



# St Columba's College

URN: 117638

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

29–30 January 2025

## Summary of key findings

### Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

#### Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

#### Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

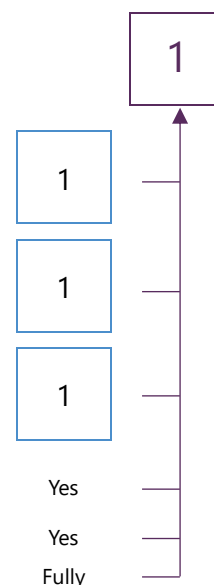
#### Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



## Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of the diocesan Bishop.
- All areas for improvement outlined in the previous diocesan inspection have been addressed in full.

## What the school does well

- The college's charism is central to its mission and is reinforced through comprehensive formation programmes for both pupils and staff.
- St Columba's College fosters a strong sense of community characterised by a culture of welcome that reflects its affiliation with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart.
- There is a bespoke programme of pastoral care which ensures that every pupil is known and valued.
- Pupils exemplify and bear witness to the three Cs of 'courage, courtesy and compassion', cultivating an environment where relationships are exceptionally strong.
- Pupils achieve a high level of understanding and proficiency in religious education leading to outstanding outcomes.

## What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that tasks and activities in prep school lessons are consistently matched to the learning objectives and pupil needs.
- Further promote and develop different styles of Catholic prayer to enhance spiritual engagement.
- Enhance the prayer life of senior students by offering more regular opportunities for them to come together to pray.

## Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

### Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

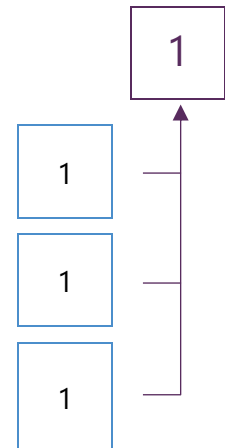
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



The charism of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart is deeply engrained in the pupils of St Columba's College. The Columban virtues of the three Cs - courtesy, compassion and courage, are celebrated and lived out by pupils, who clearly understand and embrace their distinctive Columban Catholic identity. They hold it in high regard and can share its unique story as part of the community founded by Andre Coindre. Their active participation in the American Province of schools enriches the Catholic life and mission of St Columba's. This understanding of global community issues is reflected in their strong desire to serve. There is an expectation that pupils will seek opportunities to pursue the common good. Pupils embrace their responsibilities by undertaking charism formation opportunities and upholding the 3Cs. In doing so, they express happiness, confidence and a sense of security. As a consequence, pupils respond readily to the demands of Catholic social teaching. They collect food for St Bart's Church food bank, support local homeless charities and Cafod. Pupils take a lead in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable in society and have been recognised by the wider community for their work in this area. They demonstrate a profound respect for individuals of other faiths, religions and beliefs. Their behaviour is exemplary in lessons and throughout the school.

The Brothers of the Sacred Heart are constant witnesses to their charism. As a result, pupils are provided with an inspiring expression of what it means to serve simply. Staff enthusiastically participate in, and contribute to, activities that reflect the life and mission of the school and the service it offers to the community. The charism formation programme offered to new staff is valued highly. Everyone is welcomed with generous hospitality, especially those who are most vulnerable. The financial, emotional and spiritual support offered to vulnerable families has provided some pupils with life changing opportunities. Staff know the families very well, they go above and beyond to support and understand their needs. Through their relationships with one another, and the care they demonstrate for each other, they consistently bear witness to the school's Columban identity. The

school chapel is a sacred space that reflects its identity, mission, and charism. The chaplaincy provision reflects the college's commitment to the flourishing of every member of the community. The relationships, sex, and health education provision is thoughtfully planned to ensure it fully meets diocesan requirements, is firmly rooted in Church teachings, and celebrates a holistic vision of the human person.

