

Summarised inspection findings

St Columba's High School

Inverclyde Council

14 May 2024

Key contextual information

School Name: St Columba's High School
Council: Inverclyde Council
SEED number: 8645434
Roll (Sep 2022): 637

St Columba's High School is a denominational, comprehensive secondary school located in the town of Gourock, Inverclyde. The headteacher has been in post for seven years. She is supported by three depute headteachers.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

Exclusions are generally below the national average.

In September 2022, 35.3% of young people lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In February 2023, 24.2% of young people were registered for free school meals.

In September 2022, the school reported that 42.8% of young people had additional support needs.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- The headteacher, supported well by three senior leaders, has worked very well with staff, young people and the wider school community to develop a positive, nurturing and inclusive climate for learning. The ethos is characterised by very positive relationships that reflect both the gospel values and the school's values of faith, ambition, inclusion, and perseverance. This is supported further by the school community's commitment to a strong focus to promote young people's rights. As a result, in almost all lessons there is a calm and supportive learning environment where young people are eager to learn. Almost all young people are well behaved, courteous and are proud of their school.
- The 'St Columba's lesson' model is fully embedded across the school. The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, has worked with young people and staff to develop this very strong approach to planning consistently high-quality experiences for young people. All teachers use this model to support highly effective planning of learning, teaching and assessment. This includes a common structure for lessons, checking for understanding, and how different tasks and activities aim to meet the needs of all learners. This consistency helps young people to quickly and effectively engage with tasks and learning in different lessons and contexts. It has also helped to develop a common language of learning among staff and young people. Teachers' planning, both in the short term and longer term, is highly effective.
- Almost all teachers share effectively the purpose of learning and describe how young people can be successful. This is supporting young people to understand what they need to do and how to measure their progress in a lesson. A next step for teachers should be to involve young people more in contributing to success criteria so that they can measure their own progress in lessons. Teachers share a strong understanding of standards and expectations in planning this learning and progression for young people due to their robust moderation work. As a result, in almost all lessons, young people experience learning at an appropriate pace. In the majority of lessons, they also experience learning that is appropriately challenging.
- In a majority of lessons, teachers plan and make reference to skills young people are using in class. Teachers are now well placed to build on this work further and share examples of highly effective practice to ensure that young people are always clearly aware of the skills they are learning. This will help young people to further make connections between their learning and the development of skills.
- In most lessons, young people learn in a variety of ways, such as collaborative learning, peer work and direct teaching. As a result of these well-planned learning activities and tasks, most young people are highly motivated and engaged in their learning. Most young people report that they enjoy learning. In a minority of classes young people benefit from opportunities to

lead their own learning and that of their peers. Young people would welcome further opportunities to develop further their responsibility, independence, and confidence.

- Almost all teachers use digital platforms effectively to support revision in class and learning at home as part of this range of learning experiences for young people. Young people speak positively about lessons where digital technology is used to enhance learning and teaching. As a next step, teachers should expand these opportunities further across all aspects of young people's learning.
- All staff know young people and their individual needs very well. Almost all young people who require additional support with their learning are well supported to make appropriate progress in class. Young people benefit from a range of supports, such as differentiated planning and resources, careful questioning, and high-quality direct support. Pupil Support Assistants support effectively young people in class who have barriers to their learning. Older learners also support members of younger year groups with this. Most young people feel that they are encouraged by staff to do the best that they can.
- Almost all teachers plan learning very effectively to include a range of formative assessment strategies such as exit passes, digital surveys, "show me" boards and peer assessment. These approaches allow teachers to effectively adjust their lesson planning on a day-to-day basis and during learning to respond to the changing needs of young people. Almost all teachers make effective use of questioning to check for understanding, and to encourage deeper thinking from young people. Teachers use this range of approaches to check for understanding highly effectively to inform their day-to-day planning of learning and support for young people. Staff are well placed to share more widely highly effective practice where young people can apply their higher order thinking skills in different contexts.
- Almost all teachers provide highly effective feedback to young people. This helps young people to know where they are in their learning and how they can improve. This includes the use of very detailed and well-structured written feedback. Young people also benefit from regular and ongoing verbal feedback, including termly learning conversations. This range of feedback provides clear next steps to learners in both the Broad General Education (BGE) and senior phase. As a result, almost all young people speak confidently about their progress in learning. Teachers carefully plan approaches to feedback so that young people are supported strongly and consistently on their transition from BGE to the senior phase.
- Almost all teachers have a strong, shared understanding of assessment standards. They are confident in assessment judgements in both the BGE and senior phase. This has been achieved through professional learning and robust moderation. Teachers take part in these moderation activities regularly within the school, with cluster primaries, and within the local authority. Moderation has been used effectively to inform curriculum planning and progression from primary to secondary. Teachers should continue to embed the recent approaches to moderation within the BGE. Teachers in most departments benefit from the support of colleagues who have been appointed to work for the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). They use their experience well to support their colleagues' understanding of national assessment standards. This helps teachers support young people to progress confidently through their learning in the senior phase.
- All teachers effectively track and monitor the progress of young people. They use a blend of summative and formative approaches to assessment to make assessment judgements. These judgements are then used to influence their day-to-day planning of learning experiences and support for young people. Teachers also use and discuss data regularly and use departmental and school systems to track and monitor to reflect on their planning and practice. This includes

