

# St Mark's Church of England School

Baytree Road, Larkhall, Bath, BA1 6ND

**Inspection dates** 11–12 June 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The executive headteacher has been instrumental in leading whole-school developments, which, with the support of the governing body and other senior leaders, has secured improvements in teaching and students' achievement over the past couple of years.
- Achievement is good; the percentage of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations, including in English and mathematics, has risen significantly over the past few years and is now just below average.
- Teaching is good. In most of the teaching, teachers use their knowledge of each student's ability to set appropriately challenging and engaging tasks. Written and verbal feedback consistently gives clear guidance on how students can improve their learning.
- Students are proud of their school, and behaviour, in and around the site, is good. Students work collaboratively across year groups, treating each other with respect and dignity. They feel safe, well cared for and part of the 'school family'.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Progress for a small number of students is below national expectations. Leaders, while very aware of this, have not always implemented appropriate strategies to ensure that students achieve as well as their peers.
- Some activities in lessons do not always meet the differing needs of the students and, on occasion, students do not have enough time to respond to teachers' comments in marking.
- While school leaders are working rigorously to improve attendance overall and have made improvements over time, the attendance of a small minority of students is not improving quickly enough and this is having a negative impact on their attitudes to learning and progress.

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## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons, including four lessons which were jointly observed by the lead inspector and the executive headteacher.
- Inspectors took account of 68 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and analysed questionnaires from 36 members of staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including those relating to the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, safeguarding and students' assessment information, as well as examples of students' work.
- They held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, staff and groups of students.

## Inspection team

Helen Matthews, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christopher Prosser

Additional Inspector

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## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Mark's Church of England School is very small compared to other secondary schools.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a parent or carer in the armed services) is above average.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs supported through school action is just above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A very small number of students attend an off-site provision called The Link.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school is part of a collaborative federation with St Gregory's Catholic College and there is an executive headteacher who oversees both schools. A small number of students attend courses part time at St Gregory's Catholic College.
- The school has been entering students in examinations for half their GCSE options at the end of Year 10 and the other half at the end of Year 11. There has also been an opportunity for different groups of Key Stage 4 students to take GCSE examinations in mathematics and English at different points during the course. Students embarking on GCSE courses from September 2013 will do a two year linear course in all of their subjects.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
  - ensuring that all teachers use knowledge about students' prior learning to plan lessons that meet the differing needs of students, so that they are always challenged and engaged in their learning and as a result make rapid progress
  - allowing students time to respond to the helpful teachers' comments present in marked work, so that they can make improvements and extend their learning.
- Continue to close gaps in attainment between different groups of students at the school and students nationally by:
  - checking that both academic and pastoral support offered to students has a positive impact on their learning, and where applicable, offers alternative interventions
  - building on improvements in attendance so that all students attend regularly and are fully engaged in their learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students achieve well, including the minority from ethnic backgrounds other than White British.
- Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average and a number arrive at different times in the year throughout the key stages. By the time students leave school at the end of Year 11, the proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations, including in English and mathematics, is just below average. This has been a rising trend over time from a very low starting point and looks set to improve still further this year.
- Attainment in GCSE mathematics at A\* to C grades is just below average, though current assessment data indicate that this looks set to rise significantly this year. Progress in mathematics is much higher than national expectations, particularly for those making more than three curriculum levels of progress between Key Stages 2 and 4.
- New senior leadership support for the English faculty has led to rapid improvements in teaching and achievement. As a result, both attainment and progress in English are now in line with the national average and current assessment data indicate that this will rise this year.
- In 2012, students did particularly well in English literature.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve at least as well as their peers; the attainment in both mathematics and English of a very small number of students who have a statement of special educational needs is above average for this group nationally.
- The attainment of students eligible for the pupil premium is significantly above average in both English and mathematics for this group nationally and exactly in line with their school peer group at the end of Key Stage 4. School leaders are using the pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding effectively, to provide mentoring, literacy and numeracy interventions and opportunities for students to extend their learning.
- The attainment and progress of a small group of girls has been a cause for concern. While they have achieved challenging targets, attainment has remained below average and progress below expectations. School leaders have implemented a range of monitoring strategies and interventions and as a result, there is clear evidence that this year, the progress of this group will be above expectations.
- In order to meet the learning needs of all students, a very small number of students attend an off-site provision called The Link. Progress for these students is monitored carefully and is good.
- A small number of students undertake some GCSE courses at St Gregory's Catholic College and progress for this group is good.
- The GCSE curriculum offered a range of early entry pathways. While effective for some students, particularly in mathematics, the results have been variable in some subject areas. As a result, GCSE in all subjects will now be taught as a two-year, linear course.
- School leaders have implemented a highly effective and consistent strategy to improve and promote reading, writing and communication skills across the key stages and curriculum. All middle leaders have a responsibility to ensure that literacy in their subject area is explicitly taught and that teachers' marking comments on how students can improve their written communication. Corrective reading is taught to those requiring extra support and the new curriculum for September provides extra time in English for Years 7 and 8. As a result, achievement in English and across other subject areas has improved over time.
- The library has been updated and restocked and is well used by students.
- The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View were pleased with the progress made by their children.