Leaders and governors clearly articulate their Columban values. They acknowledge the gentle charism of the brothers. Leaders' collaborative work with the brothers, in pursuing an 'education of the head and heart', serves as an inspiration for the entire community. Consequently, all policies and procedures reflect the priority given to the Catholic identity and charism of the school. Leaders and governors actively promote the Archbishop's vision for the diocese. They work diligently to ensure a flourishing partnership between the school and parishes. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of leaders' work. One parent commented, 'the school's commitment to its Catholic values is evident in every aspect, and it greatly enhances my child's and family's experience.' In every decision, leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to their charism. A governor commented that 'to see and feel Christ at work, the visitor must wash their feet in the culture of St Columba's'. Governors possess high ambitions for the Catholic life and mission of the school, consistently emphasising it as a priority for school improvement. They are actively involved in evaluating their work and have established clear systems to leave an enduring legacy. Leaders value pupils' insights and contributions, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their school community.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

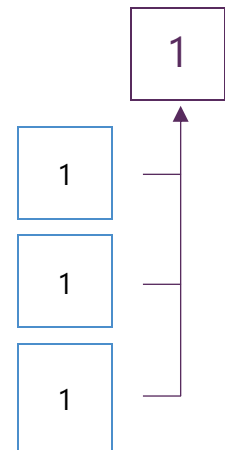
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

#### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Pupils' outcomes in religious education when they leave St Columba's are outstanding. As pupils progress through the school, they develop excellent knowledge and understanding, along with a skill set that exemplifies the learning highlighted in the *Religious Education Directory*. Pupils' progress is more evident in the senior school. This is because work is more consistently adapted to meet the needs of learners. Pupils studying A level religious studies are highly articulate and engaged in challenging lessons. In Year 12, pupils learning about Natural Law were considering ideal ways to be human. Pupils in a Year 6 lesson recalled prior learning when considering the characteristics of Sister Clare Crockett and Saint Oscar Romero. In an Early Years lesson, planned activities were creative and engaging as pupils made bread together. The additional adults showed great skill in eliciting key vocabulary to consolidate learning during this task. Tasks are adapted for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), ensuring they achieve the best possible outcomes across all ages. Pupils approach lessons with enthusiasm, passion, and interest, which contributes to outstanding behaviour in class. They clearly understand their progress, articulate what they need to do to improve, and can discuss how they have advanced in their learning. Pupils achieve above-average attainment in comparison to other core curriculum subjects.

Teachers exhibit a high level of confidence rooted in authentic subject knowledge and teaching expertise suited to the phase of education they are delivering. They demonstrate a deep commitment to religious education, maintaining high expectations which are effectively communicated to the pupils. In a Year 9 lesson, the teacher asked open and challenging questions about the lives of Saints Peter and Paul. Students provided reflective answers as they considered how these saints' lives were role models for young people today. A teacher in a Year 4 lesson expertly linked learning to pupils' life experiences. As a result, pupils gained a thorough understanding of how their fundraising work has its foundations in scripture. Teachers at St Columba's possess a profound understanding of the

impact that religious education has on pupils' moral and spiritual development, facilitating meaningful connections with their experiences of the world. The celebration of effort is evident, fostering high levels of motivation among pupils. Most teachers provide relevant and specific feedback, ensuring that all pupils understand what they need to do to progress in their learning. Some tasks and activities in prep school books do not always reflect the high-level discussions and deep learning observed in classes.

Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum faithfully reflects the *Religious Education Directory*. They are proud of their person-centred approach to teaching religious education. Pupils in the senior school make exceptional progress as a result of the individual attention received, and this includes those with SEND. Leaders are proud of the A level uptake in relation to school size. Core religious education is planned using a highly effective and engaging curriculum. In the prep school, leaders have begun to use the new *Directory* in Early Years and Lower Prep. This has resulted in a more creative approach with improved outcomes. Leaders maintain parity in expectation across all subjects regarding homework, feedback, and reporting to parents and carers. Leaders and governors provide regular, high-quality professional development in religious education for all educators, focusing on both subject knowledge and pedagogical growth. Leaders of religious education hold an inspiring vision for outstanding teaching and learning, coupled with a high level of expertise in realising this vision. This expertise is effectively utilised to improve teaching and learning in religious education, resulting in consistently high standards, particularly in the senior school. The self-evaluation process conducted by leaders and governors' thorough monitoring, insightful analysis and constructive self-reflection, leads to strategic actions and well-targeted planning that drive outstanding outcomes.

## Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

### Collective worship key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

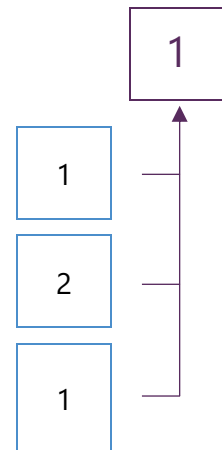
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

**Provision**

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

**Leadership**

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship



The experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school engage pupils profoundly. Pupils in the prep school explained that the brothers' work gave them courage to apply to become a 'Dove' to assist in this area. Although pupils, appropriate to their age and capacity, possess a good understanding of various ways of praying within the Catholic tradition, this could be further developed. Pupils use scripture as a foundation for prayer but do not always articulate this clearly. The quality of prayerful silence, attentiveness and engagement in communal singing, silence, meditation and reflection is strong in the prep school. In a Year 12 liturgy, pupils were confident to read and reflect on Genesis 1:26. They created a sacred space for prayer and were very comfortable with silent reflection showing maturity and reverence as they considered how they could be good stewards. Pupils in Year 6 participated in prayer and liturgy in a thoughtful and authentic way as they focused on hope in the world. They confidently articulate how prayer and liturgy are important in their lives. Pupils in the prep school appreciate their prayer jars and use these reverently. Pupils reflect on their experiences of prayer and liturgy with confidence and detail, clearly expressing how these experiences shape their understanding of themselves and the world, inspiring them to take action.

Prayer and liturgy are at the heart of school life, bringing the community together throughout the day. In both moments of joy and times of sorrow, the school community gathers in prayer to celebrate, reflect and support one another. A daily pattern of prayer follows the rhythm of the Church's prayer life. Seasonal scripture readings are carefully chosen to encourage full and meaningful participation. Staff, including senior leaders, serve as role models by actively engaging in and leading prayer and liturgy. They support pupils in planning and delivering well-structured prayer experiences. This is more embedded, and more opportunities are provided, in the prep school. Pupils and staff are encouraged to share their talents, whether through music, art, or other creative expression, to enhance prayer and liturgy, making these experiences even more meaningful for the school community. The college

recognises the importance of sacred spaces. The Chapel is made available for regular use and could be used even more effectively in the senior school. The Chapel is beautifully maintained to create an atmosphere of reverence and reflection. The prayer life of pupils in the senior school would benefit from more participation as a whole body, inviting them to reflect more thoroughly on scripture to further develop their spiritual journey.

Leaders, including governors, have carefully evaluated the prayer and liturgy at St Columba's. As a result, they have added a new end of term Mass to the school calendar, creating additional moments for pupils to come together in worship and celebrate the Eucharist. Leaders have also begun to plan the implementation of the new *prayer and liturgy directory*. They have taken a strategic and inclusive approach. They have ensured that all pupils regardless of faith feel welcome, while maintaining the richness of Catholic tradition and the central role of prayer in daily school life. Leaders encourage pupils to share their musical talents and offer retreats for pupils who wish to further explore their spirituality. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered at key times during the liturgical year. Recognising the importance of ongoing formation, leaders prioritise high-quality professional development for staff, focusing on liturgical preparation and the planning of prayer and worship. The recent acquisition of new lectionaries ensures that pupils engage with updated Biblical translations for liturgy. Leaders and governors remain committed to evaluating and enhancing the impact of prayer and liturgy, embedding these reflections within the school's self-assessment and continuous improvement efforts. Through their dedication, they nurture a faith-filled environment where every pupil can grow spiritually and feel part of a supportive and prayerful community.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Columba's College
School unique reference number (URN)	117638
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9196136
Full postal address of the school	St Columba's College, King Harry Lane, St Albans, AL3 4AW
School phone number	01727855185
Headteacher	Karl Guest
Chair of governors	Barbara Elliot
School Website	stcolumbascollege.org
Trusteeship	Brothers of the Sacred Heart
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	All through
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Selective
Age-range of pupils	4-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	October 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Evelyn Ward	Lead
Brian Finnegan	Team
Liz Keane	Team
Elaine Warnett	Team

## Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement