to talk about their learning and experiences at school. Inspectors also considered the 264 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents provided by the school. These included the school improvement plan, curriculum documentation and school policies.
- Inspectors considered 182 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. This included 118 comments from parents and carers in the free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the 85 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Jonathan Rockey, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Aimee Bray | Ofsted Inspector |
| Simon Warburton | Ofsted Inspector |
| Sharon Pritchard | |

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