

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Columba's Catholic Boys' School

Halcot Avenue, Bexleyheath, Kent DA6 7QB

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 November 2024

Outcome

St Columba's Catholic Boys' School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Dave Evans. This school is part of South East London Catholic Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), David Garrido, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Allison Thornton.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are keen to come to this happy, inclusive school. This is a caring community that welcomes and celebrates diversity. The school sets high expectations for learning, behaviour and attendance. Pupils respond well to these. They come to school regularly and on time. Pupils behave with courtesy and respect. They take pride in all they do.

All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn an ambitious curriculum. They try hard and typically achieve well, producing good-quality work in different subjects. The school is adept at identifying and meeting pupils' needs. Its specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND (specially resourced provision) includes separate bases for pupils with speech, communication and language difficulties and those with complex needs. As a result, pupils are well supported and thoroughly prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

Pupils embrace the idea of what it means to be a 'St Columba's boy'. They aspire to the example set by many former pupils who have achieved doctorates, attended universities, set up highly successful businesses and become international sports stars. Alumni return to speak at assemblies and careers events and contribute to the school by participating in the governing body.

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

The school has given care and thought to the design of its curriculum. It has set out what pupils should learn in a clear and coherent way. The school is further broadening the curriculum offer to increase the proportion of pupils who study the English Baccalaureate. Staff have secure specialist knowledge and know their subjects well. They explain new ideas with clarity and precision.

Careful consideration has been given to how the curriculum is implemented. For example, there are opportunities provided for staff to check pupils' knowledge and understanding and to correct any errors or misconceptions. Although this typically is used well, there are times when this is less consistent. This means pupils sometimes miss out on key elements of knowledge and cannot link their understanding to what they have learned before or what comes next.

The school is ambitious for all pupils to succeed. Staff are well supported to make adaptations to tasks and activities so pupils with SEND can access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. The school makes the most of opportunities to include pupils with SEND and those based in the specially resourced provision in all learning and wider opportunities. For example, some have taken on roles as student leaders. Across the school, these pupils flourish and are treated with respect by all members of the school community.

Pupils value their time at St Columba's. Their positive attitudes to education are seen in their high attendance, eager and excellent behaviour in and out of lessons and strong, trusting relationships with staff. Pupils sum this up as 'St Columba's does not tolerate misbehaviour because we would not get a good education'.

There is strong provision for pupils' broader development. There is a vast array of clubs, extracurricular activities and school journeys. These include field trips, museum visits and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Activities to promote empathy, sessions on mental health and leadership opportunities help pupils develop as responsible, resilient individuals. They learn about healthy, safe and respectful relationships and the importance of democracy and citizenship. They know the adults in the school listen to them, and this boosts their confidence. They are articulate and rightly proud to take on additional responsibilities such as prefects or library monitors.

Pupils are well prepared for success in the next stage of their lives, including in education or employment. This includes visits to different universities and places of work. All pupils access independent individual careers advice. Year 11 pupils reported enthusiastically on their recent careers conference. The one-to-one interactions with a wide range of employers raised their awareness of the variety of options available to them.

Leaders have improved standards in all areas of school life. Governors fulfil their statutory duties well. Staff enjoy working here and are proud of the school. They report that leaders are sensitive to their workload and well-being. Teachers appreciate the opportunities they have for professional development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Assessment is not used consistently well to check and address pupils' errors and misconceptions. This means some pupils can miss out on key elements of knowledge and cannot link their learning to the bigger picture. The school should ensure that assessment is used consistently to best support pupils to build their learning across the curriculum securely.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2014.

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	138650
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10345947
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	822
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Allison Thornton
CEO of the trust	David Garrido
Headteacher	Dave Evans
Website	http://st-columbas.bexley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Columba's Catholic Boys' School is a Roman Catholic school and is part of the South East London Catholic Academy Trust. The previous section 48 inspection was in September 2022. The next one is due in 2027.
- The school has specially resourced provision for pupils with speech, language and communication needs and for pupils with complex needs. The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- 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

- 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and curriculum leaders.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, trustees and the CEO of the South East London Catholic Academy Trust.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including nationally published outcomes data, minutes of governing body meetings and data related to attendance, pupils' movement, behaviour and destinations.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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.

Inspection team

Anne Hudson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ed Simmons

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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