

The Academy of St Nicholas

51 Horrocks Avenue, Garston, Liverpool, Merseyside L19 5NY

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- From its opening in 2010 until the involvement of the All Saints Academy Trust, this school suffered from frequent changes in headship and lack of effective direction from trustees and governors.
- Short-term and unsustainable attempts to boost results for successive Year 11 groups had a negative impact on the curriculum and the quality of teaching.
- Pupils have underperformed at GCSE since the opening of the school.
- Despite substantial improvements, the legacy of previous weaknesses in teaching and subject leadership is still evident in some areas.
- The curriculum is under significant review. It lacks breadth and balance. The proportion of pupils entered for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is very low in relation to the government's targets.
- Pupils' attendance, although improving, is still below that seen nationally.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is above the national average.

The school has the following strengths

- At its formation in January 2016, the All Saints Academy Trust began to make strategic decisions which have resulted in long-needed strength and stability of leadership.
- Aply supported by the new chief executive officer of the trust, the headteacher has made substantial and sustainable improvements.
- Pupils, staff and parents speak highly of the impact of changes made since the arrival of the current headteacher.
- Current pupils make good progress, although Year 11 have significant gaps in knowledge.
- Inadequate teaching has been eradicated almost entirely and that which is not fully effective is improving.
- The behaviour of pupils has been transformed. The school is now an orderly and purposeful community.
- Students in the sixth form benefit from strong teaching and leadership. After the merging of two sixth forms into one, in 2018 A-level results dipped. However, the attainment of current students is back to previous good levels.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all subject leaders have sufficient skills and confidence to contribute fully to improvements in the subjects for which they are responsible.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by:
 - making sure that pupils have the opportunity to study a wider range of subjects, especially in Years 7 to 9
 - increasing the proportion of pupils who study the academic subjects which make up the EBacc, especially modern foreign languages.
- Ensure that teaching is consistently at least good by:
 - making sure that all teachers expect pupils to do their best and complete tasks to a good standard
 - ensuring that the work set is sufficiently challenging and builds on what pupils have already successfully learned.
- Work with pupils and their families to improve attendance.
- Reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions by continuing to support teachers in implementing the new behaviour policy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher and the chief executive officer, alongside the headteacher of the other school in the trust, who is a local leader of education, form a highly effective team which has transformed the culture of the school. The senior leadership team, which is composed of staff who are new to the school or new to their role, plays an important part in continuing improvement.
- Some middle leaders are less than effective in monitoring and improving quality and standards in their subjects. The school also has some subject leaders who lack experience but are gaining skills under the guidance of their link senior leader. The leadership of some subjects is already strong, with resultant strengths in teaching and pupils' progress in their areas of responsibility. Subject leaders now benefit from working together as a team rather than in isolation.
- Movement of staff, temporarily or permanently, between the two schools in the trust has enabled the best use of skills and the sharing of expertise. It has also allowed for strategies already tried and tested in the other school to be implemented quickly and successfully at the Academy of St Nicholas.
- The morale of staff, students and parents is high. At the time of the last inspection staff absence was particularly high. Now staff are very rarely absent.
- Leaders have sought external review of many aspects of the school from the local authority, specialist leaders in education and external consultants. They have used the information gained to come to an accurate and detailed picture of strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge has enabled them to develop a long-term vision for substantial improvements which can be sustained.
- The rationale for changes has been related to what is best for pupils and not superficial short-term gains for the school. One teacher's comment typified the views of staff, parents and pupils, 'Now pupils are at the centre of everything I am asked to do.'
- Using performance management, training for teachers and working with specialist leaders in education from other schools, leaders have greatly improved teaching.
- Pupils, staff and parents are unanimous in their view that the new arrangements for the management of pupils' behaviour have had a very positive impact, although the rate of fixed-term exclusions is still high in comparison with national averages. Leaders' impact on attendance is also positive, although pupils' attendance is still below that seen nationally.
- Plans to diminish the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils are well devised. The pupil premium funding is well used to enable pastoral and teaching staff to dedicate time to this group and to provide these pupils with resources and enrichment activities. The progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils have improved, sometimes at a greater rate than those of their peers, but differences in progress at key stage 4 remain.
- The cross-trust leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is strong. Staff are now more aware of SEND, and teachers' planning to meet the needs

of this group is more effective than previously. The progress of this group is at least as good as that of their classmates.

