

Inspection of St Paul's Academy

Finchale Road, Abbey Wood, London SE2 9PX

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are safe at school. They are encouraged to stay safe in the local area and online. Pupils feel part of a caring school community. Typically, they enjoy respectful working relationships with staff and with each other. Pupils have opportunities to develop their leadership skills. They take part in fundraising events, such as sponsored walks for charity. Pupils run a food bank to help local families. They can train as mentors in support of their peers. Pupils take part in the annual musical production and have organised a cultural day.

Recent changes to the leadership team are already securing significant improvements to the work of the school. Leaders' expectations of pupils and staff are rising. They take account of pupils' views and suggestions, for example to make changes to the way that behaviour is managed. Leaders have planned changes to curriculum organisation to deliver necessary improvements to subject coverage from September 2023. Leaders are ambitious to ensure that the curriculum matches the ambitions of the national curriculum.

Around the school, pupils' conduct is typically calm and sensible. However, pockets of low-level disruption in lessons remain. Sometimes, staff do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently, which impacts on pupils' learning of the curriculum.

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

In Years 7 and 8, all pupils study a broad curriculum. However, the time allocated to subjects such as art, music and technology is limited. In Year 8, pupils decide which subjects to study at GCSE. The subjects that pupils study from Year 9 onwards are based on these GCSE decisions. Because pupils discontinue some subjects after Year 8, they are unable to develop their learning as successfully in all areas of the curriculum to the end of Year 9. New leaders have identified this issue. They have made important changes to the curriculum that will start from September 2023 so that pupils receive their full curriculum entitlement from Years 7 to 9.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. However, the quality of education that pupils receive is variable. In some subjects, the curriculum has been carefully planned and matches the ambition of the national curriculum. However, what pupils learn in some other subjects is not as carefully thought through. In these subjects, leaders do not ensure that teachers select the most appropriate tasks to help pupils learn the subject content. Sometimes, teachers' checks on pupils' understanding and recall of the curriculum do not identify pupils' misconceptions or gaps.

Leaders have improved the information they share with staff about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use this to make helpful adaptations to meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils with SEND gain confidence and thrive.

Staff have prioritised reading. They provide help for pupils who struggle with their reading. Staff ensure that pupils practise reading to their 'peer reading buddy'. Pupils enjoy sharing books with each other to read, such as during form times.

Leaders ensure that the school's work to encourage pupils' personal development is well planned. They make sure that the school is welcoming for all. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their talents and interests. For instance, they can join a choir, play in a percussion ensemble and participate in various sports clubs, which are well attended. Teachers encourage pupils to understand and respect differences. For example, during Ramadan and Lent, pupils shared their experiences.

Leaders and staff support pupils well with their post-GCSE examination choices through a comprehensive careers programme. Pupils receive impartial guidance on progression to local sixth forms and colleges. They have regular contact with employers. Staff help pupils to gain useful information about apprenticeships and vocational qualifications.

New leaders have an ambitious vision for the school. They have a realistic view of what needs to improve and have identified the most important priorities. They have wasted no time in securing changes to the quality of education and expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Their actions are already securing lasting improvements. Leaders support staff well and are mindful of their workload. They work closely with the governing body. Leaders have drawn upon the support of the diocese and the local authority effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know how to report concerns about pupils. They recognise the signs to look out for that may show a pupil is at risk. Staff receive regular training. For instance, they are well briefed on the signs of harmful sexual behaviour.

Leaders have ensured that there is a positive school culture of safeguarding. Staff support pupils in how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are taught about topics such as consent. Leaders ensure that responses to referrals from outside agencies are timely. There are clear procedures in place for the reporting of any safeguarding concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over time, leaders have decided that pupils choose their GCSE subjects in Year 8. This reduces pupils' ability to study some subjects in depth. The school must ensure that new curriculum plans are implemented effectively from September 2023 so that pupils benefit from a broad and deep curriculum in all subjects for as long as possible.

- In some subjects, curriculum thinking has not identified the key content, and order in which it should be taught, as clearly as it has in other subjects. This limits pupils' learning. The school should ensure that all subjects identify the content that pupils must know and the sequence of learning.
- In Years 7 to 11, the use teaching makes of formative assessment to check pupils' understanding is variable. This means that, at times, pupils' misconceptions are not identified and addressed with rigour and accuracy. Leaders should ensure that checks on pupils' learning and recall are used routinely and purposefully to ensure that pupils are fully ready to learn new content.
- Sometimes, the school's behaviour policy is not implemented consistently by all staff. As a result, low-level disruption in some lessons affects pupils' learning of the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that all staff have equally high expectations of pupils' behaviour, and that they apply the school's policy and tackle disruptive behaviour consistently.

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](#)' 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	105135
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	10268525
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Bernie Borland
Principal	Sheila Ward
Website	www.stpaulsacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 June 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, there have been changes to the school leadership team, including the appointment of a new principal from January 2023.
- The school makes use of alternative provision for a small number of pupils at four registered providers.
- St Paul's Academy is a Roman Catholic school sponsored by the Diocese of Southwark. Its last section 48 inspection took place on 21 and 22 March 2018. The next inspection will be within 8 years from the date of the previous inspection.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a wide range of leaders, including those responsible for the quality of education, behaviour, attendance, personal development and safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into art, English, geography, history, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke to subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, talked to pupils about their learning and considered a sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding, including through discussions with leaders, staff, pupils and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke to a representative from the local authority and from the diocese.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair.

Inspection team

Lisa Strong, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Anne Hudson	Ofsted Inspector
David Bromfield	Ofsted Inspector
Terry Millar	Ofsted Inspector
Jeffery Quaye	Ofsted Inspector

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