

St Mary's Church of England High School (VA)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117595
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358167
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	676
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maureen Bruce
Headteacher	Stephanie Benbow
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2009
School address	Lieutenant Ellis Way Waltham Cross EN7 5FB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 37 lessons, each taught by a different teacher. Meetings were held with the headteacher, nominated staff, pupils, the School Improvement Partner, members of the governing body, and the Director of Education for the Diocese of St Albans. They observed the school's work, looked at a wide range of documentation, and met with groups of students. The inspection team reviewed 83 questionnaires returned by parents and carers. A total of 105 student and 39 staff questionnaires were evaluated.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How successful has the school been in addressing the concerns raised in the previous report?
- How accurate are the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning?
- How have the significant improvements in standards and achievement been secured?
- How the improvements secured in attendance have been achieved?

Information about the school

The school was given Notice to Improve in October 2009. The school was asked to raise the standards achieved by students in lessons by ensuring all teaching sets high expectations and makes effective use of assessment; strengthen leadership and management through a greater collaborative approach to school development and an increasing use and understanding of data; and ensure that the governing body effectively fulfils its duties to monitor and challenge the work of the school.

The school is smaller than average and the number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is more than twice the national figure and so is the proportion of those whose first language is not English.

The proportion of students registered by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national figure. The students' social and economic backgrounds vary considerably and the school attracts students from other nearby local authorities. There is a small number of students who are looked-after by the local authority. The school moved into new, purpose-built accommodation at the start of the summer term 2010.

The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing. It has received the following national accreditations and awards: Healthy Schools status and the Get Set Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is now a good school; considerable progress has been made since the 2009 inspection in all the areas where HMI had previously expressed concern. Outcomes for individuals and groups are good and show significant improvement in the last 12 months. Standards of attainment have improved and are in line with the national average. The proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2010 was in line with the national average, having improved by 20%. The impact of the improvement in teaching and effective intervention strategies has resulted in students' progress improving significantly to be above the national average. Students who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds make good progress. Vulnerable students and those who find learning difficult make good progress. Equality of opportunity is good.

Teaching is satisfactory; there are no significant inadequacies across year groups although learning outcomes in science are not as strong as in English and mathematics. Evidence from this inspection confirms the findings of the school's robust monitoring of teaching and learning, namely that teaching is good or better in half of all lessons. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is good and has become a real strength of the senior staff. Although the range of modern computer-based resources is good, few lessons were effectively enhanced by this facility. Marking is generally satisfactory and there are examples of good practice. Where teaching is outstanding, the use of assessment and academic guidance to enhance learning is a positive factor. However, inconsistencies in the use of assessment to support learning remain in some lessons.

The range of curriculum opportunities provided is good and the courses introduced in 2008 and 2009 have begun to have a positive impact on standards. The proportion of 2010 Year 11 students who remained within education, employment and training was average. The sixth form is satisfactory overall although the rate of student progress varies between examination courses. The number of students is rising. Partnership arrangements have been established with a number of local schools. HMI interviewed students representing all of the local partner schools. Students were positive about the provision they experienced, the progress they made and the partnership arrangements.

Inspectors found behaviour to be good. A small number of parent and student questionnaire responses expressed some reservations on this matter; those students who spoke to the inspection team were more positive. Inspectors found the school to be a safe, secure and calm learning environment. Attendance is above average and has improved noticeably; attendance since the start of the current term would be considered high if sustained.

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The care, welfare and guidance provided are good and parents and students spoke very positively about the nature of the pastoral support available. Students were full of praise for the work of the pastoral support team. Transition arrangements with feeder schools are excellent; every child is visited by a member of the pastoral support team before they join St Mary's. Academic guidance is a notable feature of the strongest teaching. All of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda areas of the school's work, such as supporting students to lead healthy, safe lives and make a positive contribution to the community, were judged to be good.

Governance is satisfactory. The governing body has a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Careful financial management over a number of years helped to build a significant surplus that has been deployed effectively in the transition to the new school buildings. The school has made effective use of specialist consultants to balance and coach the new leadership team. The headteacher was quick to praise the quality and range of support the school had received from the local authority.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the leadership team has done well to secure the required improvements identified in standards, teaching and learning, equality of provision, behaviour and attendance. The school's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and improve teaching by:
 - further developing the use of information and communication technology in the classroom
 - ensuring each lesson focuses on learning outcomes
 - securing the assessment for learning strategies, used in the most successful lessons, consistently across the school.
- Ensure that post-16 provision builds successfully on the outcomes of the 2010 GCSE results by maximising students higher order thinking skills.
- Raise standards in science to match those secured in English and mathematics.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment on entry is average. Standards at the end of Year 11 have improved notably in the last year. The proportion of higher grade GCSE passes excluding English and mathematics, at 87%, is significantly above the national average. Similarly, the average points scored by students in all examinations were significantly above the national figure. The proportion of students obtaining five higher grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is just above the national average. The results secured in the school's specialist mathematics and computing subjects continue to improve and are now just above the national average.

Provisional data indicate that the significant weaknesses identified in the previous report have been redressed although outcomes in science are below those of English and mathematics. The results secured by students known to be eligible for free school meals were significantly above the national average. The progress made by those who find learning difficult is good because of the range and quality of the help provided by the

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inclusion support team. One in four students is from minority ethnic backgrounds; they progress as well as their peers and the standards attained by those from a Black or Black British cultural heritage were well above the national average. Students make good progress overall.

