

Inspection of a good school: St Simon Stock Catholic School

Oakwood Park, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0JP

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 October 2021

Outcome

St Simon Stock Catholic School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Simon Stock is a caring school where every pupil is expected to do their best. Pupils live up to teachers' high expectations. Pupils behave extremely well. They enjoy coming to school and know that staff are on hand to help them if they have difficulties in their learning or in their lives.

Pupils get on well with each other. They socialise sensibly at lunchtimes and breaktimes. Pupils play football, basketball or go to the 'hub', where there is a provision for pupils who want a quieter environment.

Staff encourage pupils to have high aspirations. Pupils achieve well in all key stages. Many pupils join the school's popular sixth form, where they continue to increase their independence and confidence. Large proportions of Year 13 pupils go on to further study after leaving.

Pupils' safety and welfare are at the forefront of leaders' thinking and decision-making. Pupils feel safe in school and know that there is extra support available for them if they need it. Leaders have set up 'pillar boxes' around school for pupils to post forms detailing any problems they might need some help with, or to request access to the school's counselling service.

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

Leaders have organised what pupils will learn and when they will learn it effectively. Over the past three years, leaders have thoughtfully redesigned the knowledge and skills that pupils learn. Subject leaders have sharpened their understanding about the best way to organise and plan topics in their subjects.

Teachers are knowledgeable and adept in how to teach pupils difficult concepts. Pupils respond well to teachers' precise questioning. This helps pupils to remember what they have learned. For example, in geography teachers help Year 13 students to deepen their

understanding of concepts by recalling what they learned in Year 11. Teachers present information clearly. For example, in English, teachers explain increasingly complicated language devices to pupils so that they can enrich their writing.

Pupils study a broad range of subjects. However, the proportion of pupils studying languages in key stage 4 has remained relatively low over the past three years, particularly compared to the high proportions of pupils who study geography and history at GCSE. Leaders have begun to put measures in place to increase the proportion of pupils opting for languages. They aim to ensure that more pupils study all the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects.

Pupils behave maturely and sensibly. They concentrate very well in lessons and are attentive to what teachers tell them. Those pupils who need support with their behaviour are helped by specialist staff in the school's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) base, the 'hub'.

Teachers adapt their teaching for pupils with SEND. These pupils study the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils, particularly in the sixth form, say that if extra help is needed it is always available. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND study appropriate courses and qualifications that enable them to move on to the next stage of their education.

Leaders prioritise reading in their decision-making. Teachers encourage pupils to read different types of books. In English, teachers use thoughtfully chosen literary texts that enrich pupils' understanding of issues such as racism and inequality. Staff provide precisely targeted help for pupils who are behind in their reading. Pupils with SEND who are at the early stages of reading are supported effectively by well-trained staff.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of all that the school does. Leaders have developed a highly ambitious personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. Pupils learn about PSHE issues, such as appropriate behaviour when in a relationship, in tutor time and during separate PSHE lessons. All subjects contribute to developing pupils' understanding of social, moral, spiritual and cultural issues. This prepares pupils for life in modern Britain very well.

Careers education is varied and engaging. Pupils receive a wide range of information about the options available to them when they leave school. External speakers enrich careers education. For example, students in the sixth form heard about careers in law from a visiting solicitor.

Leaders make sure that staff's workload is manageable. Staff told inspectors that they enjoy working at the school and that leaders make staff well-being a priority.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained in how to keep pupils safe. Staff who join during the year are given induction packs that tell them about the school's safeguarding procedures and expectations. Staff are vigilant in identifying pupils who might be at risk of harm. Staff work well with other agencies, including the local police and the local authority.

Pupils learn about how to keep safe online. Leaders have included several safety related topics in PSHE lessons. These, along with frequent assemblies that address pupil safety issues, mean that pupils have a developed understanding of how to reduce the risks they may face.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over the past three years, the proportion of pupils studying the full range of EBacc subjects has remained at about a third of pupils in key stage 4. The proportion of pupils who study languages has remained relatively low. Leaders should increase the proportion of pupils studying all EBacc subjects so that more pupils study a highly ambitious curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school St Simon Stock Catholic School to be good in January 2010.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	140537
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10200343
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	1139
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	207
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Francis Powis
Principal	Jon Malone
Website	www.ssscs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 November 2016, under section 8 of the education act 2005

Information about this school

- The executive principal and principal were appointed in their posts in September 2018.
- The school joined the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership multi-academy trust in January 2014.
- The school uses the Maidstone and Malling Alternative Provision.
- The school is a member of the Archdiocese of Southwark and has a Roman Catholic character.
- A Section 48 inspection was carried out in January 2015.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive principal, vice-principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the academy committee, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- On the first day of the inspection, inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, languages and geography. This meant that in each subject, inspectors met with subject leaders, talked to pupils, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff from meetings with groups of staff and from the 77 staff who responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors considered the views of 50 parents who responded to the confidential Ofsted parents' questionnaire.

Inspection team

Harry Ingham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Francois Walker

Ofsted Inspector

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