

St Columba's Catholic Boys' School

Halcot Avenue, Bexleyheath, Kent, DA6 7QB

Inspection dates 23-24 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Most boys make good progress from average starting points. They achieve examination results in Year 11 similar to those in other schools in most subjects. GCSE results in English, mathematics and science are above average and improving steadily.
- The headteacher, leaders and governors are passionate about raising aspirations across the school. They are determined that every boy is supported to reach his full potential. They are regularly seen around the school and build positive relationships with staff and students.
- Teaching across the school is good. Effective management of teachers' performance and focused professional development opportunities help teachers improve.
- Boys take great pride in their school. They behave exceptionally well and have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They are respectful and courteous towards visitors, staff and each other.
- Attendance is very high because boys enjoy being at school. They value the support they are given which helps them to achieve well. They expect a lot of themselves and work hard to reach their goals.
- Boys are kept extremely safe. Bullying incidents are uncommon. School leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding of students is of a high standard.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Most boys make good or better progress but there is still some variability across subjects, for example design and technology and modern foreign languages.
- Not all teachers provide high-quality marking and feedback to ensure that boys know how to improve and make better progress.
- Achievement targets, set by teachers and leaders, are not always based on accurate information. Targets are sometimes not challenging enough. This slows the pace of improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 25 part lessons taught by 25 teachers. Seven observations were conducted jointly with members of the school's leadership team. A series of shorter visits to lessons was made with school leaders to check the quality of marking and feedback in workbooks, evaluate the impact of the pupil premium funding and to check how targets were used across the school.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of newly qualified teachers, and the Chair of the Governing Body, the vice chair and two other members. A meeting was held with a representative from the local authority at the request of school leaders. Inspectors also met with three groups of boys and spoke to them informally throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of 32 parental views expressed through the Parent View survey. They considered the school's own parental survey and letters from parents and carers sent directly to the school and the inspection team. Parental comments recorded by the school throughout the year were also considered.
- Inspectors reviewed the 30 staff questionnaires returned during the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the school's work, scrutinised information about boys' achievement and checked work in books. They examined any records relating to behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work.
- A review of all safeguarding records and procedures was carried out.

Inspection team

Lesley Cox, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Maureen Hill

Additional Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average, boys' secondary school. It is a Catholic school within the diocese of Southwark. The school is located within the London Borough of Bexley which offers selective provision.
- St Columba's Catholic Boys' School converted to become an academy school from September 2012. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted in 2010, it was judged to be good.
- Boys come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. The largest groups are Black African and White British. The proportion of boys who speak English as an additional language is similar to that in other schools.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is slightly above average.
- The school has a specially resourced provision, funded by the local authority, which supports up to 16 boys with autistic spectrum disorders.
- The proportion of boys who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding provided for children eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children from service families, is just below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.
- Boys rarely attend off-site alternative education provision. Currently a very small number attend the Pathways Short Stay School.
- Boys are entered early for examinations in science at the end of Year 10.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure leaders at all levels have a precise understanding of how much progress boys are actually making, so that they can plan further actions and check that they are making a difference by raising boys' achievement.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding so that more boys make accelerated rates of progress by:
 - improving the quality of feedback and marking so that boys know how to improve their work and can move forward quickly in their learning
 - ensuring all teachers use accurate assessment information to set challenging targets for boys to work towards.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The highly committed headteacher, senior leaders and governors have successfully communicated their aspirational vision for the school to the whole school community. They are determined to sustain recent improvements and staff and students work hard to fulfil leaders' expectations. A school-wide ethos of caring for each other and high levels of respect have created a supportive community where all individuals are valued equally.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and development areas. Self-evaluation is embedded at all levels so that further improvements can be identified quickly. However, plans to raise achievement lack precision because leaders are not always setting challenging targets based on accurate information. As a result, the pace of improvement in some subjects is too slow.
- Leaders ensure that the pupil premium funding is appropriately used to support the needs of eligible boys. However, leaders do not yet know what interventions have been effective because monitoring systems have only recently been introduced.
- The leadership of teaching is good and has led to improvements in the quality of teaching over time. Regular monitoring takes place and teaching is accurately evaluated using the national Teachers' Standards. Effective support is provided for improving teachers, including those that have recently qualified. Professional development programmes are tailored carefully to meet the needs of individuals and provide a wide range of high-quality training opportunities throughout the year. Teachers are not rewarded unless their targets are met and they undertake responsibilities appropriate to their pay scale.
- The leadership of behaviour and safety is considered by staff, boys, parents, carers and the local authority to be a strength of the school. Inspectors agree. Leaders keep careful records of any concerns and take effective action to address them when necessary. Leaders and governors are vigilant in making sure that safeguarding systems are robust. All safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
- Leaders have taken decisive action to improve the standard of leadership across the school. New and improving middle leaders are well supported by colleagues, senior leaders and external consultants. As a result, the number of subjects that do not achieve results in line with national averages has reduced.
- The curriculum provides an appropriate balance of subjects that meet the needs of all boys. Consequently, most go on to study higher-level courses when they leave the school. Boys supported by the resourced specialist provision participate in the full range of subjects offered. Leaders check the curriculum offer provided to the few attending Pathways Short Stay School to ensure that it addresses their needs. Leaders and governors are firmly committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all.
- Leaders work closely with local authority officers to ensure that standards continue to improve. They draw appropriately on available support and contribute to wider school partnerships within the diocese and local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very strong. The partnership that exists between governors and school leaders is effective because they share a common vision for the school. Members of the governing body contribute a range of skills that allow them to offer high levels of support and challenge to school leaders. Governors make regular visits and attend professional training with teachers to improve their own understanding. They ensure that staff salary progression is linked with performance management targets and check that the quality of teaching improves. They have an accurate understanding of assessment information and monitor this closely. They know how the pupil premium and catch-up funding are spent. They have rightly asked leaders to evaluate more closely the effectiveness of this funding from this year. School finances are managed well, despite a fall in funding caused by lower student numbers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Boys have very positive attitudes towards their learning and demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm and engagement in lessons. They wear their uniforms with pride and treat their surroundings with respect. Their exemplary behaviour at break times and during lesson changes is not reliant on staff supervision, but reflects the high levels of consideration for each other, evident throughout the school.
- The school's work to keep boys safe and secure is outstanding. All boys say they are safe and speak highly of the support they get from school staff. Those supported through the pupil premium, disabled boys and those who have special educational needs are extremely well cared for. Boys attending the resourced provision know where to go at break times and can bring their friends with them. They are integrated fully into the life of the main school and become increasingly confident when mixing socially as a result of the effective support they receive.
- Boys are kept well informed about all types of bullying through assemblies, external speakers and discussions in lessons. A strong focus on the dangers of cyber bullying has ensured that boys know what to do to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Some boys have been trained as cyber mentors to raise awareness throughout the school and at home.
- The very positive views of staff, parents and carers and boys concerning behaviour, safety and care are supported by the low number of concerns recorded. The use of temporary exclusions has fallen rapidly and is now very low. No boy was excluded twice last year. Some boys come to the school after struggling to succeed elsewhere and benefit from the effective pastoral support that is provided. They recognise and respond to the high expectations the school has of them and have raised their own aspirations accordingly.
- Nearly all boys attend regularly and very few are persistently absent. Overall attendance rates are very high compared to other schools'. Boys say that this is because they enjoy coming to school and appreciate the extra-curricular clubs and sporting events offered to them.
- The behaviour and attendance of the very small number of boys attending the Pathways Short Stay School are monitored and recorded carefully.