The students' current learning and performance in the classroom mirror the improvements shown by the most recent examination results. In the majority of lessons, students make good progress and enjoy their work. Lesson outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and students respond well to this challenge. In an outstanding Year 8 geography lesson, tasks were very well planned to match the learning needs of the full range of students; questioning was particularly skilful and students responded very positively as they discovered the environmental relationships of the rain forest ecosystem. Enjoyment and achievement are good overall, with strengths evident in achievement, positive attitudes to learning, attendance and good behaviour.

Students and their parents and carers are positive that students feel safe in school and inspectors observed good staff/student relationships to support this view. The school provides effective support for a healthy lifestyle; a wide range of meals is available, although not all parents viewed the choice as healthy. However, the provision for sex and drugs education is good and the proportion of students engaged in sport is high. The students' contribution to the school and wider community is good and they appreciate the range of responsibilities they are able to assume, although more could be made of their wish to be more involved. Overall, the range of workplace and other skills the students develop towards their future economic well-being is good. Significant improvement has been secured in the students' key skills. School staff have worked hard to improve attendance and the work done by student managers is outstanding. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the social maturity displayed during an inadvertent sounding of the alarm was impressive.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall and the increasing proportion of good teaching is clearly having a positive impact on standards and students' progress. Outstanding teaching was observed in geography, music, information and communication technology and food technology. The strengths of teaching included: very good relationships between teachers and students; skilful questioning which probed students' understanding; enthusiastic and committed delivery; good use of information and communication technology; and strong subject knowledge. In some other lessons, the match of task to students' learning need lacked precision or opportunities were missed to exploit the information and communication technology resources available. In these lessons the use of assessment to enhance learning was underdeveloped.

The curriculum is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. New pathways offering a range of courses have been introduced in the last two years and these have helped raise standards in the recent public examinations. The school's specialist status in mathematics is beginning to strengthen the curriculum provision by offering one year related courses but this has yet to develop in computing, the school's other specialism. Care, guidance and support are good overall. Aspects such as pastoral care and transition are outstanding.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior team has embedded ambition and driven improvement well in the year since the last inspection. In that time it has managed the transition to the new school building, raised standards, improved teaching, students' progress and attendance. Senior staff consider that they have become leaders rather than managers, that they have used consultancy support effectively to build management capacity, and have been well supported by the local authority; inspectors concur with these views. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by senior leaders are good. Senior staff were invited to accompany inspectors in the joint observation of teaching; the views they expressed concurred with the judgements given by inspectors. Equality of opportunity is good, pupils were quick to point out that racism is rare and that the diversity of the school community is regularly celebrated.

Governance is satisfactory with a clear focus on enhancing provision at every level; the governing body and the Diocesan authorities have provided a new school and the transition funding to open it ahead of time. Partnership working is satisfactory overall, with increasing numbers of students studying vocational and post 16 courses with neighbouring schools. Community cohesion is satisfactorily promoted. The school's safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. Engagement with parents and carers is good and is being enhanced by the work of the extended schools team and student managers. Senior staff and the governing body deploy resources effectively and the school provides good value for money

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make satisfactory progress in their learning and attain broadly average standards by the end of Year 13. However, there is variation across subjects and the poor attendance of some students has an adverse impact on their learning. Staff increasingly scrutinise sixth-form performance data and act soundly to remedy underachievement. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is some good teaching but not enough that is maximising students' higher-order thinking and evaluative enquiry to develop the skills and knowledge they need to reach the higher grades in GCE examinations and distinctions in vocational courses.

Students are well informed about opportunities at university and the world of work. This mirrors the good care, guidance and support in the rest of the school. They enjoy taking leadership roles and work very well as peer supporters for younger students. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory and are focused on raising levels of attendance and achievement for all its students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

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Views of parents and carers

The questionnaire responses from parents and carers were positive and they were consistently supported by the views of the students. The response rate was below the average for secondary schools. All parents and carers appreciated the work of the student support team and the overwhelming majority supported all aspects of the school's work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Church of England High School (VA) to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 676 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	54	33	40	5	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	38	46	43	52	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	46	55	32	39	5	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	43	42	51	4	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	30	47	57	7	8	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	19	56	67	10	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	19	50	60	12	14	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	28	53	64	5	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	35	47	57	3	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	25	49	59	5	6	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	23	46	55	8	10	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	25	30	45	54	9	11	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	51	34	41	5	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England High School (VA), Waltham Cross, EN7 5FB

It was a pleasure to meet so many of you when I visited your new school buildings in November. The governing body has done particularly well to provide you with such wonderful new facilities; staff worked hard to manage the transition to the new building. The school has improved significantly in the last year and inspectors were very pleased to see how much progress you are now making; we have judged St Mary's to be a good school. We found behaviour to be good and were very impressed with your high level of attendance. Well done!

I have asked the headteacher to:

Raise standards further by improving the use of information and communication technology in the classroom; asking staff to provide a sharper focus on what you need to learn, and to make greater use of assessment to improve learning.

Ensure that post 16 provision builds successfully on the outcomes of the 2010 GCSE results.

Raise standards in science to match those secured in English and mathematics.

It was a pleasure to meet so many of you and I look forward to hearing about your future successes.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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