the use of a GIRFEC tracker and attainment dashboards to ensure that they know their learners well and can support them to progress in their learning. All teachers consider the progress of identified groups of young people, such as young people with potential barriers to their learning. This allows teachers to make well-judged interventions to their planning of learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers carefully consider what tasks and activities will support their learners to make better progress. This might include greater levels of challenge for some and consolidation of learning for others. Teachers are very well placed to continue to consider how their knowledge of their learners' progress helps inform their adaptations to and planning of their classroom practice.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

BGE

- In 2022/23, almost all young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level or better in literacy and third level or better in numeracy by the end of S3. These high standards have been maintained over time. The majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy and fourth level in numeracy by the end of S3. This has improved over time. Teachers have improved approaches to moderation to ensure a greater understanding of standards.
- Sustained and collaborative planning of progression through the BGE is supporting strong attainment in the BGE. Very strong curricular transition between St Columba's High School and its cluster primaries is allowing teachers to set appropriate expectations and standards from S1. Teachers regularly work with cluster primary colleagues to ensure improved outcomes for young people. This highly effective approach has included planning, moderation, professional learning, family learning and regular visits by teachers and learners to and from cluster primaries and St Columba's High School. Secondary school staff and young people work very well with cluster primary children from an early stage, before primary 7.

Leavers

Literacy

- Over the last five years, 2018/19 to 2022/23, most young people left school with Scottish Credit and Qualifications (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy. For a few years, this was almost all young people. Performance in literacy at this level is generally in line with the VC. Performance at SCQF level 6 is very strong, being significantly higher than the VC in the last three years. The school has maintained high levels of performance with the majority attaining at this level, with the exception of the latest year where most young people left school with SCQF level 6 in literacy. Most young people with an additional support need left school with SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2022/23. This has increased over the last five years. The majority of young people with an additional support need left school with SCQF level 6 or better in 2022/23.

Numeracy

- Over the last five years, 2018/19 to 2022/23, the majority of young people left school with SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. For a few years, most young people achieved this level. Performance has improved from being significantly lower to being in line over the last three years. At SCQF level 6, performance has fallen although remains in line with the VC. There is no consistent pattern of improvement for those young people who require additional support for learning.

Cohorts

Literacy

- As young people move through the senior phase, particularly by S5 and S6, they have been consistently sustaining very high standards in literacy over the last five years. By S6, most young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy and this has been significantly much higher than VC for each of the last five years.

Numeracy

- As young people move through the senior phase, there is not a consistent improvement in numeracy over the last five years. However, across this time attainment has broadly been in line with VC. Senior and middle leaders should continue to explore how to further improve young people's attainment in SCQF level 6 in numeracy, in particular.
- In 2022/23, the percentage of the S4 cohort presented for National 5 mathematics has fallen to be in line with the national average and their passes have improved to be in line with the national average.

Attainment over time

BGE

- By the end of S3, almost all young people are achieving third CfE level or better in almost all curriculum areas outwith literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. By the end of S3, the majority of young people are achieving fourth CfE level or better in most curriculum areas beyond literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Attainment in the BGE has improved over time. Teachers in these curriculum areas are already working with colleagues across St Columba's High School and in cluster primaries to ensure young people benefit from well-planned transitions into secondary school and through to the senior phase. They should continue to build upon this very well-planned and collaborative practice to further improve outcomes for young people.

