Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St John's Catholic Comprehensive

Rochester Road, Gravesend, Kent DA12 2JW

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 January 2025

Outcome

St John's Catholic Comprehensive has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish in this inclusive school because staff provide high-quality care. A harmonious sense of purpose and calm permeates the school. Pupils know exactly what staff expect of them. Staff are consistently clear with their high expectations. Important values such as 'excellence for all' and 'service to others' underpin the ambitious culture in place. Pupils are extremely courteous and respectful. They contribute positively to the school community to ensure everyone feels safe and welcome.

A broad and ambitious curriculum prepares pupils well for life. Pupils achieve well, with many securing the qualifications they need for further study and employment. Pupils and sixth-form students speak very highly of the wide range of qualifications the school offers them. Pupils learn well because teachers have expert knowledge of the courses that they teach. Many pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), successfully go into further education or enter aspirational apprenticeships.

The school prioritises pupils' wider development. Extensive support and a responsively designed education help pupils manage their mental health. Pupils are respectful of differences. Celebrations such as 'cultural day' enable pupils to demonstrate pride in their own identity, whilst educating them about other cultures.

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

Planning for pupils' education starts before they join the school. The school transition team works closely with primary schools to plan to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Pupils with education, health and care plans receive effective learning support from staff who know them well. A large proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. These pupils achieve very well. Pupils who would benefit from enhanced

learning support receive this in the key stage 3 transition classes. Here, pupils learn a curriculum designed to prepare them for success alongside their mainstream peers. Thorough assessments identify pupils at the earlier stages of reading. These pupils receive additional support to read with increasing confidence and fluency. The school has introduced additional approaches to promote a love of reading. It evaluates the impact of these on pupils' reading confidence and comprehension.

The school makes decisions about the curriculum in the very best interests of pupils. For example, decisions about early entry for GCSE examinations are carefully considered. The curriculum is meticulously designed to ensure that pupils learn at sufficient depth. An increasing number of pupils are successfully studying the full suite of English Baccalaureate qualifications.

An extensive vocational offer at key stages 4 and 5 matches the interests and aspirations of pupils. In these subjects, teachers regularly check for gaps in pupils' knowledge and address them quickly. They design learning in a way that enables pupils to make connections between linked ideas. This means that pupils learn well and produce high quality work in these subjects. However, in a minority of other subjects and lessons, teaching is less precise. Gaps in pupils' learning are not always identified and addressed. At times, learning is not purposefully structured to help pupils connect and apply prior knowledge in new or more complex ways. This limits how well some pupils achieve.

There has been a demonstrable improvement in pupils' attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic. The school engages well with parents and professionals to remove barriers to positive attendance. This work has significantly increased the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' behaviour around the school is highly respectful and orderly. Staff provide thoughtful support to pupils who struggle to meet the high expectations in place. This includes the effective use of alternative provision to help pupils engage positively with education.

The school ensures that pupils are very well prepared for life. The careers programme provides up-to-date and impartial education and guidance. Pupils learn how to be safe in the community and develop an age-appropriate understanding of consent. Pupils strive to live out the school's values by raising money for charity and taking part in community work. Sixth-form students demonstrate responsibility, helping younger pupils to improve their understanding and address gaps in learning. A wealth of extra-curricular opportunities further enhances the rich curriculum offer. Pupils recognise that there is something for everyone to take part in. The school pays particular attention to making sure that opportunities are accessible to disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders at all levels, including governors, understand the priorities of the school. Governors provide supportive challenge to ensure the school takes effective action in the very best interests of pupils. Staff retention is high because staff feel well supported. They are committed to enabling pupils to thrive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some instances, teachers do not check pupils' understanding before moving on to new learning. When this is the case, misconceptions and gaps in pupils' knowledge are potentially not addressed, limiting how well pupils learn. The school should ensure that all teachers consistently identify and address gaps in pupils' understanding to enable all pupils to achieve as well as they can.
- In a small number of subjects, there is variability in how effectively teachers design learning to help pupils make connections between linked ideas and concepts. As a result, in some subjects, pupils do not apply what they know in increasingly complex ways, which means that they do not achieve as highly as they could. The school should support teachers to design learning that enables pupils to achieve the ambitious aims of the curriculum in all subjects.

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 November 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	118933
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10296283
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	1,324
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mark Hannon
Headteacher	Matthew Barron
Website	www.stjohnscs.com
Dates of previous inspection	15 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The last section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character was carried out in January 2020. The next inspection should take place within eight years of that date.
- The school uses one registered and one unregistered provider of off-site alternative provision for a small number of pupils. The school also has three internal alternative provisions called the 'St Francis provision'; 'Return to Learn'; and key stage 3 transition classes.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information 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. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, associate headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector also had a meeting with a representative from the local authority and a separate meeting with a representative from the Archdiocese of Southwark.
- Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector spoke to leaders on day two to further evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' actions to maintain the standard of the quality of education. They also visited pupils in the 'St Francis provision' and 'Return to Learn' provision.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff survey and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed and scrutinised a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' plans for improving the school, minutes of governing body meetings and records of attendance and behaviour incidents.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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

Michelle Payne, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nicky Archer	Ofsted Inspector
Owen McColgan	Ofsted Inspector

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