



DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP INSPECTION REPORT

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

URN 138650

**St Columba's Catholic Boys' School
Halcot Avenue
Bexleyheath
DA6 7QB**

Inspection date: 21 & 22 September 2015

Chair of Governors: Mrs Sharon Biggs
Head Teacher: Mr Nigel Fisher
Inspectors: Mr Tom Cahill
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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION

Description of the school

St Columba's is an 11-16 comprehensive school for boys with academy status. It is situated in the Bexley Deanery and within Bexley Local Authority but is funded by the Education Funding Agency. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Anselm's, Dartford; St Stephen's, Welling; St Thomas More, Bostall Park; St Fidelis, Erith and St Joseph's, Crayford.

The number of pupils on roll at the time of the inspection was 577 and the proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 51%. The vast majority of the other pupils are from other Christian faiths.

The attainment of students on entry to the school is broadly average even though the school is located in an authority which offers selective provision. The proportion of students on free school meals is below the national average but close to the average for Bexley schools. The number of students with additional needs is also close to average whereas the number of ethnic minority students and those with English as an additional language is above the national average.

10% of curriculum time is allocated to the teaching of Religious Education in all year groups which is in line with the recommendation of the Bishops' Conference.

Date of previous inspection:

30/11/2010

Overall Grade:

2

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding

Grade 2 Good

Grade 3

Grade 4

Requires improvement

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

**GRADE
2**

St Columba's is a good Catholic school with many outstanding features. Since the last inspection, it has made rapid and significant improvement and has the capacity and drive to become an outstanding Catholic school. The school provides an exceptionally caring environment where the boys feel safe and secure and they are encouraged to excel in all that they do. It is a highly inclusive school where everyone is made to feel welcome.

Within the school, there is a culture of high expectation and one of celebration. Behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils show high levels of respect for one another as well as to their teachers. Every opportunity is taken to celebrate success whether in the classroom, in examinations, on the sports field or in art and music.

The Head Teacher provides exceptional leadership to the students and staff and is highly respected. He has a clear vision for the school which is shared and supported by parents, staff and governors. He is ably supported by a strong and experienced senior leader team together with the Governing Body which provides the right blend of challenge and support.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They very much appreciate the strong Catholic ethos of the school and the high quality care given to their sons. As one parent wrote, "St Columba's is an excellent school not just for education but for life skills. It has helped my sons to become a very grounded and well balanced young men and I cannot praise the school highly enough." Another parent wrote, "We very much value the commitment and sincerity of all the staff to the children's education and welfare."

Parents who met the inspection team spoke warmly of how the school manages to embrace all the pupils whatever their background, ability or needs and how the gospel values are lived out each school day. They appreciated the opportunities of being invited to special Masses and awards assemblies and spoke openly of the pride that their sons had as pupils of St Columba's. Parents and stakeholders are kept very well informed through weekly newsletters and the termly newsletter 'Reflection'.

The leadership of the school has successfully addressed the areas highlighted for improvement in the previous inspection.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Head Teacher and staff should:

- Continue to raise the quality of teaching within the Religious Education department so that pupils experience more outstanding teaching.
- Teachers should differentiate work more effectively so that the more able pupils are stretched and the less able better supported to achieve their potential.

- Ensure pupils have more access to information technology in Religious Education lessons to encourage them to take more responsibility for their learning.
- To provide further opportunities for pupils to participate in the planning of Collective Worship and the prayer life of the school.
- Review the provision of retreats to ensure more pupils have the opportunity to participate each year.

Outcomes for pupils

**Grade
2**

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

The boys at St Columba's clearly benefit from the strong Catholic ethos that pervades the school and the high expectations that all staff have of the boys. The very caring ethos is very much appreciated by the pupils and their parents and the boys develop a clear sense of right and wrong as well as a strong sense of fairness and compassion for others.

The behaviour of the pupils is excellent and they feel safe and secure.

There are a number of opportunities for pupils to experience retreats including the annual Year 7 retreat to Aylesford. Most retreats are voluntary and pupils' spirituality would be further enhanced if more retreats for all pupils in all year groups were available perhaps using facilities found in local parishes. The pupils have also participated in a trip to Rome.

They have many opportunities to be involved in fund raising for a range of charities at local, national and international levels. The school has raised considerable sums of money for CAFOD, the Manna Centre and Cancer Research. More recently the pupils have supported 'Lend with Care', encouraging those in developing countries to open their own businesses in order to become more self-sufficient.

The pupils and staff are fortunate to have a highly effective full-time chaplain who has a high profile around the school. He provides practical support to the pupils and their families as well as supporting staff at the school. He also ensures assemblies and Collective Worship are well resourced and are of high quality.

The pupils are also able to benefit from the Chapel which is adjacent to the Religious Education department. Mass takes place in the Chapel before school once a fortnight and a whole school Mass takes place each term.

As a highly inclusive school, St Columba's has embraced pupils with serious learning difficulties as well as pupils on the autistic spectrum. The St Ambrose Suite provides a stimulating and supportive environment where such pupils are enabled to manage in a mainstream school.

