Summarised inspection findings

St Columba's R C High School

Fife Council

23 January 2024

Key contextual information

School Name: St Columba's R C High School
Council: Fife Council
SEED number: 5446538
Roll (September 2022): 848

Attendance is now generally above the national average, having been below in four years out of the last five.

Exclusions are generally below the national average. Exclusions have decreased substantially in the last three years.

In September 2022, 20.5 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2022, 31.7 per cent of pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2022, the school reported that 48 per cent of pupils had additional support needs.

St Columba's R C High School is situated in the town of Dunfermline, in the south west of the region of Fife. The current school building is due to close in August 2024. The school will move to a new campus nearby. The headteacher has been in post for almost three years. He is assisted by a team of five depute headteachers and one business manager. There have been a few recent appointments to the team of depute headteachers.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	satisfactory
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 well-established faith-based ethos supports a calm and safe learning environment. Almost all interactions between young people, their peers and with staff are respectful and reflect the school's recently developed values of 'Faith, Aspiration, Inclusion, Tolerance, and Honesty'. Most young people feel well supported by staff to do their best.

■ Most young people participate well in learning tasks set by their teachers. A few young people are disengaged from learning and do not make progress in their learning during lessons. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to meet the learning needs of all young people. In a minority of lessons, teachers match tasks well to the learning needs of all young people. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to enable young people to be more active in their learning. This should help to improve further young people's motivation and participation in their learning.

- The majority of young people enjoy their learning experiences. Most young people work well independently and in pairs or groups. They have regular opportunities through various pupil voice activities to shape and improve how they learn. The majority of young people feel staff listen to their views and take these views into account. However, young people would benefit from increased opportunities to take responsibility for and lead their learning across all areas of the curriculum.

- All young people have access to a digital device. In the majority of lessons, this is supporting them to access materials, support and feedback from their teachers. In a few lessons, teachers are using digital technology creatively to increase young people's participation and motivation. Teachers are well-placed to continue to develop young people's digital skills and their effective use of digital devices to improve learning experiences further.

- Staff have worked collaboratively with young people to develop a clear structure for lessons. The recently introduced lesson framework, 'Start, Learn, Reflect', is evident across the school and used by teachers to provide a consistent approach to lessons. Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to continue to improve the quality of each aspect of this standard. Building on the progress made by the learning and teaching group, all staff should work together to ensure a shared understanding of what high-quality learning and teaching looks like.

- Almost all teachers begin lessons with a purposeful introductory task. A minority of these are well constructed and build successfully on young people's prior learning. Teachers share the purpose of learning and how to be successful in learning in almost all lessons. In the majority of lessons, these are task based and not of a sufficient quality for young people to be clear about what they are learning and how they will be successful. Senior leaders are continuing to work with staff to develop approaches to designing learning intentions and success criteria.

- Teachers should continue to develop approaches to reflecting on learning at the end of lessons. Plenaries are inconsistent across the school and do not reflect well enough the planned learning or criteria for success shared at the start of lessons. This is resulting in young people sometimes being unclear about the purpose of their learning and whether or not they have been successful.

- Almost all teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. Most teachers have developed clear classroom routines to support young people in their learning. They have a good understanding of the needs of young people. In the majority of classes, teachers use this understanding to ensure young people participate well in learning activities. While all teachers use questioning to elicit responses from young people, only a few use high-quality, well-planned questioning to promote higher order thinking skills in young people.

- Teachers need to be more effective in supporting and challenging all young people in lessons. A few young people do not make progress in their learning during lessons. Young people would benefit from teachers regularly checking for understanding on an ongoing basis.

- The majority of young people feel staff help them to understand how they are progressing in their learning. They believe the feedback they receive is helps them to improve their learning. Young people at all stages describe regular learning conversations that take place with their teachers. Young people in the senior phase speak more confidently about their working level, target grades and feedback. However, more than half of young people are unable to articulate clearly the detailed steps they need to take to improve their learning in each subject. Teachers should continue to work with young people to improve the quality of feedback. They should

ensure that any written, digital or verbal feedback has meaningful next steps for young people to progress their learning.

■ Teachers use a variety of assessment approaches to check the progress of young people. In the broad general education (BGE), teachers are correctly reviewing their approaches to assessment to ensure that assessment aligns with the benchmarks for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Senior leaders should work with teachers to ensure that assessment approaches in the BGE are effective. Continuing to develop teachers' understanding of national standards through moderation both internally and externally across all subject areas will support this.

■ Teachers' approaches to assessment in the senior phase are effective. Assessments are closely aligned to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) course criteria. A minority of staff share the understanding of standards they have gained as SQA appointees in roles such as markers, with staff in their departments. This is resulting in most teachers having a clear understanding of standards in National Qualifications (NQs). They are also confident in the verification and moderation process associated with NQs in the senior phase.