Senior phase

Leavers

- Based on average complementary tariff scores, the performance of the lowest attaining 20%, middle 60% and highest 20% of leavers is broadly in line with the VC over the last five years, 2018/19 to 2022/23.

Cohorts

- The lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people are attaining very well and consistently over time at S4, by S5 and by S6. The complementary tariff scores for these young people is generally significantly higher than the VC. Senior leaders should also now continue to focus on improving the quality of passes for young people to help further improve outcomes for the highest attaining 20% of young people. Performance is in line for the highest 20% at S4, by S5 and by S6.

Breadth and depth

- Teachers present young people for a wide range of SCQF qualifications and there is a relentless focus on ensuring that young people achieve full course awards, where appropriate. Senior leaders should continue to explore ways in which their expanding range of qualifications can allow greater opportunities for targeted groups of young people to achieve at a higher level.
- Young people across the senior phase have generally sustained a level of attainment in line with or above the VC. At S4, a minority of young people have achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5C over four of the last five years. Although improvement has not been consistent, this has been sustained to be in line with VC. The proportion of young people attaining awards

at SCQF level 5A for one or more to five or more courses over the last five years has had some decline in the last two years.

- By S5, based on the S4 roll, the majority of young people have achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6C. This has been significantly higher than VC for four of the last five years. A minority of young people have achieved three or more or five or more awards at SCQF level 6C over the last four years, which has been broadly in line with VC. The proportion of young people attaining three or more or five or more awards at SCQF level 6A shows inconsistency in attainment across the last five years, although it remains broadly in line with VC.
- By S6, based on the S4 roll, the majority of young people have achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6C. This has been significantly higher or much higher than VC for each of the last five years. Performance in three or more or five or more courses at SCQF level 6C has been broadly in line VC or significantly higher over the last five years. Performance in one or more to five or more courses at SCQF level 6A has broadly improved, although there has been a decline in 2022/23. Throughout these five years, attainment has been in line with VC or significantly higher. Attainment at SCQF level 7 has been broadly in line with VC across these five years.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified that there is capacity for improvement in the quality of passes across young people's National Qualifications, particularly in S4. They are using their robust processes around monitoring, tracking and interventions to work with teachers, young people and their parents to further improve the quality of young people's attainment. Teachers have identified and successfully taken action on specific issues around cohorts of young people that led to a slight dip in attainment, including against VC, for some cohorts of young people in 2022/23.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Almost all young people benefit from one or more wider achievement activities run by school staff. The number of young people involved has risen over time and it is an important strength in the school's provision of high-quality experiences for young people. Staff run these activities for all year groups, which successfully supports the development of young people's confidence, aspiration and skills for life and work.
- Teachers track young people's involvement in wider achievement activities across the BGE and senior phase very well. This allows staff to support and encourage all young people to become involved in these clubs, groups and activities. Staff intervene to encourage young people to get involved. They have been able to work with individual young people to identify barriers to participation and have been successful in working to remove many of these barriers, such as providing individual transport home.
- A minority of young people develop their leadership skills through wider work in the school. Young people also gain further accreditation through this leadership work, for example with Saltire Awards, the Caritas Award and SQA leadership qualifications. Young people's involvement in these leadership opportunities continues to rise and those involved further develop their skills in organisation, leadership and independence. For example, the pupil leadership team recently organised a very successful careers conference, and groups such as the literacy leaders and sports leaders regularly organise and lead activities to support children from cluster primary schools. This transition work encourages more young people to get involved in wider achievement activities when they arrive in secondary school. The school has also had notable success in a range of partnerships that support young people's achievement and skills development. This has included Gold Rights Respecting Schools, Digital Schools Award, Silver SCQF Ambassador School and accreditation as a Mentors in Violence

Prevention (MVP) school. Staff are innovative in the wide range of courses offered within the curriculum that develop skills and knowledge for young people. This has resulted in an increasing group of young people benefiting from further SCQF accreditation.

