

Inspection of St Ursula's Convent School

Crooms Hill, Greenwich, London SE10 8HN

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 January 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 nine 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 graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. 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 graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Ursula's offers an ambitious curriculum that helps many pupils to achieve well by the end of key stage 4. However, recent turbulence in leadership has resulted in limited oversight of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). While most of these pupils follow the same curriculum as their peers, they do not consistently receive sufficient support to access learning and achieve well.

Recent changes at the school, including the appointment of new leaders, have increased the number of staff that pupils can talk to if they are worried about something. Pupils know who these staff are and understand how to report a concern. Staff make sure that there is support in place to keep pupils safe. Bullying does not happen often. However, pupils have been affected by a challenging period at the school and feel unsettled. Some pupils do not trust that adults will help them effectively, if they need it.

Behaviour around the school is generally orderly. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors. At times, it is not as calm, including at less structured times of the day. The school has introduced a new behaviour policy, which sets out high expectations, though this is recent and not embedded in practice. In lessons, most pupils are attentive and show positive attitudes, although learning is occasionally interrupted by low-level disruption.

The school provides a programme of extra activities and visits. These include sports clubs, choir, and visits to places of local interest. However, in some aspects of the curriculum, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to discuss their ideas and to explore different perspectives fully.

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

The curriculum is ambitious and at least matches the aims of what is expected nationally. The school has thought carefully about the knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which this should be sequenced. This helps pupils to secure their understanding of important ideas before tackling more complex work. For example, in modern foreign languages, pupils explore different aspects of vocabulary and grammar, which increase in complexity as they move through the school. This builds their confidence in manipulating language, enabling them to develop greater fluency and expression in writing and speaking.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They value the professional development opportunities that are provided to improve their practice. In most cases, pupils are provided with activities that enable them to deepen their knowledge and apply what they have learned. Teachers identify and address misconceptions, adjusting their planning and explanations to clarify pupils' understanding.

The school identifies pupils with SEND, but recent changes in staffing have resulted in information about pupils' needs being shared inconsistently with teachers. Staff work with a range of external agencies and are provided with advice about how best to support these pupils. However, this information is not used consistently to cater for individual pupil's needs. For example, sometimes, staff do not adapt activities and resources appropriately for pupils with SEND. In these cases, pupils do not complete work that enables them to practise what they have learned. This limits their understanding in different areas of the curriculum. Pupils who struggle with reading are given additional help to gain confidence and fluency.

Most pupils behave well around the school. They are positive in their attitudes to learning and show courtesy to visitors. Occasionally, behaviour is unsettled and falls below the school's expectations. This results in less respectful attitudes in the school community. The school monitors attendance and takes action to promote improvement where concerns are identified, though it identifies that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND, attend well.

The school has designed the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum to support aspects of pupils' wider development. It provides pupils with information about future learning and careers. Pupils learn about different faiths and perspectives. They learn about staying healthy and keeping safe, including online. Pupils enjoy 'drop-down days', such as the recent celebratory event for St Angela's Day. This programme is not delivered consistently, however, and pupils' experience of coverage of the intended content varies. On occasion, pupils do not have enough opportunities to discuss their ideas, or to explore the views of others in sufficient depth.

The school provides opportunities for pupils to take up leadership roles and responsibilities, including as prefects. Pupils value this, but they do not see that there is sufficient action taken by the school in response to their discussions and recommendations.

Those responsible for governance understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and fulfil their statutory duties. They are ambitious for pupils, have received appropriate training and hold leaders to account. However, this work is at the early stages and has therefore had limited impact on the school's improvement. Many parents and carers share the view that further, sustainable improvements are needed at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not ensure that teachers have sufficient information to adapt the delivery of the curriculum for the individual needs of pupils with SEND. Sometimes, these pupils do not get the support they need to learn effectively and secure the knowledge and understanding they should. The school should make sure that teachers have the information, knowledge and training they need to support pupils with SEND effectively.
- The school has recently introduced a new policy which that out high expectations for pupils' behaviour. However, this is not embedded. The school should ensure that all staff receive the training and support they need to implement these expectations both in lessons and during less structured times of the school day.
- The programme of personal development and wider enrichment is not coherently planned and implemented. This means that pupils do not have a consistent experience of this aspect of their educational experience. The school should ensure that the implementation of the programme covers all intended curriculum content fully, as well as providing sufficient opportunities for all pupils to discuss and debate ideas in a considered way.

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	100193
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	10314673
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	631
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Anthony Moffatt
Interim headteacher	Ursula Norbert
Website	www.stursulas.com
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character. The school had its last section 48 inspection by the Diocese of Southwark in February 2023.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors met with governors, a representative from the Diocese and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, science and geography. They met with subject leaders to discuss the curriculum, visited lessons, and spoke with teachers and pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The curriculum in other subjects was also considered as part of the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the 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.
- Inspectors gathered the views of pupils, parents and carers, and staff through both discussion and responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Russell Bennett, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Alan Blount	Ofsted Inspector
Lauren Thorpe	Ofsted Inspector
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