**The quality of teaching is good**

- Students are typically encouraged to become actively involved in their learning and work collaboratively and independently in order to solve presented problems. In most of the teaching, students' prior knowledge is used well in planning, so that activities are engaging and challenging for all.
- For instance, in a mathematics lesson, students were learning how to calculate interest charges. Students worked collaboratively on different problems, according to their ability. This led to a short film and an orchestrated discussion on Global Debt and Wonga.
- In a physical education (PE) lesson, students led the warm-up, using appropriate language to describe the muscle groups being used. There was a discussion around techniques and targets and regular opportunities for them to peer assess their performance during the activity.
- In an English lesson, students analysed a poem as a class, while the teacher targeted questions at particular students, encouraging them to explore Christian morals and values associated with its contents. They were then each given a new poem to consider independently.
- School leaders have introduced a very effective marking and assessment policy that is being consistently applied by all teachers across all subject areas. However, sometimes, opportunities to respond to the teachers' comments are not routinely mapped into the lesson plan and as a consequence, there are missed opportunities for students to amend and improve their work.
- Students are encouraged to regularly peer and self-assess their work and do so effectively. There is, typically, a good dialogue between the teacher and the students about setting appropriate learning targets.
- In a small minority of lessons, students are expected to complete the same task, in the same time, irrespective of their prior learning. In some cases, teachers do not adjust their plans quickly enough, spending too long on an activity or preventing students from moving on at their own pace. In these lessons, students find the work either too easy or too difficult, the pace slows and they quickly lose interest in the activity, hindering their progress.
- The vast majority of parents and carers on Parent View indicated that they are very positive about the quality of teaching.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Behaviour around the site, at break and lunchtimes is good. Behaviour in lessons is also good. Students are polite and courteous to each other and work well in groups.
- The behaviour of students working off site is also good.
- The house system, mixed-age tutor groups and the fact that there is a small number of students at the school encourage them to effectively interact across year groups.
- Students are proud of their school and this is reflected in their smart uniform and willingness to share their positive experiences with inspectors. As one student noted, 'We are like a big family.'
- The behaviour of all students is monitored very regularly and a number of actions are put in place when there is a cause for concern, including referral to the Governors' Achievement Panel and a range of external providers. This is having a positive impact on many students. However, a small number still require further support regarding their ability to fully engage in their own learning.
- The school provides an extensive range of pastoral support, some of which is delivered via an on-site provision called The Sanctuary for those needing support, guidance or mentoring and overseen by a pastoral support manager and a chaplain. There is a breakfast club.
- Students feel safe and have received appropriate advice on how to keep themselves safe.
- Responses from Parent View indicate that the vast majority of parents and carers believe that their children are safe and happy at school.

