

St Mary's College

57 Midanbury Lane, Southampton, SO18 4DJ

Inspection dates 26–28 February 2013

| Overall effectiveness | Good | 2 |
|--|-------------|----------|
| Pupils' achievement | Good | 2 |
| Pupils' behaviour and personal development | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of teaching | Good | 2 |
| Quality of curriculum | Good | 2 |
| Pupils' welfare, health and safety | Outstanding | 1 |
| Leadership and management | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings

This school is good.

- School leaders have ensured that as a result of outstanding teaching, pupils make outstanding progress overall in the Nursery, Reception and preparatory school, and good progress overall in the senior school.
- Leaders have also ensured that the standards of attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 are well above national age expectations. Students' achievement in English, mathematics and the sciences has much to do with this.
- Teaching in the Nursery, Reception and preparatory school is outstanding overall, and is good overall in the secondary school.
- The development of pupils' welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and their spiritual, moral and social development is a strength of the school.

It is not yet outstanding because

- In the senior school, progress is not consistently good in all subjects, for example, history, geography and design and technology.
- There are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between subjects in the senior school.
- Phase leaders are at the early stages of holding teachers to account for the progress pupils make, especially in the primary school.
- The curriculum has a few weaknesses, namely careers information and advice and guidance in the senior school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- Twenty-three part lessons were observed by inspectors, many of them alongside senior leaders. A number of lessons were visited with a specific focus on teachers' use of assessment. Pupils' work was scrutinised and inspectors listened to some pupils read. Meetings took place with pupils, staff and representatives of the trustees. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including improvement plans, policies and safeguarding arrangements.
- By the end of the inspection visit, 55 responses to the online parent survey (Parent View) were collected and analysed. Inspectors also analysed 33 questionnaires that were returned by staff.

Inspection team

John Seal, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Michele Messaoudi

Additional inspector

Jerome Freeman

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a co-educational Roman Catholic independent school for pupils aged from three to 16 years. It is a Christian school whose mission statement is embodied in the lives and works of the De la Mennais Brothers, whose aim is to make Jesus better known and loved.
- Located in Bitterne, in the City of Southampton, St Mary's consists of two separately managed schools in two main buildings; the preparatory school with nursery and reception provision (Charlton House) and the senior school (St Mary's College). Additional independent-standing buildings provide extra classrooms, some of which are for specialist subjects, for example, science and music.
- The school was founded in 1922 as a boys' school. In 1992, the school started admitting girls.
- The school is registered for 312 pupils. There are currently 273 on roll, including 25 in the Nursery, of whom 21 are part-time. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs and there are a very few pupils with disabilities and a range of other needs. A small number have English as a second language
- The students are predominantly of White British origin.
- In the preparatory school, the proportion of pupils who start and leave within the school year is higher than typically seen in most schools.
- The school does not use additional provision.
- The school's previous full Ofsted inspection was in September 2009. Following this inspection there was a series of visits by Ofsted inspectors to check the school's progress in carrying out improvements, the last one being in October 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In the senior school, ensure that the progress of all pupils in all subjects matches the best seen in the school by:
 - requiring all teachers use their prior knowledge of pupils' learning and assessment information to plan learning activities that more accurately meet their different needs and abilities
 - providing pupils with enough opportunities in lessons to learn independently of the teachers
 - sharing information and observations of good teaching practice.
- Strengthen the curriculum by:
 - providing pupils with a well-planned programme of information, advice and guidance regarding careers, training and work-related learning
 - developing pupils' skills in accessing and using resources and materials more independently in all subjects.
- Ensure phase and subject leaders become even more proficient in holding teachers to account for the progress of the pupils they teach.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good. It is not yet outstanding because the rate of pupils' progress is higher in the preparatory school than it is in the senior school. This is a result of some variability in the quality of teaching in the senior school.

In the nursery and reception classes, children settle in quickly and make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Children's standards in literacy and numeracy are high. In the preparatory school, pupils' overall progress is outstanding, which includes their progress in reading and mathematics. By the end of Year 6, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is much higher than that typically seen for most 11-year-olds.

