



# DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on  
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 138650

St Columba's School

Halcot Avenue

Bexleyheath

DA6 7QB

Inspection date: 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Chair of Governors: Mrs Jeanette Johnson

Headteacher: David Evans

Inspectors: Damian Fox  
James Jukes

## EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR  
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Interim Director of Education: Angela Cox OBE



## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

## FULL REPORT

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Columba's school is a boys' Catholic academy. It is part of the SELCAT multi-academy trust. The school takes students from 11 to 16 years. The number of students currently on roll is 829. The school is situated in the Bexley Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and serves parishes across South East London into North West Kent.

The parishes with the highest number of pupils are Our Lady of the Angels, Erith, St Mary of the Crays, Crayford, and St Peter's, Woolwich. The proportion of students who are baptised Catholics is approximately 37%.

The attainment of most pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of students eligible for free school Meals (FSM) is just over 20%, which is in line with the national average. Around 10% of the students receive extra support in class. The percentage of students with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) is 5% which is above the national average. The percentage of students who have English as an additional language is 24% which is in line with the national average. The majority of students, 78%, are from a non-white ethnic background.

Date Published: 21 November 2022



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Columba's is an Outstanding Catholic school because:

- The Catholic life of the school is outstanding. A sense of belonging to a family is a common thread woven through every aspect of daily life. It is a Catholic community in which every member of the school is valued and treated with dignity and respect in a culture of mutual trust.
- Governors and school leaders are committed to realising the mission of the school, especially in terms of helping students develop academically, emotionally and spiritually.
- Religious education (RE) is regarded as central to the life of the school and is warmly regarded by pupils. Outcomes in RE are outstanding. Students of all abilities are challenged and supported as appropriate.
- Prayer and worship are central to daily life in the community. Students have many opportunities to pray through assemblies and daily form time. Student leadership of collective worship is a significant strength of the school. Students across the school are empowered to participate fully in prayer privately and as a community.

## WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

- Further develop the quality of teaching to maintain the upward trend in outcomes, especially for the higher ability students.
- Continue to develop the retreat programme to provide more opportunities for students to reflect on their faith and vocation.



## Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

### Catholic Life

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

### Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

1

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

2

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

1

### Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

1

Date Published: 21st November 2023



## CATHOLIC LIFE

1

### **The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is Outstanding**

Students derive huge benefit from and make a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They are excellent ambassadors for Catholic education. In discussions and lessons, students were overwhelmingly positive about being part of a spiritual and caring community. They have an obvious pride in the school and in their own achievements.

In every interview, the word family was signposted as one of the defining characteristics of the school. Students know they are part of a community where kindness and respect are shown to all. An understanding of their responsibilities to the Catholic mission of the school is manifest in the calm and joyous spirit that permeates throughout the school.

Students have many opportunities to serve each other and those in need beyond the school gates. They have a well-developed understanding of Catholic Social Teaching and respond with compassion to those less fortunate. They have raised significant sums of money for good causes, including CAFOD, the Red Cross and the St Vincent de Paul Society. A major strength is that students can articulate an understanding that fundraising is rooted in scripture and Church teaching.

The development of the students' sense of vocation is evident through leadership in many areas. As a result of the trust teachers place in them, the head-boy and senior students, in partnership with prayer mentors and faith ambassadors, play a significant role in strengthening the Catholic life of the school.

Students greatly appreciate the school's genuine concern for them. The high level of inclusion ensures that no one is left out. Strong pastoral care for the whole student body is a significant strength of the school. This is reflected in the highly effective work of the St Ambrose Suite. Students, who may not always find it easy to follow the normal pattern of the day because of their unique needs, are given strong support and guidance. It is further evidenced in the way students develop emotionally.

Through a dedicated school app and email, students know the staff well-being team will respond quickly and confidentially to them. Consequently, relationships across the school are strong and are based on mutual care and respect.



## **The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is Outstanding**

The school mission statement is a clear and inspiring expression of the educational mission of the Church. Its effect is evident in the manner in which all students, regardless of faith and background, recognise they are unique, cared for and part of God's creation.

