

St Columba's Catholic Boys' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101477
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	355007
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	David Radomsky

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	865
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Kieran
Headteacher	Nigel Fisher
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Forty lessons were observed, taught by 39 teachers. Meetings were held with parents, groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised policies, monitoring information, data about past and present performance and the school improvement plan. The team analysed the 82 parents' and carers' questionnaires, 39 completed by staff and 113 by students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How effectively are students with special educational needs and/or disabilities identified and supported and what is their current rate of progress?
- Are leaders at all levels effectively addressing the year-on-year variations in pupils' performance by ensuring greater consistency in the quality of teaching and assessment?
- Does the school support the more-able pupils well enough so that they make fast progress?

Information about the school

St Columba's Catholic Boys' School is smaller than average. Since September 2006, the school has had performing and visual arts specialist status and has more recently achieved Artsmark Gold. A well-below-average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals and a smaller-than-usual proportion of boys have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but the number with statements of special educational needs is above average. The headteacher took up post in April 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. All stakeholders strive to fulfil its inclusive vision to meet the personal and academic potential of each individual, based firmly on the school's Roman Catholic ethos. Most students do well academically and socially and all develop an impressive sense of communal responsibility. As one parent put it, 'My son's strengths have been spotted and are being used, encouraged and developed. His different faith background is encouraged and he never feels excluded or left out.' Students show confidence and behave well. Good systems for care, guidance and support ensure that students feel very safe in school, attend exceptionally regularly and are enabled to make well-informed choices about their futures. They make an outstanding contribution to their school and to local and international communities. Provision to promote community cohesion is excellent, as is the pupils' spiritual, moral cultural and social development.

The good curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of most students successfully. Through partnership work with businesses, professionals and other agencies, as well as the varied in-school activities, students have opportunities to develop a range of skills that help them prepare well for their futures. The recent developments in the curriculum, especially in science and in a range of targeted learning support groups, combined with the performing and visual arts specialism, are significant contributory factors in improving outcomes.

Through early identification of needs and effective support systems, the school ensures that most students make good progress during their time at the school, including those who have specific learning difficulties. Since the previous inspection, attainment in the majority of subjects has risen and is now above average. An important element in promoting this improvement is the students' desire to learn and their diligent application in lessons.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now good. In the best lessons, teachers engage students well by framing a variety of creative learning and assessment activities that assist effectively in their acquisition of knowledge, understanding and new skills. However, on occasions when learning is only satisfactory, it is as a result of planning that does not challenge all levels of ability well enough. Some marking is unhelpful in guiding students on how to improve and there are occasions when students are passive rather than active learners. Some middle leaders have not fully developed the skills to focus sharply enough on measuring the impact of teaching on students' learning. The headteacher, ably assisted by his deputies, has been the driving force in striving for improvement. The school knows itself well and is reflective and effectively self critical. Much has been achieved, including improvements in attainment and personal development and in ensuring that attendance is high. The good use of data to identify and provide tailored support, together with a detailed analysis of all groups in the

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school in terms of both provision and outcomes, ensures that all have equality of opportunity to succeed. This track record, combined with strong support from the governing body, demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further so that by July 2011 students in most subjects reach above-average grades by:
 - spreading the good practice in teaching so that activities to support students' learning, at all levels, are planned well enough
 - regularly setting homework in all subjects that extends learning and ensuring that marking details what students need to do to improve
 - providing support and training to less experienced subject leaders so they can maintain the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility and improve it further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average. Learning is good in the large majority of lessons. Students enjoy their lessons a great deal. The level of commitment to their work is high; they show ambition and interest, applying themselves fully to the range of activities on offer. They take great pride in their work and have positive and mutually respectful relationships with their teachers. This is supported by their good behaviour and attendance, which is consistently high. As a result, boys make good progress during their time at the school and attainment at the end of Year 11 is above average. Boys with special educational needs and/or disabilities or learning difficulties, those who are looked after, those for whom English is an additional language and the very few non-White British students achieve at least as well as their peers.

Students of all ages have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The school council have a strong voice and influence in the school. For example, they have been instrumental in organising participation in the 'Saving Young Londoners' scheme whereby all boys learn first aid. Boys make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities by, for example, performing in drama productions and raising considerable sums of money for a range of charities which they choose themselves.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and contribute well to cultivating a culture of positive engagement in learning. In the best lessons seen, teachers set a good pace and encourage students actively to lead their own learning and work collaboratively with their peers. In some lessons, self assessment and peer assessment, supported by effective feedback from teachers, is used well. Where this was the case, students could talk confidently about their learning and understood what they needed to do to improve their work. Thus, for example, in an outstanding Year 11 art lesson, students knew and communicated confidently about proportion, tone and texture in the the context of self portraiture. However, there are still occasions when teachers talk for too long, are over directive and the students remain passive. In some subjects, homework is not set regularly to extend learning, and feedback to students, through marking, lacks clarity.

The curriculum has expanded recently and offers a good range of opportunities for learning and experiences which contribute well to students' personal development and well-being. The expansion of vocational courses, combined with the recently introduced 'learning to learn' programme in Year 7, and the targeted intervention groups for numeracy and literacy, have all played a major role in improving outcomes for the boys. More-able students are well supported, by, for example, the opportunity at Key Stage 4 to study the AS critical thinking course. The specialist performing and visual arts status supports a wide range of enrichment activities and educational visits, in this country and

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abroad, as well as visitors. This helps students to put their learning into context and makes a strong contribution to their personal development.

The introduction of year learning coordinators, with their enhanced role in monitoring and supporting academic progress in addition to their pastoral roles, ensures that students are known well as individuals. The special needs centre effectively supports those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff work hard to integrate these students as quickly and effectively as possible into mainstream classrooms. There are strong links with primary schools and the arrangements for transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 are well developed. Well-considered advice is offered to students when choosing their Key Stage 4 and post-16 options.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Along with the governing body, leaders communicate a shared vision that is ambitious for all. As one middle leader put it, 'Everything has a solution, not a problem.' Decisive and effective action following the dip in GCSE results in 2009 secured the school's best ever results in the summer of 2010.

Leaders monitor the work of the school well and the senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning, as do the majority of middle leaders. Some subject leaders, however, do not have a sharp enough understanding of how to measure accurately the impact of teaching on students' learning. As a result, they do not develop their teams' teaching expertise sufficiently well to ensure that all students are consistently making good progress.

Equality of opportunity is at the heart of the school's values, beliefs and actions, and hence boys achieve good outcomes. The school works hard to engage parents and carers, including hard-to-reach groups. For instance, at parents' and carers' evenings, the school provides laptops for them to complete surveys and evaluate communications with the school. The school has very strong partnerships with a wide range of local schools, churches, colleges, businesses, universities and the community. The school's commitment to community cohesion is exemplary. As a result, students have a strong understanding of the diversity of religious, ethnic and cultural groups locally, and internationally.

The governing body are well informed of the school's work and highly supportive. They have successfully turned a deficit budget three years ago into a surplus, for example, and are increasingly confident to challenge the school when needed. Clear policies and

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procedures for safeguarding are implemented carefully so that young people are kept safe at all times.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

A small proportion of parents and carers responded to the inspection survey. A very large majority of those who did respond were extremely positive in their support for the school. A very small minority felt that insufficient homework was set or that it did not extend learning sufficiently. A few felt that the lunchtime arrangements result in some boys not having enough time to get their food and eat it. The school is aware of this concern and has plans to address this issue.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Columba's Catholic Boys' School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 82 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 865 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	55	36	44	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	42	51	36	44	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	29	35	42	51	8	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	37	40	49	2	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	29	35	49	60	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	45	38	46	4	5	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	33	45	55	7	9	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	25	30	44	54	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	39	45	55	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	45	36	44	5	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	28	48	59	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	43	42	51	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	55	33	40	3	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Columba's Boys' School, Bexley DA6 7B

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited St Columba's Boys' School. We greatly enjoyed talking to many of you and wish we had had more time to meet all of you. Yours is a good school and these are some of the reasons why.

- Your headteacher, staff and governing body are passionate in wanting to help you achieve your potential in all that you do.
- The curriculum and extended opportunities that the school provides for you ensure that you have a good range of choices that give you many enjoyable learning opportunities.
- You willingly take on a broad range of responsibilities in the school and in the community. Your charitable work is extensive and you have a real sense of what it means to be upright and responsible citizens.
- The majority of teachers prepare good quality lessons, and work with you to make your learning exciting. You confirmed that those teachers who give you helpful feedback enable you to make good progress.
- You agreed that you are very well cared for and supported.
- You are confident and polite, and you appreciate and celebrate difference so that everyone feels part of the St Columba's 'family.'

We have asked the school to ensure that in all of your lessons you have more time for active learning so that in even more lessons you can make good progress. You can contribute to this by engaging positively in all activities and group work that your teachers set you. We have also asked all teachers to set you regular homework to extend your learning and to tell you in greater detail about how to improve your work. You can contribute to this by doing your best to study well at home, and by acting on your teachers' advice to continually improve. Your school is also going to provide additional support and training to subject leaders so they can maintain the good quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility and improve it further.

We wish you every success and happiness in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Radomsky
Lead inspector

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