The quality of teaching is good

- While the quality of teaching is improving, the amount of outstanding teaching over time is small. Teaching is therefore typically good rather than outstanding.
- Most teaching is planned well to take account of the needs of all boys, including the most able. However, some teachers do not always know the actual amount of progress boys have made because they have not established accurate starting points. As a result, they set targets that are not challenging enough.
- The quality of marking and feedback given by teachers is variable. While some is of a high quality, identifying the next steps and providing helpful advice, this is not yet the case across all subjects and teachers. Some boys therefore make slower progress because they have to wait for further guidance.
- Most teaching allows boys to make good progress because teachers develop very positive relationships. They are highly committed to ensuring that everyone achieves highly and boys are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning attitudes. Consequently, there is little disruption and no time is wasted in lessons.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are reinforced by most teachers, and boys therefore make good progress in reading, writing and understanding mathematical concepts.
- Opportunities are taken by teachers to raise awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural themes. There are high-quality displays of work and a wide range of extra-curricular and charitable activities planned throughout the year. These allow boys to develop a deeper understanding about themselves and their place within modern Britain.
- Disabled boys and those with special educational needs, including those supported by the resourced provision, are well supported in lessons through appropriate interventions and

effective support. They make good progress and achieve as well as other boys at the school.

- Boys and their parents and carers indicate that they are pleased with the quality of teaching at the school and consider it to be of a good standard. Inspectors agree with these views.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good rather than outstanding because there is still some variability across different subjects and student groups.
- Most boys start at the school with average levels of attainment. They make consistently good progress across Years 7 to 11 and attain GCSE results that are above average in English and well above average in mathematics. Overall, A* to C pass rates at Key Stage 4 have risen steadily over time. However, in design and technology and modern foreign languages, results remain below the national average.
- Boys who are eligible for the additional pupil premium funding do not achieve as well as others at Key Stage 4. Unvalidated data show that they achieved approximately three quarters of a grade below other boys in both English and mathematics GCSE examinations in 2014. This gap is closing gradually and achievement gaps are much smaller across Key Stage 3.
- The proportion of boys who make expected rates of progress in English and mathematics is above average. The number making accelerated rates of progress is in line with that in other schools nationally. Effective use of the Year 7 catch-up funding has ensured that any identified gaps in literacy and numeracy skills are addressed quickly. As a result, nearly all boys have caught up and are making expected rates of progress by the end of Year 9.
- Disabled boys and those with special educational needs, including those supported by the specialist provision, make good progress in English and mathematics. They achieve as well as other boys at the school.
- There is little disparity in the achievement of different minority groups. Boys who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as their peers. Some start to make accelerated rates of progress after a short time at the school as a result of the effective support they receive.
- The most able boys make at least good progress in most subjects. They achieve in line with similar students nationally in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11.
- All boys are entered early for GCSE science examinations in Year 10 to allow them more time to study other science subjects in Year 11. In 2014 they achieved results that were significantly above average in this subject.
- The very small number of students who attend the Pathways Short Stay School make good progress because these placements are carefully planned and regularly monitored by school leaders.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138650
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	449411

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	545
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Biggs
Headteacher	Nigel Fisher
Date of previous school inspection	n/a
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