The learning environment reflects the school's Catholic character. It is visible to the school community and to visitors in the many religious icons and images displayed throughout the school. The school is blessed in having a school chapel. Students confirm it central to the school, physically and spiritually. It is often used for a class or small groups to pray and reflect.

The mission of the school is encapsulated in the life of the community. It is a warm, supportive and prayerful school. It is an excellent example of faith in action. From the moment students enter the school, they are welcomed into a family of service. Students appreciate the support they are given on their journey to adulthood. They confirm they are well prepared for life after St Columba's.

A genuine sense of community is evident in the significant part staff play in providing outstanding pastoral care for students. The weekly staff well-being breakfast is an example of how teachers are valued and cared for. They are models of respect and care for students. Students speak warmly of the readiness with which teachers listen and respect them as individuals.

The impact of chaplaincy is evident in the devotional character of the school. The way students respond positively to opportunities to pray and serve each other reflects a high degree of emotional intelligence and spiritual maturity.

Personal social, health and education (PSHE) and relationships, sex and health education (RSE) programmes are thoughtfully designed with Church teaching in mind. They are appropriate to each year group.

## **How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is Outstanding**

There is a highly effective partnership between governors and school leaders. They understand that developing and sustaining an authentic Catholic ethos is a core leadership responsibility. Catholicity is a priority in the school development plan (SDP).

Governors are experienced, fully committed and loyal to the school. They provide a powerful blend of challenge and support for school leaders. Governors are highly effective in monitoring and evaluating the quality of Catholic life. Documentation and discussions show they ensure they are fully informed of achievements with regular visits and through the resources and curriculum committees.



Leaders and governors have shown insight and wisdom in the manner in which they have ensured a seamless transition to the new school leadership whilst coming out of lockdown. There has been no regression in the quality of provision and its impact on the efficacy faith and practice. As a result, students have continued to have a real understanding of their vocation to serve and pray.

Leaders and governors are aware of their wider role to provide Catholic education. Through membership of the Corpus Christi partnership, they have strengthened links with parishes and Catholic primary schools. There is an extensive outreach programme to promote the strengths of the school as a spiritual oasis in which all students grow in faith and demonstrate a willingness to serve.

The new headteacher has kept true to the school's mission of service. It is understood and shared by the whole community. He is supported by teachers who demonstrate their own deep understanding of service in the way they conduct themselves and ensure that all students are included and cared for.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They appreciate the education and care they receive from teachers.

Date Published: 2nd November 2022



## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

### **How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is Outstanding**

Outcomes for students last year, including those with special educational needs and vulnerable groups, were outstanding. This continued the upward trend in outcomes over recent years. Detailed school evidence indicates that almost all students continue to make at least their expected progress, whilst many make outstanding progress.

Students approach lessons with enthusiasm. Behaviour in lessons is excellent. There was a consistently high level of engagement throughout the inspection, both in answering questions and working independently. Students settled quickly to work. As a result, they created a positive environment with a quiet buzz of learning.

Students acknowledged that lessons are inclusive of different faith backgrounds. They learn about other religions and are at ease discussing their own beliefs and practices.

RE Ambassadors, one from each class, spoke very highly about being trusted to contribute ideas for making learning more interesting. They spoke respectfully and wisely about how teachers respond with a variety of ways to ensure all students learn. A wide range of suggestions, such as whole class discussion and opportunities to demonstrate learning through art, show that they take learning seriously and want to do the best they can.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is Good**

RE is a high performing department. Outcomes indicate that teachers are adept at motivating students. They work very hard to ensure lessons meet the needs of all students. Teachers have the capacity to deliver more outstanding teaching. The school agrees that strategies for continually improving outcomes are not always consistently applied.

High level questioning was a feature of several lessons. This encouraged students to think for themselves and to challenge each other. The impact of this was exemplified in GCSE lessons. Clear guidance from teachers encouraged students to engage with each other and develop their understanding. High levels of religious literacy were demonstrated in students' responses.

