

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

Phoenix Drive, Leadenhall, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK6 5EN

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 May 2025

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very happy and welcoming here. They live and breathe the school's inclusive ethos and are extremely kind and respectful to others. They proudly live up to the school's motto of 'Love, serve, do the best that is possible.' This is reflected in pupils' positive behaviour in lessons and social times. Sixth-form students are excellent role models in this regard.

Staff are committed to helping pupils flourish and have high expectations for all. Pupils study a very broad curriculum in all years. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well and are successful in public examinations. The school is sharply focused on helping pupils become even more effective learners.

The school community is very strong. Staff take time to get to know pupils and families and nurture strong bonds of respect and trust between them. This is appreciated by pupils and parents alike. Pupils contribute generously to the school and local community. Many volunteer to support other pupils, academically or through the chaplaincy. They also support and fundraise for charities. This helps pupils develop their confidence and character. They are extremely positive and articulate young people ready for the future.

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

The school offers a very broad curriculum. Staff have reviewed the curriculum in all years to ensure that pupils' experience of learning is even richer and more aspirational. It has carefully reviewed the sequencing in each subject and has raised expectations for all year groups. Consequently, staff have a clear understanding of the important knowledge pupils should learn and how it builds from Year 7 to Year 13.

Overall, staff deliver the curriculum effectively. Most staff present new ideas clearly. They select tasks that help pupils embed new knowledge. Where this is strongest, pupils rise to challenges enthusiastically. They talk confidently and accurately about their learning. For example, sixth-form students, including students with SEND, discuss their set texts in English with insight. However, there are some inconsistencies. Sometimes, staff do not check pupils' understanding throughout lessons. This means that teaching approaches are not always precisely adapted to the needs or potential of all learners. Consequently, sometimes pupils do not consolidate or develop their learning deeply enough for them, for example, through applying their learning to increasingly complex tasks.

The school's reading strategy has a high priority. Teachers help pupils to access demanding texts in lessons. Pupils read regularly for pleasure and have access to a popular and well-stocked library. Where pupils are not yet fluent readers, staff identify their reading gaps precisely and provide targeted support. These pupils catch up quickly with their peers.

Where necessary, the school identifies any additional needs pupils may have accurately. Staff receive clear information about how to help these pupils. Almost all pupils follow the same curriculum. Occasionally, pupils follow bespoke programmes which are thoughtfully and precisely designed. For example, pupils in the school's specially resourced unit, the Emmanuel Centre, follow an ambitious, specialist curriculum. It supports pupils' academic and social and emotional development highly effectively.

The school's integrated pastoral and safeguarding hub, alongside the school's chaplaincy provision, is highly effective in supporting pupils who find school challenging. Because staff know pupils extremely well, they can target support with significantly positive impact. For example, this is starting to reduce the number of suspensions.

The personal development and careers offer prepares pupils for the future exceptionally well. Pupils build the knowledge and values they need to become fulfilled and positive citizens and adults. Where necessary, the school provides bespoke support so that all pupils have access to the full offer. Careers provision is comprehensive. Pupils benefit from presentations and experiences provided by a variety of former pupils and partners from education, training and employment. Personal, social, health and economic themes are presented age-appropriately from Years 7 to 13. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and nurture healthy relationships, including online. They enjoy exploring different points of view. Consequently, they naturally demonstrate service and empathy to others. The school's varied extra-curricular and pupil leadership activities enable pupils to discover or develop interests, talents and character. For example, many pupils take on responsibilities through the schools' chaplaincy and the school council spoke about how they had gained confidence in public speaking.

Staff and governors are extremely proud of the school, but they are not complacent. They share a drive for continuous improvement. Staff feel valued and listened to. They

appreciate very highly the professional development and support they receive, including in relation to their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not delivered consistently well. Sometimes, activities or teachers' questions are not sharply focused on helping each pupil embed the relevant knowledge and understanding. This means that some pupils do not achieve as highly as they could. The school should continue to support teachers' implementation of the curriculum so that they make effective adjustments which meet the needs and potential of all pupils.

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 March 2016.

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	110517
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10362391
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1880
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	411
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paul Herbert
Headteacher	Jo-Anne Hoarty
Website	www.st-pauls.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Northampton. The last section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character was carried out in June 2019. The next inspection should take place within eight years of that date.
- The school uses one registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.
- 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

- 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 her evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority and separately with a representative from the Diocese of Northampton.
- Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also visited pupils in the Emmanuel Centre and the Emmaus 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 for attendance and behaviour.
- 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

Mary Davies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Cartwright	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Boddington	Ofsted Inspector

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