

Inspection of a good school: St James' Catholic High School

Great Strand, Colindale, London NW9 5PE

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 May 2022

Outcome

St James' Catholic High School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St James' Catholic High School is a caring and inclusive school. Pupils say that they feel safe here and know that they can talk to staff if they have any concerns. Pupils behave well around the school and are respectful to each other and to their teachers.

Pupils and staff take pride in their work and in their school. In lessons, pupils are attentive and work hard, in line with the high expectations set by staff. Clear behaviour systems mean that disruption to learning is not tolerated and rarely happens. Well-established routines for learning across the school mean that pupils benefit from a consistent approach in their lessons. Leaders offer a wide range of qualifications for pupils to choose from at GCSE and in the sixth form. However, pupils do not currently study the full range of national curriculum subjects in sufficient depth in Year 9.

The school's 'Veritas values' and its house system encourage pupils and sixth-form students to take on additional responsibility within the school and community, for example by helping to coordinate the careers week, helping younger pupils with reading and by raising money for charities. Pupils also have the opportunity to attend a wide range of lunchtime and after-school activities, including choir, 'maths challenge' and a wide variety of sports clubs.

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

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is delivered consistently well across subjects and year groups. Staff have strong subject knowledge and benefit from continuous and targeted training. This ensures that they can deliver subject content with confidence. This in turn leads to pupils having a secure grasp of the concepts, knowledge and skills that leaders intend them to gain. Teachers' expert subject knowledge is particularly noticeable in the sixth form. Pupils routinely revisit ideas they have learned previously, and teachers check that what has been taught has been retained by pupils. This consistency of approach supports pupils in their learning across the school.

Leaders have made sure that the order in which pupils learn knowledge is carefully thought through. In Year 9, not all subjects are taught in the breadth or depth that is required by the national curriculum. Leaders have plans in place to ensure that all pupils study a broad and balanced curriculum throughout Years 7 to 9.

In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is broad, with a range of courses including vocational qualifications on offer. The proportion of pupils who are entered for the English Baccalaureate qualification is higher than the national average. The sixth form has a similarly broad curriculum offer, with a carefully considered range of both A level and vocational qualifications.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who are supported well in the school. They access the same curriculum as their peers. Timely information-sharing means that staff are aware of pupils' individual needs and make necessary adjustments to support learning.

Leaders recognise that reading is a priority and have set up several initiatives to support and promote reading across the school, including for those who need the most help. Some of this support is in sessions that are run before school, but some pupils who need this extra support do not attend regularly enough.

There is a very well-planned programme in place to support pupils' wider personal development. This ensures that pupils learn about important issues, such as keeping safe, in an age-appropriate way. Careers education starts in Year 7 and is revisited each year, including in the sixth form.

Pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular clubs and a variety of trips and out of school activities, including theatre and gallery visits. Leaders check pupils' attendance at activities so that they can ensure that all pupils have access to these opportunities. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles through the house system, which also encourages pupils to take part in charitable fundraising. The sports leadership programme is well established and is held in high regard by pupils.

Pupils behave well around the school and in lessons. They are respectful and polite to staff, visitors and each other. Learning is not disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils told us that bullying is not widespread, and they know that they can report bullying to staff or through an online system. Pupils know that harmful and discriminatory language or behaviour will not be tolerated, and leaders keeps accurate records of all such incidents.

Leaders have established a very calm and purposeful learning and working environment. Staff are proud to work in this school and say that leaders are considerate of their well-being and workload. Governors know the school very well and listen to the views of pupils. They are clear about their statutory duties and provide support and challenge to school leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders ensure that staff are fully trained so that the whole school community is alert to keeping pupils safe. Leaders work closely with relevant agencies, including the local authority, to get advice and support.

Pupils have been taught how to stay safe, including staying safe online. Pupils told us that they are comfortable reporting any concerns to school staff, and that they trust staff to deal with any issues appropriately.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils in Year 9 study different subjects according to their GCSE options. This means that these pupils do not study all aspects of the curriculum in the same depth. Leaders should ensure that the Year 9 curriculum enables all pupils to access the scope and ambition of all national curriculum subjects. It is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing this about. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied.
- Leaders offer support to those pupils who need help to develop their reading skills. However, these sessions are not attended well enough. This means that some pupils do not improve their reading swiftly. Leaders should ensure that those pupils who need additional support with reading are accessing this on a regular basis.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2017.

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	101364
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	10212474
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1281
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Margaret Brady
Headteacher	Carolyn Laws
Website	www.st-james.barnet.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	7 and 8 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a Christian ethos of the Roman Catholic denomination. It is in the Diocese of Westminster. The last section 48 inspection was in January 2020. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight years of its previous section 48 inspection.
- The school places a few pupils in alternative provision at the local authority pupil referral unit.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, history, computing and art. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked to teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and staff, as well as a range of pupils. They considered the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding and supporting pupils' health and safety as well as their welfare and well-being. This included looking at case studies as well as reviewing the school's single central record of pre-employment checks.
- Inspectors also met with leaders responsible for SEND, careers education, behaviour and pupils' wider development.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and spoke to a representative of both the local authority and the Diocese of Westminster. Inspectors considered responses to the parents', staff's and pupils' surveys.

Inspection team

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