

Inspection of Saint Michael's Catholic High School

High Elms Lane, Garston, Watford, Hertfordshire WD25 0SS

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 February 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Edward Conway. This school is part of the Diocese of Westminster 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), Patrick Murden, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Patrick Leeson.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since November 2014. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to be members of this inclusive community. They are supportive of each other, and they enjoy coming to school. They take advantage of a range of clubs, visits and opportunities that are available. These activities develop pupils' confidence and character, so they grow to become well-rounded members of the community.

Pupils study a broad and ambitious curriculum. Typically, they are challenged in their thinking, and they learn well. However, this is not evident in all areas of the curriculum. As a result, some pupils are left without a secure understanding of new learning.

Pupils' behaviour is highly positive. They manage their own conduct with maturity. Pupils treat each other, adults and visitors with courtesy and kindness. They make valuable contributions to school life. For instance, many pupils volunteer to support their younger peers in lessons. They build and value excellent friendships. Pupils learn about and understand the importance of respecting differences without prejudice.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know how to seek help if they require it. Pupils learn about topics such as the responsible use of social media and healthy relationships. Effective careers advice and guidance help pupils to make informed choices about their next steps. They gain an insight into the challenges of adulthood, such as managing money and renting accommodation.

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

The curriculum identifies the important knowledge that each year group needs to know. This knowledge builds up gradually as pupils progress through the school. The curriculum is clear about what teachers should teach and the order in which they should teach it. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to explain new concepts in a clear and engaging way and anticipate where pupils may make mistakes.

Many teachers use questioning routinely to identify what pupils do not know. They use this knowledge to adapt learning so that pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), can access the curriculum and produce high-quality work. However, this is not consistent across the school. Some staff do not check effectively how well pupils have understood new content. In these cases, some pupils' misconceptions go unaddressed, which impacts negatively on their understanding and progress through the curriculum.

The school identifies and meets the needs of pupils with SEND through regular monitoring and sharing of strategies. The school regularly checks how well pupils can read. Those pupils who require support with reading get this in a timely manner to enable them to access the planned ambitious curriculum.

Students in the sixth form follow a mixture of vocational and academic qualifications. The strong pastoral care and positive ethos support transition and aid their learning. Students are well prepared for their next steps. Students learn how to study independently, carry

out research and receive effective advice on careers, higher education and apprenticeships. They successfully complete their studies and achieve well. They are, therefore, very well equipped to make informed, ambitious choices about the next stages in their education or employment. Sixth form students are active in supporting younger pupils with their learning across the curriculum.

Leaders have taken decisive decisions that focus on making improvements for pupils. For example, the school day and the curriculum offer have been revised. More time is available for learning. There is also greater clarity about what should be taught and when. Staff now have consistent and clear expectations about what makes teaching effective through the extensive training that has been provided. If staff need additional support, they receive this.

The school works closely with individual pupils and their families to ensure that pupils come to school regularly. Consequently, the school's attendance rates are high.

The school's well-structured and comprehensive personal development programme ensures that pupils are well prepared for life in a changing modern Britain. They learn about democracy and how to be a good citizen. The school provides many opportunities for pupils of all ages to encounter employers and learn about the world of work. Additional inputs from local media companies ensure that pupils know about the industry surrounding their community. Pupils learn about their own and the wider community. They know the importance of caring for others. The caring ethos of the school is exemplified by pupils raising extensive funds for their local community and international charities.

The school has undergone many positive changes from improvements to the fabric of the building to the curriculum and how it is taught. These have been led and managed well and have gained the confidence of parents, staff and pupils. Leaders are clear about the strengths and areas for further development of the school. Staff feel supported with their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasions, teachers do not check pupils' understanding of content effectively before moving on to new learning. This means that some pupils have misconceptions that go unnoticed, and this impacts on their having a secure understanding of some important subject knowledge, so they do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that all teachers are skilled in identifying and swiftly addressing any insecure knowledge so that pupils achieve as well as they can.

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	137922
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345331
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,126
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	214
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Patrick Leeson
CEO of the trust	Patrick Murden
Headteacher	Edward Conway
Website	www.stmichaelscatholichighschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	25 and 26 November 2014, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character and is affiliated to the Diocese of Westminster. Its most recent inspection of its denominational education and collective worship, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in November 2024. The next one is due in 2029.
- The school is a member of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provision for pupils.
- 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. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages, and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited a range of lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the trust, members of the local governing body, a school improvement advisor from the trust and a representative of the local authority.
- An inspector met with early career teachers and staff involved in their induction and mentoring.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around school. They met with groups of pupils to discuss behaviour in the school.
- 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.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. He also considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Ahson Mohammed, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jason Howard	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Matthews	Ofsted Inspector
Likhon Muhammad	Ofsted Inspector
Donna Young	Ofsted Inspector

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