- Pupils who attend the resource base for those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) benefit greatly from it in relation to attendance, behaviour, academic progress and the ability to manage in lessons in the main school.
- The school's curriculum lacks breadth and balance. An early emphasis on the requirements of GCSE has resulted in a restricted curriculum and lack of development of subject-specific skills and knowledge at key stage 3. In addition, there is currently no provision for drama or resistant materials. At key stage 4, very few pupils study the range of subjects that make up the EBacc, especially modern foreign languages. A cross-trust curriculum review is under way, with significant changes being made from September 2019.
- Pupils benefit from an impressive range of extra-curricular activities including study support, sport, performing and visual arts, debating and visits to cultural centres and higher-education establishments. These activities allow pupils to take part in national competitions and to broaden their horizons and raise their aspirations.
- Leaders have created a culture of respect and tolerance. They have put in place good strategies for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils speak of those who are different from themselves with sensitivity and empathy. Leaders have made sure that the school prepares pupils for life in a modern and diverse country.

Governance of the school

- When it was formed in 2016, the multi-academy trust recognised the extent of the school's weaknesses and the impact of a long period of instability in leadership. The current Year 11 had already had four headteachers in their time at the school. Trustees have secured significant and lasting improvements by recruiting a new and experienced chair of governors, an experienced headteacher and a highly skilled chief executive officer.
- After a period of lack of clarity of roles between the trust and the local governing body, the trust commissioned an external review of governance. It acted on all recommendations and now responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear and communication is good.
- Trustees and governors have a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They seek external review to ensure that the information they receive from the school's leaders is a fair reflection of standards and quality and they act with urgency when weaknesses become apparent. The introduction of 'governors' open days' has resulted in more governors and trustees visiting during the school day to see for themselves the impact of the decisions they make.
- Trustees and governors bring a wide range of educational, business, personnel and finance skills to their roles and have used them well to recruit highly effective leaders and secure the long-term stability of the school, including the viability of the sixth form.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Pupils with whom inspectors spoke said they feel safe in the school and know who to go to if they have concerns. They, and staff, understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- Staff undertake regular training. They know the procedures to follow if they have concerns about a pupil.
- The school involves external agencies when necessary and staff records are carefully kept.
- The system to ensure that adults employed by the school are safe to work with pupils is appropriate and recruitment procedures reflect current guidelines.
- Staff and visitors teach pupils how to keep themselves safe from such dangers as drug and alcohol abuse and the misuse of the internet and mobile technology.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- A legacy from previous leadership means that some teaching remains less than effective, particularly in history. A minority of teaching fails to build on what pupils have already learned and does not challenge them sufficiently. A minority of teachers have low expectations of how hard pupils should work and do not challenge inattention or incomplete and careless work.
- The quality of teaching has improved considerably under the school's new leadership. Many teachers are new to the school since the last inspection. Most teaching ensures that pupils make good progress, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- Improved management of behaviour has resulted in much better use of lesson time, with little or no disruption caused by poor behaviour or silliness. Most teaching is enhanced by strong working relationships between teachers and pupils. One teacher commented, 'Pupils don't waste lesson time by arguing back like they used to.'
- In line with the school's policy, most teachers insist that pupils redraft work to make improvements based on feedback.
- Long-standing and considerable strengths remain in the teaching of some areas such as art and vocational subjects.
- All teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and most use this to plan logical sequences of activities that build on each other and reinforce previously learned work. The subject knowledge of teachers also ensures that most use questions well to extend pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking.
- In the past, assessments were overgenerous. Staff training, moderation within the school and with other schools, and the use of GCSE examiners currently on the staff, have made sure that teachers' assessment of pupils' work and the grades they allocate are accurate.
- Assessments are also more timely now, giving staff better opportunities to identify and address weaknesses in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. The new system also helps pupils to become accustomed to working under examination conditions as well as helping them to cope better with the different ways they will be assessed in Year 11.