In the senior school, progress in English, mathematics, the sciences and religious education (RE) is good in Years 7 and 8 and accelerates to outstanding in Years 9 to 11. As a result, the proportion of students achieving five GCSEs grades A* to C is very high. In recent years, the proportion of pupils achieving the A to A* grades has increased. However, in the work seen and in the school's analysis of assessment information, the progress pupils make in history, geography, and design and technology is slower.

In the preparatory school, there are a significant number of pupils who either leave or start within each school year, especially in Years 4, 5 and 6. For those who start within the school year, this is managed extremely well by the school, enabling pupils to settle to good learning habits quickly. New students from other primary schools start the senior school in Year 7. There are effective systems in place to ensure they settle into good learning routines.

The extremely small numbers of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well catered for and make good progress in both schools. This judgement also applies to the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. From the youngest children to the oldest pupils, there is a happy, calm and purposeful atmosphere which enables them to enjoy their learning. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary. Pupils treat each other, staff and visitors with politeness and respect. There is a high level of tolerance and understanding of those from different cultures and those who have a range of faiths and beliefs. Relationships are highly positive and supportive. One of the older pupils told inspectors she felt 'part of a family'. Others spoke of a very close-knit community that looked after everybody. Consequently, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent and their attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. This is seen in the roles of the head student and prefect team in the senior school. Other roles include the school councils, which have had a positive impact on the school's environment, leading the raising of funds for charities and those less well off than themselves. Pupils' cultural development is a strength of the school, with a very wide range of opportunities for sporting and artistic activities available. Pupils have a good understanding of public institutions and services in England.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good. It is not yet outstanding because the teaching quality varies between the preparatory and senior schools. The quality of teaching in the preparatory school and Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. In the secondary school, there is a high proportion of good teaching, with some that is outstanding, especially in English, mathematics, science, French

and religious education (RE). However, there are some subjects where the teaching is more inconsistent, being either adequate or good. This is particularly seen in history, geography and design and technology.

In the best teaching, the consistently good features seen in both schools include well-planned and -prepared lessons. As a result, children and pupils are clear about what they need to do and learn at a good pace. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are able to become more independent and confident in their learning. In both schools, teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge through a good use of questioning which, at its best, challenges pupils to think and discuss with their peers how to solve problems and gain a balanced understanding of complex issues. Some good examples of this were seen in the senior school's science lessons and an enrichment class studying philosophy and ethics. The preparatory school provides pupils with exciting and practical activities to help them understand their learning. For example, preparatory pupils recently enacted the Battle of Bosworth to bring their study of history to life.

Assessment information in both schools is used to good effect by most teachers to make sure the learning activities are well matched to pupils' abilities and understanding. As a result, pupils are able to effectively build on previous learning and are generally very clear about how to improve further. Teachers give challenging targets for improvement which are known to pupils.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not use the assessment information to plan their lessons with enough precision to match the different needs of pupils. They often spend too long giving instructions or explanations, which limits the time pupils have for learning and developing the study skills required to become less reliant on the teacher. As a result, learning slows down and pupils take part in the same activity regardless of their ability.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is not yet outstanding because the year-on-year planning of subjects, although secure, is not sufficiently refined and detailed to maximise pupils' practical learning skills in all subjects. In addition, pupils' careers advice and guidance in the senior school, though adequate, is, nevertheless, underdeveloped. These areas for development are recognised by both headteachers and plans are already underway to secure further improvements, particularly in the preparatory school, where a focus on developing pupils' skills to become less reliant on teachers to access their learning is being planned.

There are good policies, plans and schemes of work from the Early Years Foundation Stage to the end of Key Stage 4. In the nursery and reception classes, all areas of learning are well planned and taught. The children have easy access to outdoor learning and the balance between adult- and child-led activities is good. In the preparatory and senior schools, schemes of work are broadly based on the National Curriculum, and in Key Stage 4, all pupils are taught GCSE English, mathematics, the three sciences, French, and RE. Optional subjects include music, art, German and PE. Some pupils in the senior school are entered for GCSE examinations early, with a high degree of success. These pupils have the opportunity to study 'enrichment' subjects which include the A/S courses for mathematics, philosophy and ethics, GCSE film studies and Latin.