- Bullying is rare and students commented positively on how quickly and efficiently the school deals with any minor incidences. The school actively tackles issues to do with discrimination and cyber bullying through its effective personal, social and health education programme and the banning of mobile phones in school, which students commented positively on.
- As part of the school's drive to proactively celebrate differences and promote equality of opportunity, a survey was undertaken to ensure that cultural diversity was mapped across the subject areas; visitors have been invited in to speak to or mentor students and the school has close links with a school in Zambia.
- Attendance is still below average but has risen consistently over the past few years. School leaders have an acute understanding of the needs of the small group of poor attenders and are working hard to minimise barriers that are preventing these students from regularly attending.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- Led by the executive headteacher, leaders and managers have effectively secured significant improvements in teaching and students' achievement over the past two years. The executive headteacher is highly regarded by staff, students, parents, carers and the governing body.
- The executive headteacher, the governing body and other leaders believe the school sits at the heart of the local community and as such, have worked tirelessly to build positive relationships with parents, carers and local schools, and within the school itself. This is reflected in the very positive staff questionnaires, responses on Parent View and attendance at the Parent Forum.
- A robust and rigorous system is in place to monitor the performance of teachers and their impact on students' learning. Senior leaders undertake formal observations and the small number of staff are encouraged to observe each other, share best practice and undertake appropriate professional development.
- Although the school's monitoring of students' progress and the provision made for them have been mostly effective, the school acknowledges that it had been too slow to respond to one group's underachievement. This has now been addressed and this group is now making good progress.
- The school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through assemblies and lessons is very good, with opportunities planned to permeate throughout the school day. The volunteers on the school council are keen to promote student action, and initiatives such as the 'Learning to Lead' cross-curricular sessions enable students to actively participate in school improvement planning and action.
- The executive headteacher oversees both St Mark's Church of England School and St Gregory's Catholic College in a collaborative federation. As a result, links between the two schools are very strong with students able to access both GCSE courses and extra-curricular activities on either site. As a result, a wide range of opportunities is available for students at St Mark's such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and trips abroad. Participation rates are high and monitored carefully by senior leaders.
- School leaders have undertaken a thorough analysis of the current, 'stage not age' curriculum and through extensive consultation have decided to create a new Key Stage 3/4 curriculum that will be launched in September 2013. The new curriculum aims to provide a range of courses, some of which are new to the school, for instance BTEC science, to ensure that all students make rapid progress. The opening of the collaborative sixth form in the autumn term of 2013 will give students the opportunity to continue to study post-16.
- A senior leader oversees the small number of students attending either The Link alternative provision or courses at St Gregory's Catholic College. There is a rigorous system in place to monitor the progress, attendance and specific learning needs of these students overseen by a senior leader.
- Due to effective advice and guidance in Year 11, all students went on to further training or employment on leaving the school.

■ The local authority has a thorough understanding of the school's improvement journey since the appointment of the executive headteacher. It knows the school's strengths and areas for development. Though the school is considered low priority, the local authority has provided effective support in developing the shared sixth form provision and the induction of the new head of science. It is fully supportive of the capacity of the executive headteacher to make further improvements to the school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and is clear about its role in holding the executive headteacher and other senior leaders to account. Governors share the executive headteacher's vision for the school to be a community school and are working hard to promote this locally.
- The governing body now has an astute understanding of performance data, and of the progress and attainment of students. It clearly challenges school leaders on the impact of pupil premium funding on students' achievement. It works effectively with the executive headteacher to ensure that teachers' performance is managed robustly and underperformance is tackled.
- All safeguarding requirements are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

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## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	109328
<b>Local authority</b>	Bath and North East Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	412754

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	250
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Chair</b>	Roger Coombe
<b>Headteacher</b>	Raymond Friel
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26–27 January 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01225 312661
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