■ Teachers have clear systems in place to moderate planning, assessment and learning and teaching. Staff link with primary colleagues to support transitions and with other secondary colleagues to share, develop and moderate plans and assessments. There is an embedded approach to self-evaluating the quality of learning and teaching in all departments on a yearly basis. This is helping staff to identify areas of strength and development.

■ All departments have well-established approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress. Most teachers are beginning to use monitoring and tracking data to provide feedback to young people. They also use tracking information at key times to report to parents. Following periods of tracking, senior leaders, pastoral staff and most teachers work well together to put in place interventions to support young people in their learning.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	**satisfactory**

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
- ■ Most young people attain well in both literacy and numeracy. Over the past five years, most young people have achieved CfE third level in literacy and almost all have achieved third level in numeracy by the end of S3. A minority of young people achieve CfE literacy at fourth level by the end of S3. Overall, over the past five years, the majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy by the end of S3.

Senior phase
Literacy and numeracy (leavers)
Literacy
- ■ Overall, attainment for leavers in literacy is in line with the VC. In 2022/23, this improved to being significantly much higher than the VC for those leavers achieving literacy at SCQF levels 3 and 4 or better. For those young people leaving school over the past five years and achieving SCQF levels 5 and better and level 6, achievement in literacy was significantly lower than the VC in two years. This has improved to being in line with the VC currently. In the most recent year, no young person left school without achieving an award in literacy.

- ■ Young people who have additional support needs achieve well in literacy, by the time they leave school.

Numeracy
- ■ Attainment for young people leaving school in numeracy is strong across almost all measures. Over the past five years for those leavers achieving numeracy at SCQF level 3 or better to SCQF level 5 or better, attainment has mostly been significantly higher or much higher than the VC. Attainment for leavers at SCQF level 6 numeracy has remained in line with the VC over the past five years. Senior leaders should continue to work with teachers to help address the gap between young people achieving units versus the full course award at SCQF level 5. In the most recent year, all young people left school having achieved an award in numeracy.

- ■ For leavers who have additional support needs, attainment in numeracy has been consistently strong.

Literacy and numeracy (cohorts)
Literacy
- ■ As young people move through the school, attainment in literacy has been strong at SCQF level 3 or better and SCQF level 4 or better, at S4, and by S5 and by S6. At SCQF level 5 or better at S4, and by S5 and by S6, attainment has been weaker. In two out of the last five years in S4, this has been significantly lower or much lower than the VC, improving to being in

line with the VC in the most recent year. By S5 and by S6, attainment at SCQF level 5 or better is currently significantly much lower than the VC. At SCQF level 6, attainment in literacy has been broadly in line with the VC over the past five years.

Numeracy
■ As young people move through the school, attainment in numeracy has been consistently very strong over the past five years. From SCQF level 3 or better to SCQF level 5 or better, at S4, by S5 and by S6, attainment has almost always been significantly higher or much higher than the VC over the past five years.

Attainment over time
BGE
■ Across almost all subject departments, teachers use robust approaches to track and monitor the progress of young people. Most young people achieve third CfE level in most subject areas by the end of S3. A minority of young people achieve fourth CfE level in most subject areas by the end of S3. Senior leaders should continue at pace with plans to ensure teachers have regular access to professional learning opportunities to improve their understanding of moderation across the BGE. This will help to ensure more consistently robust teacher professional judgment of young peoples' progress and achievement.

■ Importantly, senior leaders should also continue with their plans to ensure that all young people access a full BGE learning and attainment experience, in all curriculum areas. Young people require this to lead to more robust coursing decisions for them into and through the senior phase.

Senior phase
■ At S4, average complementary tariff scores for leavers in S4 have remained broadly in line with the VC over the past five years. For the middle 60% and highest 20% of leavers complementary tariff scores have been consistently significantly much lower or lower than the VC for the last five years.

■ At S4, the complementary tariff scores for the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest 20% is in line with the VC. By S5 and by S6, average complimentary tariff scores for the lowest attaining 20% of young people have remained in line with the VC over the past five years. For the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people, average complementary tariff scores have broadly been significantly lower than the VC.

Breadth and depth
■ Overall attainment in S4, at SCQF levels 3 or better and 4 or better for one or more to eight or more awards, has been strong over the past five years. There is no consistent pattern of improvement at SCQF level 5 or better over the past five years. Attainment at this level has often been significantly lower or much lower than the VC. The percentage of young people gaining top quality passes at SCQF level 5A or better shows improvement. Senior leaders need to review the number of courses young people are presented for to ensure that young people maximise success.

■ By S5, there is no consistent improvement in young people's attainment at SCQF level 5C or better or SCQF level 6C or better. Performance is generally significantly lower than the VC over the last five years. For young people achieving SCQF level 6A at five or more awards, attainment has consistently been in line with the VC over the last five years.