- Homework is set when it will consolidate learning. Pupils enjoy the online element of mathematics homework.
- The systematic implementation of whole-school policies for the development of literacy and numeracy in subjects other than English and mathematics is at an early stage of development.
- Teachers reinforce the school's culture of tolerance and respect for difference. Pupils told inspectors that no-one uses prejudicial or offensive language in the school.
- Parents receive detailed information about how their children are progressing. Attendance at parents' evenings has increased considerably over the past two years.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are frequently reminded by staff of the 'Academy Promise' that staff, pupils and parents make to each other, 'We always try our personal best and accept no excuses.' This simply-put promise has successfully guided pupils through raised expectations of their contribution to all aspects of school life.
- Staff are reminded that it is their duty to challenge and help pupils to achieve their 'personal best' every day. Guided by the school's Christian ethos, leaders aim to develop pupils' resilience, ambition, respect and compassion.
- In responses to Ofsted questionnaires and in discussions with inspectors, all pupils showed respect and empathy in relation to people of different sexuality, race, religion or culture from their own.
- During the inspection, in lessons and in discussions with inspectors, pupils spoke and acted with confidence. Older pupils spoke with pride of the improvements they have seen since the arrival of the current headteacher.
- Most have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed academically.
- All pupils are helped to make educational and career choices by the trust's careers and employability manager. This has contributed considerably to the significant decrease in the number of pupils who are not in education, employment or training two terms after leaving Year 11. This figure has gone from above the national average in 2016 to below in 2018.
- For those pupils who attend alternative provision, leaders have put in place effective systems of communication to ensure their safety and well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although the attendance of pupils has improved, overall it is still below national averages. Too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough.

- The school is working hard with pupils and their families to make sure that they understand the negative impact of low attendance. Staff employ an intelligent range of strategies which represents a good balance between rewards and sanctions. Their work has succeeded in improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils to above the national average.
- Pupils, staff and parents told inspectors that behaviour in lessons and at social times has been transformed since the arrival of the new headteacher and the assistant headteacher with responsibility for behaviour. This matches the respectful relationships and calm orderly environment which inspectors witnessed during the inspection.
- Non-teaching heads of year have the time and resources to get to know pupils and their families very well. They are very effective in identifying and supporting pupils at risk of misbehaving and in dealing with those who have misbehaved.
- Evidence of improved behaviour can be seen clearly in the decrease in the number of behaviour-related incidents requiring in-school sanctions, such as removal from lessons and detentions. The number of pupils who are sent more than once to 'Room for Improvement' for temporary internal exclusion has diminished markedly. The number of permanent and repeat fixed-term exclusions has also decreased, although single fixed-term exclusions are still above the national average.
- The school's records and inspectors' discussions with pupils and staff indicate that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively by staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The school's past GCSE results over several years show that pupils made significantly less progress than pupils across the country who had achieved similar scores at the end of Year 6. This was particularly true of disadvantaged pupils and those of middle ability.
- As a result of improvements in the quality of education, pupils currently in the school are faring better in all year groups and ability groups. Pupils in Years 7 and 8, who since joining the school have had the same leadership and governance, are making the most progress.
- The school's assessment information and inspectors' scrutiny of work indicate that pupils currently in Year 11 have already made better progress than Year 11 pupils in previous years. However, as a result of past weaknesses in teaching and leadership, they are still underachieving in relation to their prior attainment and capabilities.
- Progress in vocational subjects and art remains above the national average. It is also strong in modern foreign languages but with a very small number of pupils.
- In Years 7 and 8 disadvantaged pupils have caught up with their non-disadvantaged peers in the school. In the other year groups, while differences are diminishing, disadvantaged pupils are still not making as much progress as others in school.
- Effective leadership and provision for pupils with SEND has resulted in them making better progress than their peers when taking into account their results at the end of Year 6.

