

Inspection of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy

Woodland Street, Biddulph, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST8 6LW

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 May 2025

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The executive headteacher of this school is Sarah Rathbone, who is responsible for this school and one other. This school part of The Newman Catholic Collegiate, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Ian Beardmore, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gillian Meller.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2015. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils thrive thanks to the many opportunities they have. As one pupil, typical of many, stated: 'It is a small school but full of big possibilities.' The high-quality provision means pupils are fully engaged in the life of the school. They are known well by adults. Pupils are happy and are very proud of their school. The school is determined that all pupils will achieve to a high standard. Pupils typically achieve well from their starting points.

Behaviour is exemplary at Our Lady of Grace. This is because pupils understand the importance of treating each other with respect. They also try their hardest in lessons. The many pupil leadership opportunities provided mean that pupils collaborate with the school to improve the provision on offer.

The school places significant importance on a wealth of high-quality opportunities to enrich pupils' experience. These include a wide range of trips, clubs, activities and visits. The school supports pupils to broaden their experiences, extending pupils' learning beyond the classroom. Pupils speak especially highly of a trip to Parliament and a trip to France, as well as the activities the school participates in locally.

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

The school has continued to review and renew its curriculum with a more recent focus on mathematics. The key knowledge that pupils need to learn across the curriculum is clearly identified and taught in an order which is logical. Teachers check understanding in a variety of ways to ensure that gaps in pupils' learning are identified and closed. There are significant strengths in the curriculum, including in subjects beyond English and mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified with precision. The school ensures that staff have detailed information on these needs to support these pupils' learning. When appropriate, adaptations are made to the learning for these pupils, and they learn the curriculum well.

The school has prioritised early reading and has a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. Pupils who have gaps in their phonics knowledge have rapid support to enable them to progress in their reading. The school supports all pupils with their reading to an adult to help develop fluency in reading. The school has ensured there is a wider love of reading, with exposure to high-quality texts, and a well-stocked library.

Through detailed knowledge of the children, the school ensures they have a strong start in their early years. They establish starting points promptly and use these to match activities in the classroom and outside play area to the children's development needs. Extensive support is put in place, including advice from external agencies, for those children who need further help to be ready for later learning. Their learning is enriched with stories, songs and rhymes.

Generally, the school's curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Most pupils know and remember more over time. However, some aspects of the curriculum have been

revised more recently. Where this is the case, there are occasional examples, including in the early years, where learning is less secure. This means the quality of provision is not quite matched to the high standards seen elsewhere.

Pupils' attendance is exceptionally high. The school works in a proactive way to support families to ensure pupils attend regularly. The highest standards of behaviour are the norm at this school. Pupils fully understand how to conduct themselves and how important it is to treat all others with respect. In lessons, pupils concentrate hard and work to the best of their ability. They understand the importance of perseverance. Social times are harmonious, with many opportunities for activities which pupils enjoy.

The school is rightly proud of its exemplary provision for pupils' personal development. A range of pupil leadership groups work well with leaders to improve provision. The very significant range of well-designed opportunities are popular and enrich the experience for pupils. Pupils show perseverance in their commitment to the many opportunities the school offers. These include clubs, activities and a range of trips. There are notable numbers of pupils who complete a course offered through a local university.

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the school and community it serves. They have continued to renew practice in a highly effective way, drawing on support from the trust and wider best practice. Directors and governors are ambitious for the school and ensure they have the information they need to support leaders in their work. Staff are highly positive about how leaders engage with them around workload. They appreciate the opportunities for their own professional development. Parents and carers value the school, its engagement with them and the high-quality education that it provides.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The impact of revised curriculums, including in the early years, is variable. This means that, on occasion, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school should continue their work to embed these curriculums further so that all pupils achieve consistently well in all subjects.

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	140129
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10344019
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gillian Meller
CEO of the trust	Ian Beardmore
Executive Headteacher	Sarah Rathbone
Website	www.ourladyofgraceacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 June 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is one of nine in The Newman Catholic Collegiate.
- The executive headteacher took up their post in March 2022.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school is a Roman Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. It was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in June 2019. The next section 48 inspection is due in the academic year 2026/27.

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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- 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.
- As part of this inspection, the inspectors met with governors and directors, including the chair of the trust. They met with senior leaders, subject leaders, teaching staff and other employees in the school. Inspectors also talked informally to pupils to gather general information about school life. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the archdiocese by telephone. He scrutinised records of external visits to the school. Governing body minutes and trust minutes were reviewed.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical education and science. For each deep dive, the 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 in these subjects and others.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's extra-curricular activities, enrichment programme and their careers and personal development programmes with leaders and pupils.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's behaviour and attendance records with school leaders.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including plans to improve the school.
- The inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, at various points in the inspection. They took account of responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils, Ofsted Parent View and the free-text responses. An inspector also spoke with a selection of parents informally.

Inspection team

Andrew Madden, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rob Bourdon-Pierre

Ofsted Inspector

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