- Teachers have developed an innovative approach to 'skills for the future'. As part of this, all learners in S3 choose a selection of bespoke skills-based courses which are focused on developing the skills required in the future workplace. Young people are confident in talking about general and specific skills they are developing across the wider curricular offer. As planned, senior leaders and teachers should further develop a coherent approach to tracking the skills that young people develop within their wider achievement involvement. This will allow young people to understand better how their skills can be applied and developed in different contexts.
- Staff recognise and celebrate the achievements of young people regularly and very effectively. This includes award ceremonies, achievement awards, subject 'success walls', department awards, sharing success at registration, parent/carer newsletters and a well-used social media channel. Most young people feel they can discuss their achievements from beyond the school with school staff. Parents and carers also regularly inform the school of their child's notable achievements. As a result, staff consider young people's participation in activities out with school and celebrate and share these successes, too. As a next step, staff should continue to build on approaches to more comprehensively track all young people's full range of achievements to help learners build a more detailed self-evaluation of their own skills and achievements. Young people appreciate the importance the school places on pupil achievements and the dedication of staff towards them. The recording and celebrating of young people's achievements is embedded very well in the culture of the school.

Equity for all learners

- School staff are fully committed to ensuring equity for all. This permeates the work of school staff at all levels. Attendance has generally been in line with the national average. The school tracks attendance by SIMD, showing a positive pattern of reducing the gap between SIMD deciles 1 and 2 and SIMD deciles 3 to 10 over the last five years. Targeted interventions have had a positive impact on improving the attendance of selected young people. Staff work proactively with young people to keep them engaged meaningfully with learning in school. The school's exclusion rate has been below the national average for the last three years where national comparisons are available. Approaches to eliminating the cost of the school day and knowledge among staff of learners' backgrounds are key drivers to ensure there are no barriers to young people's engagement across the school.
- Senior and middle leaders have established a strategic and successful focus to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing outcomes for those young people in SIMD deciles 1 and 2. This has been part of the use of the school's Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Teachers closely track the progress of identified groups of young people and ensure interventions are timely, targeted, measurable and sustainable. Senior leaders have successfully prioritised developing staff understanding of what the attainment gap means for their learners. As a result, staff know what the poverty related attainment gap is and there is a clearly understood expectation that all staff will focus on interventions to reduce this for young people. As a result of this focus, level 4 and level 5 attainment in literacy and numeracy for learners in SIMD 1 and 2 has been significantly greater than the VC for the last three years.
- In 2022/23, using complementary tariff scores, the school has performed significantly higher than VC for its largest cohort of learners - those who live in SIMD decile 1. Leavers who live in SIMD deciles 6 and 7 also performed significantly higher than VC, and leavers who live in the remaining SIMD deciles performed broadly in line with the VC. Generally, across the last five

years, leavers who live in each SIMD decile have either performed in line with VC or significantly higher than the VC.

- Almost all young people have moved onto a positive destination in 2022/23 and for each of the previous four years. Young people are supported well to these destinations and young people benefit from a culture of high expectations. A proportion of young people greater than the national average stay on at school until the end of S6 to benefit from the staff's support. The school's percentage of young people moving onto a positive destination has been broadly in line with the VC. The proportion of young people moving on to higher education has been rising over the last five years. In 2022/23, a majority of S6 as a percentage of the S4 roll left to attend higher education.
- As a result of the school's very strong and targeted focus on equity, all leavers in SIMD deciles 1 and 2, all those in receipt of free school meals, and all those with an additional support need moved onto a positive destination in 2022/23.

Other relevant evidence

- The leadership of learning and teaching across the school is very strong. Approaches to ensuring high-quality learning, teaching and assessment across the school are underpinned by a strong ambition for all young people to achieve their best. These approaches are also supported by a highly strategic and collegiate culture within the school, including a focus on creativity in learning and very thorough self-evaluation processes. This collaborative culture is valued by staff and is improving the learning experiences of young people.
- Young people access the library to select books for personal reading and for research projects. The librarian also works with groups of identified young people on literacy projects.
- School staff submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and school meals provider.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- Teachers in St Columba's High School successfully consider every element of a young person's journey through their education. Policies, planning and actions clearly encourage a parity of esteem between the Broad General Education and the senior phase. This is reflected very well in learning and teaching, monitoring and tracking, assessment and self-evaluation. Highly effective approaches to planning learning and teaching experiences are applied consistently in both the BGE and the senior phase.
- To support this, senior leaders have very successfully established a strong collaborative working culture involving St Columba's High School staff and their colleagues in cluster primaries. This strategic approach to managing transition from primary to secondary begins several years before primary seven. Teachers' planning also considers how to best prepare learners with skills and knowledge for the senior phase. Teachers have further benefited from developing new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment through collaborative work with their primary colleagues. Positive working relationships with parents and families have also been established at an earlier stage.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.