- Pupils who speak English as an additional language continue to make stronger progress than their peers.
- Those pupils who entered Year 7 with low levels of literacy and numeracy have been supported effectively to improve their skills. Their reading ages and mathematical skills have improved rapidly so that they are now much more able to reach their potential in the range of subjects they study.
- The proportion of pupils who progress to and stay in education, employment or training after leaving Year 11 has risen considerably over the last three years and is now above the national average.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- In September 2017, the multi-academy trust amalgamated the sixth forms of its two schools to form All Saints Sixth Form College, which is part of the Academy of St Nicholas. This important strategic decision has resulted in a sixth form with viable numbers which can provide a high-quality curriculum across A-level and vocational courses.
- The merging of groups which had studied the same subjects but with different examination specifications proved problematic. In addition, the entry requirements for studying A levels were low, so some students found the demands of the A-level course too great. These two factors resulted in a dip in A-level results in 2018, especially for most-able students. However, current students have encountered no such problems and their progress is strong.
- Historically, attainment and progress in vocational courses was strong and it remains so. Results were not reported in performance tables last year because the courses followed were not eligible to be counted. This year all courses followed by the school's sixth formers are eligible and will be reported on.
- Disadvantaged students continue to make better progress than their peers.
- Students who enter the sixth form without at least a grade 4 in GCSE mathematics and English make better progress than is seen nationally.
- Leaders of the sixth form have a clear vision for its development. There has been a review of teaching and of entry requirements, with subsequent actions resulting in improvements in standards and quality. In September 2019, the curriculum will be enhanced by the introduction of travel and tourism, construction, and philosophy and ethics.
- All subjects are now taught by specialist staff. Teaching in the sixth form is strong in both vocational and academic subjects.
- Pupils benefit from good-quality impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance. This helps students select courses which suit their prior attainment and career or higher-education aspirations. As a result, very few students leave the sixth form before they have completed their courses.
- Students also enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities. All students undertake meaningful work experience in Year 12.

- In January 2019, to provide the extra leadership capacity needed due to the growth of sixth-form numbers, an assistant head of sixth form was appointed with responsibility for personal development, behaviour and welfare. This appointment is also intended to provide extra capacity to improve students' attendance, which, although increasing, is still below what the school expects.
- The same high standards of pastoral care and safety seen in the rest of the school are clearly evident in the sixth form.
- When talking to inspectors, students had only good things to say about their sixth form. They are very proud of it and very appreciative of the help and guidance which staff give them, especially in terms of support for applications for university, employment and apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	136119
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10057940

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	730
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	204
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Brynley Marsh
Headteacher	David Lancaster
Telephone number	0151 230 2570
Website	www.theacademyofstnicholas.org.uk
Email address	d.lancaster@theacademyofstnicholas.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 November 2016

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is high.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.

- Sixteen pupils are educated off-site at: Everton Free School, Alternative Centre of Education, Harmonize, Assess Skype Project, Employability Solutions, Prudentia and Active TT.
- The school has a special educational needs resource base for pupils who have ASD. Sixteen pupils attend this base.
- The academy is sponsored by the Archdiocese and Diocese of Liverpool, which, in 2016, formed a multi-academy trust, known as All Saints Academy Trust, consisting of this and one other school. There is a board of trust directors and a local governing body.
- There have been very considerable changes in staffing since the previous inspection and a new headteacher was appointed in July 2017.
- The school has been supported by the local authority (School Improvement Liverpool), specialist leaders of education and external consultants.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and pupils' learning. Many of these lesson observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- An inspector visited the ASD resource base.
- Inspectors observed and spoke with many pupils during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors met formally with five groups of pupils. An inspector heard a range of pupils read.
- Inspectors held discussions with a group of parents, staff, middle and senior leaders, members of the local governing body and the board of trustees.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding. They took account of the school's information about pupils' outcomes and scrutinised their books and assessment information.
- Inspectors considered 57 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including a number of free-text comments. They considered 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and 37 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

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David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector
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John Edwards	Ofsted Inspector

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