The pupils also benefit significantly from the presence of Christian Resources in Bexley Schools (CRiBs) which is a charitable trust based in the school. It provides outreach work to both primary and secondary schools in Bexley. The school has very generously offered the group a base at the school and the group in turn are regularly involved in assemblies and other school celebrations.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

The pupils spoken to during the inspection made it clear to inspectors that they enjoyed their Religious Education classes and this was reflected in their positive attitudes in class and towards their teachers and in their work. Overall they make good progress although their outcomes in Religious Education are generally lower than English and Maths at the end of Key Stage 4. However, the tracking of students and the assessment data held by the school show that pupil outcomes continue to rise as improved teaching and more effective learning impacts on the progress pupils make in their lessons.

The pupils are also benefitting from more stable staffing within the Religious Education department as well as from the new leadership of the department.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

The pupils respond in a highly respectful and positive manner during times of Collective Worship. In a Year 7 assembly seen during the inspection, the pupils entered the hall respectfully and were fully engaged by the pupils and teachers who led the assembly. The pupils sang loudly and joyously a hymn at the end of the assembly. The assembly was further enriched by the high quality art work produced by the pupils which was displayed around the school hall.

The pupils also told inspectors that they very much enjoyed the termly whole school Masses which take place in the sport hall. They particularly enjoyed the drama and music led by pupils at the Masses.

How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

The Head Teacher provides strong and effective leadership to staff and pupils. He has a high profile around the school and he is respected by pupils and staff. He has a clear vision of what makes an effective Catholic school and this is articulated to everyone who is part of the school community.

The Head Teacher is well supported by senior leaders and an effective Governing Body. The Governors know their school very well and are kept fully informed by a very detailed report from the Head Teacher presented at every meeting of the full governing body. The governors make regular visits to the school and are always present at the termly Masses and other whole school celebrations.

The school has clear targets within the school improvement plan relating to the development of the Catholic life of the school which are agreed with governors who monitor progress towards these targets through discussions at their full meetings as well as through the Head Teacher's termly report.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

Senior Leaders have an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development in relation to the provision of Religious Education. They have taken decisive action to address staffing issues that was preventing the department from moving forward and they give very good support to the subject leader. They monitor regularly through visits and through link meetings with the subject leader, the progress the pupils are making.

Where pupils are not making good progress, staff work together in a collegiate way to put in place interventions to address the issue.

The subject leader for Religious Education provides very good leadership for his team. Although he has been in post for only a relatively short period of time, he has raised the expectations of the teachers and he has played a significant role in raising the quality of teaching. He is well supported by senior leaders as well as the Diocesan Secondary Schools' Adviser.

The department has very good facilities with high quality classroom displays. Access to ICT (Information and Communications Technology) is not as good as some other

departments and the department would benefit from mobile ICT facilities for use within the Religious Education classrooms. Pupils could then benefit from a wide range of on-line resources and it would encourage the pupils to take more responsibility for their learning as well as promoting independent learning.

Provision

**Grade
2**

The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

The teaching of Religious Education is good overall and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The department which is under new leadership has strived hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning experienced by the pupils in Religious Education. Lessons are well planned and enthusiastically delivered. The boys told inspectors how much they enjoyed the opportunities to discuss topics and the opportunity to speak about their beliefs and views in a safe and supportive environment.

Teachers ensure that lessons are appropriately paced and work is differentiated although this is not consistent across the department. Further differentiation of tasks would both stretch the more able as well as support the less able to reach their full potential. Teachers should also regularly check the understanding of the pupils during lessons and be prepared to deviate from the lesson plan where necessary to ensure all students make progress.

Work was regularly marked and feedback was given to pupils in how to improve their work further. Some excellent examples of feedback were seen during the inspection and such practice should be encouraged across the department.

As mentioned, lessons are well planned and structured but in some cases too teacher led. This prevents students from taking more responsibility for their own learning and leads to missed opportunities for pupils to think more deeply about the topics being studied. Pupils would benefit from more structured tasks as well as model answers to help organise their responses. Pupils would also benefit from having information technology more easily available within the classroom setting to support them as independent learners.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The curriculum offered by the department follows the guidelines of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. At Key Stage 3, the pupils follow a course based on 'The Way, The Truth and The Life'. Pupils in Key Stage 4 follow the Edexcel GCSE Course and study St Mark's Gospel and Roman Catholic Christianity options. The school should keep

these options under review to ensure the course of study meets the needs of all the pupils taking into account the religious beliefs of those students who are not Catholic.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Collective Worship at St Columba's is outstanding. The Chaplain and teachers plan Collective Worship carefully ensuring students are actively involved and engaged through reading, singing and prayer. Prayer is part of every school day. Prayers are always said at the beginning of staff briefings, tutor time and Religious Education lessons. Pupils are encouraged to lead prayers as well as participating in silent personal reflection. Music and singing strongly enhance acts of worship during assemblies, Masses and other liturgies.