Monitoring, assessment and analysis of students' progress is rigorous and consistent. This informs further planning linked to current assessment and knowledge of the individuals and leads to targeted support through booster classes and extra challenge.



## **How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is Outstanding**

Leaders and governors are fully committed to improving standards in RE. They have a clear understanding of the importance of RE in nurturing the faith of young people. They ensure RE is a particular strength of the school, reflecting its position as the core of the curriculum in a Catholic school.

Governors and the headteacher form a strong partnership and together demonstrate total commitment to providing high quality teaching and resources to ensure students continually make progress in their knowledge and understanding of the faith.

Governors are proud of the school's vision and determination to ensure outstanding outcomes in RE. They rightly have confidence in the headteacher and RE staff to deliver high quality teaching so that students of all abilities make outstanding progress.

The headteacher line manages RE. He is strongly supported by his leadership team. He is genuinely committed to the further growth and development of RE. This is evidenced by ensuring specialist RE teachers and a suite of RE classrooms. School evidence shows that monitoring of teaching is rigorous.

The school curriculum for RE is a faithful expression of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). It is carefully planned to ensure subject content is introduced systematically in an increasingly demanding way.

Date Published: 21st November 2022



## COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

### **How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is Outstanding**

Collective worship is central to the life of the school. Acts of worship engage all students' interest and inspire them in deep thought and heartfelt response. This was evident in two year groups collective worships in which students' enthusiastic and reverential responses reflected an established culture of individual and collective prayer.

The creative and artistic skills of students have been identified, nurtured and practised to enable them to use their gifts confidently to enhance collective worship. Students are provided with an excerpt from a source of wisdom and authority, a reflection and a call to faith in action.

This was evident in the way student leaders prepared and played a significant part in assemblies. One student developed the theme of the assembly in explaining the message of Fratelli Tutti. In explaining how it applies to school life, he displayed a profound degree of spiritual intelligence.

Students confirmed that prayer is a normal part of the daily routine of school life. They expect it and they appreciate the opportunities to participate. Students articulate a good understanding of why they pray. They acknowledge it is not merely an extra but is an integral part of what they do every day.

Each day starts with prayer in form rooms. It is well planned ensuring students have moments of prayer and reflection. Students are clearly at ease when praying and act with integrity, irrespective of their faith background and affirmed that there is no embarrassment in offering intentions for prayer, for example, if a relative is ill.

### **The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is Outstanding**

Collective worship features prominently in the daily life of the school with a range of extensive and varied religious experiences for staff and students. It is strongly supported both by staff and students. It is led effectively by a senior teacher in collaboration with student faith ambassadors.

Senior leaders work closely together to develop the quality of collective worship and ensure effective chaplaincy provision. The provision of materials provided by the chaplaincy team to enable form tutors to lead collective worship effectively is outstanding. Resources are well planned and enable teachers and students to pray and reflect.



The themes and the style of liturgical celebrations are inclusive with preparation focused on where students are on their faith journey. The fact that students on different stages of that journey feel respected was confirmed compellingly by both students and parents.

**How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is Outstanding**

Leaders and governors are committed to the spiritual life of the whole community. They are fully dedicated to enhancing the quality and provision of prayer opportunities. They ensure activities and events are meticulously planned to meet the needs of all students.

Leaders and governors have a thorough understanding of the efficacy of prayer. Consequently, students experience a wide range of liturgical opportunities reflecting the commitment of leaders and governors to the distinctive nature of this Catholic school.

Governors know the school well. They ensure liturgies are in line with the Church's calendar. They have witnessed the positive impact of prayer on the community in the way students lead and participate in acts of worship.

The headteacher's vision for embedding spirituality in the lives of staff and students is understood and shared by the whole community. Working with the senior team, he has continued to keep the spiritual formation of the person at the forefront of the prayer life of the school. He is supported by teachers who demonstrate their own commitment to ensuring students benefit from the range of opportunities to pray.

Date Published: 21st November 2022