The faith element of the school contributes significantly to pupils' personal development and is highly influential in the schemes of work and planning for RE and pupils' personal, social and health education. During the inspection, Year 10 pupils were on a residential 'retreat'. Physical education (PE) is provided for all pupils, including football, cricket, rounders and netball. Swimming is taught to Year 7 pupils. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well supported through additional support and in some cases one-to-one teaching.

Extra-curricular activities are a strength of the school. These include a range of musical activities and instrumental lessons. In the preparatory school there are after-school activities, including

opportunities for homework. There is an annual stage production. Sporting activities include sailing and table tennis and a film club. The school has exemplary international links with schools in France and developing countries because of the Christian Brotherhood's world-wide mission. Older pupils and staff regularly visit countries such as Togo and many are looking forward to the biology field trip to Madagascar in the very near future.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

The quality of the school's provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has robust procedures and arrangements for safeguarding pupils, including the youngest children. These include ensuring all relevant staff have attended child protection training to the appropriate levels. Procedures for the vetting and appointment of staff and others are thorough and arrangements meet all requirements. The school has an up-to-date single central register of staff checks which contains all of the required information. All the required policies are in place, including child protection, health and safety and anti-bullying. These are significant improvements from the time of the previous full inspection.

Pupils told inspectors that bullying is extremely rare. When it does occur, the pupils have confidence in the staff to tackle it well. The outstanding behaviour of pupils means that there are very few recorded incidents of inappropriate behaviour. When these happen, the procedures and policies fully meet current requirements.

The school has a very secure approach to risk assessments both on and off site. Pupils enjoy healthy lifestyles through the very healthy, well-cooked and nutritious food served at lunchtimes. In addition, there is a very wide range of physical activity on offer which takes place in the extensive grounds. Pupils say they are very happy and enjoy their school life. They told inspectors how everybody looks after each other. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children have a secure and happy start to their school life. They are extremely well looked after by the well-qualified and well-deployed staff. All the independent school regulations are met for welfare, health and safety.

Leadership and management

Good

The quality of the school's leadership and management is good. It is not yet outstanding because the effective procedures, policies and approaches to driving improvement by senior leaders have not been in place long enough to see the full benefit of them. However, the school is well placed to make further improvements.

The headteachers of both schools are an effective and productive team. They work well with their key stage leaders to ensure there is a consistent overview between the two schools. One key stage leader said, 'We are two schools but have one ethos.' Senior leaders, especially the headteachers, have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. They provide accurate and robust feedback to teachers in conjunction with training and support. A good example of this is the development of a coaching programme and opportunities to share best practice across all key stages. In addition, staff have made some recent visits to other Catholic independent schools to gain further insights into how to further improve teaching and learning.

Plans for improvement clearly outline the actions required to maintain the school's improvement. This is clearly seen in the approach both the headteachers take in their effective and accurate checking of the progress pupils are making.

The heads are ably supported by a team of key stage leaders. Their role in monitoring the school's performance is developing well. However, the nursery manager and leaders of Key Stages 1 and 2 are at the early stages of developing how to hold teachers to account for the progress made by the pupils they are responsible for.

Members of the Christian Brotherhood are the school's trustees. They have a good understanding of what the school does well and what the priorities are for further improvement. Led by the very experienced and knowledgeable chair of trustees, the headteachers are suitably challenged and supported to ensure the school moves forward in the right direction.

The school's premises offer appropriate accommodation for all pupils to be taught securely and safely. Arrangements and facilities for pupils who are ill are appropriate. All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others. An informative website provides up-to-date news and access to policies and other information. Parents and carers are provided with regular reports on their children's academic progress. The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

The trustees have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
|---------|-------------|---|
| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements. |
| Grade 3 | Adequate | A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 116567 |
| Inspection number | 408714 |
| DfE registration number | 852/6003 |

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Roman Catholic co-educational |
| School status | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 3–16 years |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 273 |
| Number of part time pupils | 21 |
| Proprietor | Brothers of Christian Instruction |
| Chair of Trustees | Reverend Brother Francis |
| Headteacher | Preparatory school including Nursery: Mrs D Owen Senior School: Mr C Lickley |
| Date of previous school inspection | 22 September 2009 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | Preparatory school: £6,450 Senior school: £ 8,400 |
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