

Inspection of The Academy of St Nicholas

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

Inspection dates: 6 to 7 December 2022

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school, including those in the sixth form, benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers have high expectations of what pupils and students should achieve. They care about pupils and help them to do their best.

In lessons and around the school, most pupils follow the routines and meet the high expectations set by staff. Teachers reinforce good behaviour with rewards, which pupils appreciate.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, told inspectors that they are happy and feel safe in school. When bullying does happen, staff are supportive and deal with it well. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm. Pupils are confident that if they have a problem, there will be someone to talk to, and they will receive the help they need.

Pupils enjoy the school's personal-development curriculum. They are taught how to keep themselves safe, about healthy relationships and the value of diversity. They are able to attend a wide range of clubs and activities, including debating, gamers' club, basketball, pottery and foreign-language movie club.

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

Since the arrival of the new headteacher, leaders have transformed the curriculum. It is now at least as ambitious as the national curriculum for all pupils. In the sixth form, there is a well-chosen and broad range of subjects for students to choose from. Leaders have taken action to increase the number of pupils who take the qualifications that make up the English Baccalaureate. Crucially, more pupils now study a language in Year 10.

Leaders have thought carefully about the knowledge pupils and students should have and the order in which they should acquire it. As a result, learning is organised coherently across all key stages. This ensures that new content builds on what pupils and students have already learned.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. Most design learning well and check carefully for any gaps in pupils' knowledge. They use this information to adapt teaching so that pupils can catch up on what they have missed, misunderstood or forgotten. This helps pupils to build their understanding over time and progress well. However, some teachers do not use learning activities effectively to identify what pupils know and remember. Consequently, their pupils, including those with SEND, continue to have gaps or misconceptions in their learning and are not fully ready to learn new content. Teachers of sixth-form students are particularly skilled. As a result, students in the sixth form achieve well.

Leaders recognise the importance of reading. They have improved the systems for

identifying pupils who are falling behind. Staff provide effective support for these pupils to develop their reading knowledge. Teachers place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' and students' vocabulary. Pupils read well-chosen texts in class each week. This helps them to become more confident and fluent readers.

Leaders and staff know how to identify and support pupils with SEND. Leaders ensure that teachers have high-quality information about the individual needs of these pupils. Teachers and support staff meet their needs well. Leaders ensure that they have additional help to gain access to the school's programme of personal development if they need it.

Leaders' high expectations for behaviour are shared and understood by staff and pupils. Typically, the school is calm and pupils behave well in lessons. Leaders react quickly to the information they collect about behaviour, for example by making changes to ensure that pupils arrive at lessons on time. Pupils and staff can see the improvements that have been made. A small number of pupils do not follow school routines as well as they should, particularly at social times.

The school's programme for personal development, its 'curriculum for life', is popular with pupils. Pupils and students receive age-appropriate relationships and sex education. They learn about equality and respect for different groups of people. The programme helps to build pupils' moral and spiritual understanding. For example, pupils and students are given time each week to consider and debate moral dilemmas.

Leaders have introduced a well-planned careers programme. Pupils and students learn about the range of careers and educational opportunities available to them. Trips and guest speakers provide direct encounters with local and national employers. Pupils and students move on to appropriate, high-quality destinations when it is time for them to leave the school.

Leaders have taken the school on a journey of improvement and remain ambitious for it. They ensure that staff receive high-quality training and professional development. Staff told inspectors that leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being.

Local governors and trustees take their responsibilities seriously. They know the school well and support and challenge leaders effectively. Leaders have made good use of external expertise to bring about school improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff are well trained in safeguarding. This helps staff to be alert to any signs that pupils, or students in the sixth form, may be at risk of harm. Leaders ensure that systems for monitoring safeguarding concerns are robust. They act quickly to secure the right support for vulnerable pupils. They have forged close links with external

agencies to ensure that pupils get the help that they need. Pupils know well how to keep themselves safe, including online. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught about any new risks which emerge.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not check pupils' knowledge and understanding as well as they could. As a result, some pupils continue to have misconceptions or gaps in their learning and are not fully ready to learn new content. Leaders should ensure that all teachers have the required expertise to identify when pupils are falling behind and to help them to catch up. This will allow pupils to build and remember a rich body of knowledge.
- A small minority of pupils do not follow school routines and misbehave during social times. Leaders should ensure that staff consistently apply the school's behaviour policy so that pupils behave well in classrooms and around the school.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136119
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10244614
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	907
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	222
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Matt Elliott
Headteacher	Jeniffer Sing
Website	www.theacademyofstnicholas.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 March 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a joint Catholic and Church of England academy. The most recent section 48 inspection was in July 2016.
- Leaders make use of four registered alternative provisions for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information 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.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and the head of sixth form, middle leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and the chair of the All Saints Multi-Academy Trust, local governors and a trustee. The lead inspector also spoke with the local authority school improvement officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, geography, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils and students about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' and students' work.
- Inspectors also reviewed the curriculum and spoke to leaders about some other subjects. They visited a sample of lessons in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for safeguarding. They reviewed a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding, including the school's pre-employment checks on staff. They spoke to staff, students and pupils about wider aspects of safeguarding. They also considered Ofsted's survey responses from staff, pupils, parents and carers about safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' and students' behaviour during breaktimes and lunchtimes, in corridors and during lessons. They spoke with pupils and students about bullying, behaviour and leaders' expectations of their behaviour. Inspectors also discussed pupils' and students' programme of wider personal development.
- Inspectors considered the responses from parents to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's staff, student and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Stephanie Gill, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Phill Walmsley	Ofsted Inspector
Andrea O'Neill	Ofsted Inspector
Thomas Fay	Ofsted Inspector

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