

Inspection of St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls

Pound Street, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3PS

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 February 2022

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

This school was last inspected 14 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a caring learning community where pupils said they are part of a 'big family'. Pupils and staff are guided by the school's core values, including generosity, kindness and integrity.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are polite, respectful, and welcoming towards each other, staff, and visitors. Pupils are kept safe and value the support their teachers give them.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils' conduct. Most pupils understand that the school rules create an environment which helps them to learn. Pupils said that bullying, including derogatory comments, are not accepted. Should any incidents occur, staff are quick to address them. Nonetheless, in a few instances, pupils do not feel fully confident reporting concerns to staff. Leaders are addressing this. For instance, well-being 'ambassadors' have recently been introduced to strengthen provision for pupils' mental health.

Leaders expect all pupils to achieve well, and pupils live up to the high expectations, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In the sixth-form, students produce work of an exceptionally high standard. Sixth-form students' excellent behaviour and attitudes mean they are strong role models for younger pupils.

Pupils attend a variety of exciting clubs. They also participate in many trips which aim to extend their horizons.

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

Leaders have planned a curriculum which is well sequenced overall. It is ambitious for all, including for those pupils with SEND. The curriculum offer is wide ranging, broad and balanced. In Years 10 to 13, this includes the provision of vocational courses which reflect pupils' aspirations for the future. Leaders are also taking steps to improve uptake of the English Baccalaureate. For instance, they are increasing the number of pupils continuing modern foreign languages at GCSE.

In Years 7 to 11, leaders plan and sequence the curriculum effectively in most subjects. Key concepts are taught in a logical manner. This ensures that pupils develop a secure understanding of subject content and deepen their knowledge successfully over time. Staff typically know what they expect pupils to learn in the long term. In a few cases, for instance in art and mathematics, teachers are not as clear about the specific building blocks of knowledge that underpin pupils' progression in the subject. Occasionally, this means that teaching does not fully support pupils' readiness to tackle new, more complex learning.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They know how to select appropriate resources and activities that help pupils get to grips with new subject content. Furthermore, in most subjects, leaders have given careful thought about how assessment is used to support the teaching of the curriculum. Teachers check what pupils have understood and remembered. Gaps in understanding are addressed. Nonetheless, some teaching in Years 7 to 11 does not routinely check that pupils have grasped the meaning of key academic vocabulary. This is particularly evident in mathematics, computer science and art.

Sixth-form leaders have high expectations of students. These expectations are reflected in the ambitious curriculum, which meets the needs and goals of all students. Students excel in their learning. There is a broad range of enrichment activities for students to enjoy outside of academic study. For example, students take part in societies for diversity, debating and law as well as a book club.

Pupils with SEND are fully included in the wider life of the school, and have the same opportunities to develop their interests and talents. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND receive the support they need to access the full curriculum along with their peers. For instance, teachers use information from 'pupil passports' to make appropriate adjustments to their lessons.

All pupils have access to high-quality and challenging texts, and they read widely. Leaders ensure that pupils at the early stages of reading benefit from bespoke support to develop their reading and enhance their learning.

The school has a calm and orderly environment where low-level disruption is rare. Pupils behave well and show positive attitudes to their learning.

Pupils are taught how they can be healthy, active, and responsible citizens. The personal, social and health education curriculum enables pupils to learn about ideas relevant to their lives and wider society. For example, pupils are taught about the value of democracy and how they can challenge discrimination. Pupils benefit from high-quality, impartial careers advice and guidance to help them choose their future destinations. The vast majority of pupils go on to the sixth form to study a range of courses, and then to university to pursue further study.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders and governors promote staff well-being and support them to manage their workload.

Governors are experienced and knowledgeable. They carry out their statutory duties with fidelity and hold leaders to account through rigorous evaluation of school information.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The headteacher and governors ensure that pupils' safety and well-being are always given high priority. Policies and procedures reflect the most recent government guidance and are followed consistently. This includes checks on staff's suitability to work in the school.

Staff are vigilant and understand risks to pupils' welfare. Leaders are proactive in identifying particular challenges faced by pupils, for example when travelling to school from different parts of London. Leaders and staff bring together all the information they have on pupils' welfare. They work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils have the wide range of support they need. Pupils said that they feel safe and know how to stay safe online and in their local community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, some checks on pupils' learning do not pick up when pupils are finding it hard to grasp key academic language. In some instances, pupils' understanding of this language is not fully secure. Leaders should ensure that approaches to checking pupils' understanding contribute consistently well to developing pupils' use of subject-specific vocabulary.
- On occasions, leaders' curricular thinking has not made clear what knowledge pupils need to learn in order to achieve the long-term goals for the subject. When this happens, pupils sometimes move on to learn more-complex ideas before they are ready. Leaders should monitor the implementation of the curriculum and support teachers to identify all of the different knowledge pupils will need to successfully tackle more complex subject content.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	103013
Local authority	Sutton
Inspection number	10211808
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,476
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	303
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Mary Howard
Headteacher	Maria Noone
Website	www.stphils.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 March 2008, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St. Philomena's Catholic High School is a voluntary-aided comprehensive school for girls with a Catholic ethos.
- The school's last section 48 inspection took place on 10 and 11 December 2018.
- Leaders use two registered alternative providers for their pupils.
- The headteacher has been in post since 2011.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, and the governing body. Inspectors also spoke with pupils and staff, and staff at the alternative providers.
- A meeting was held with the chair of the governing body and four other governors. Inspectors also talked with the education director from the archdiocese, a school improvement partner and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors also met with leaders with specific responsibility for safeguarding and the provision for pupils with SEND. Inspectors scrutinised the arrangements for safeguarding, including policies, record-keeping and checks undertaken when recruiting staff.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, art, history, and computer science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work. Other subjects were also considered as part of this inspection.
- The inspection team also reviewed school policies, and documentation about behaviour, attendance, bullying, and relationships and sex education.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils to discuss their views. Inspectors also talked to pupils informally about the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, along with the responses of staff and pupils to Ofsted’s questionnaires.

Inspection team

Jeffery Quaye, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Hall	Ofsted Inspector
Philippa Nunn	Ofsted Inspector
Alice Clay	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Lucy Bruce	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Bob Hamlyn	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Alison Colenso	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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