■ By S6, for young people achieving one or more to six or more courses, attainment has been significantly lower or much lower than the VC in three of the last five years. In 2022/23, this has

improved to being broadly in line with the VC across almost all measures at SCQF levels 6C or better and 6A. For young people achieving awards at SCQF level 7C or better, attainment has broadly been significantly below the VC over the last five years for one or more courses. Attainment has been consistently in line with the VC at SCQF levels 7C or better and 7A over the last five years, for young people achieving two or more or three or more courses.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

■ Young people in the BGE participate in activities such as the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, the Equalities Group, Pit Stop Crew, and the Pupil Parliament. As a result, they develop skills in communication, research and team working. Young people in the senior phase demonstrate leadership skills through achievements in areas such as sports, employability, SCQF. They also achieve well as My World of Work Ambassadors, and through the Caritas and Mentors in Violence Prevention programmes. These achievements are increasing learners' confidence, self-motivation, and resilience. Learners in the senior phase volunteer at lunchtime and after-school clubs, supporting the participation of younger members of the community. Through these clubs, young people display confidence and engage positively with their peers.

■ Young people demonstrate important citizenship skills through involvement in a variety of charity initiatives and work with local primary schools. They contribute positively to the caring ethos of the school and their participation and achievement reinforce St Columba's R C High School's values.

■ Almost all staff celebrate the successes and achievements of young people effectively through praise postcards, pupil of the month initiatives, the annual awards ceremony, social media platforms, newsletters, and assemblies. Learners and parents welcome that staff, including senior leaders, make regular calls to parents and carers to celebrate achievements.

■ Young people gain accreditation for their achievements through a wide range of SCQF awards. Staff plan to implement a wider range of youth awards to recognise further young people's leadership, volunteering and achievements.

■ Staff request data on young people's achievements from parents and young people. Through parent and pupil surveys staff have identified young people not currently engaging with achievement opportunities and are identifying barriers to non-engagement. Staff mentor the young people to develop wider interests and key skills. The school is at an early stage of tracking young people's participation, skills development, and engagement in achievements. Staff as yet are unable to track gaps in young people's achievements and skills development. Staff should continue to develop young people's awareness of their development of skills and support them to develop an individual skills profile.

Equity for all learners

■ Staff use Equity Funding (PEF) to support a range of projects aimed at improving the life chances of young people affected by socio-economic deprivation and at risk of not achieving. The PEF plan focuses particularly on those young people who find it difficult to engage with school and are at risk of under-performing in S4 courses. Early indications are that these young people are maintaining engagement in courses. Staff have provided focused support for young people not yet meeting national expectations in the BGE. As a result, these young people are making strong progress. For example, almost all of these young people have improved their maths attainment, and all have made progress in reading. Young people who have received targeted interventions describe their increased confidence and readiness to engage more in school.

- As planned, the senior leaders should track the impact of the PEF interventions and make adjustments as required. It is too early to identify the full extent to which the current plan is accelerating progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Senior leaders should involve parents in evaluating the success of this year's plan and developing the next plan.

- Senior leaders identified the importance of engaging closely with families living in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2. For example, they have worked to increase attendance at parents' events for this group, and this has increased considerably. Staff have put in place a range of helpful supports, such as arranging bespoke transport to school where necessary. As a result of these interventions, the attendance of all young people in the targeted group has improved. The average improvement in attendance for this group is 21% and a few of these young people now have attendance of over 90%.

- Staff have put in place a range of interventions to support the attainment of young people living in the SIMD deciles 1 and 2. As a result, the attainment of these young people across S4, S5 and S6 in session 2022/23 is in line with or significantly higher than that of young people from similar backgrounds across the country. Previously this had been, at times, lower than the national average. The lowest attaining 20% of these young people perform significantly higher than the VC. Most young people living in SIMD deciles 1 and 2 comment that having access to digital devices has helped to improve their achievement in school.

- School staff work very well with a range of partners, including university and Skills Development Scotland staff, to support young people as they move on to post-school destinations. The Lift-Off initiative provides helpful support for young people facing challenges as they move into Higher education. Almost all young people living in SIMD deciles 1 and 2 went on to positive destinations when they left school in 2021/22. The percentage of these young people moving on to positive destinations is higher than has previously been the case. The majority went on to further or higher education. In 2021/22, all young people who have English as an additional language left school to positive destinations. This has been the case for the past four years. Almost all young people with an additional support need left school to positive destinations, and this has been the case in three of the past four years. All young people who are care experienced moved on to positive destinations in session 2021/22.

Other relevant evidence

■ The school 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 the school meals provider. Aspects of good practise were identified in relation to food in schools.

■ Senior leaders have agreed a position statement on reducing the cost of the school day, especially for families affected by socio-economic deprivation. There is no charge for any learning materials, and additional study support is available for young people. The 'Pit Stop' provision ensures that all young people have access to food at break times. A breakfast club provides a nurturing environment for a targeted group of young people. School staff should now explore the impact of this work on the cost of the school day on outcomes for young people.

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.