

# St Mark's West Essex Catholic School

Tripton Road, Harlow, CM18 6AA

**Inspection dates** 3–4 July 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Standards are average but rising in all subjects, and achievement is rising rapidly.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do well because their needs are understood and support is effective.
- The school's checking and review of its teaching is consistently accurate. Teaching is good. Students respond very positively to the well-planned lessons.
- Standards in the sixth form are rising as a direct result of improvements made in teaching.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Students work particularly well together, feel safe, and have a very positive attitude to learning.
- Students are courteous, and a calm social atmosphere is evident around the school.
- Attendance is above the national average.
- Additional government funding has been used well to support students who need extra help. As a result, they achieve as well and often better than their peers.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff are proud to be part of a rapidly improving team.
- Senior staff have been very well supported by the experienced educationalists who have advised the governing body. Working together, senior staff and governors have driven rapid improvement in teaching and achievement.
- The governing body has been approached by the other secondary schools in Harlow to extend access to the sixth form provision across the town.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not achieve equally well in all subjects and all year groups.
- The impact of additionally funded support is not sufficiently clear on the school's website.
- Not all staff make full use of the assessment data available to match work in lessons to student's abilities so that it is neither too easy nor too hard.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons and reviewed the inspection evidence gathered during the previous monitoring inspection. All staff were offered professional feedback about the lessons inspectors observed.
- Meetings and informal discussions were held with groups of students. Meetings were arranged with the governing body, nominated staff and a representative of the local authority.
- There were no current responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised statistical information about students' achievement which was then cross-referenced to the work in the students' books.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including the school improvement plan, the analysis of students' progress, the results of staff questionnaires, the records of lesson observations conducted by senior staff, the headteacher's reports to the governing body, and the minutes of governing body meetings.

## Inspection team

David Jones, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional Inspector

Rosemarie McCarthy

Additional Inspector

Geoffrey Marston

Additional Inspector

## Full report

*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.*

### Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of students are White British. Around one in three students represents other nationalities, and one in five students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is half the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and those with a parent in the armed services.
- The proportion of students who need extra help with their learning because they are disabled or have special educational needs is average. These include students supported at school action, school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs.
- A very small number of students who are in danger of exclusion are placed at alternative provision organised by the local authority at the Children's Support Service in Harlow and Harlow Education Consortium.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The predecessor school converted to academy status in August 2011 and a decision was taken to retain the predecessor school's name. While it has a predominantly Catholic intake, the school also takes students from other faiths.
- The school was given a Notice to Improve in March 2012 and was visited by HMI in October 2012.

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

- Raise standards and ensure that students progress equally well in all subjects and all year groups by:
  - ensuring that staff make consistent use of the school's robust assessment data to plan lessons that fully cater to the abilities of all students
  - sharing good classroom practice
  - providing staff with well-targeted professional development opportunities.
- Ensure that the impact of the school's effective use of pupil premium funds is accessible on the school's website.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' progress is improving rapidly in all subjects. An effective system of assessment and recording helped the school to identify where improvements were needed, and, in 2012, a rise in standards brought attainment into line with the national average.
- Target setting is well organised; the students' are given minimum expected progress levels which are significantly above national expectations. HMI reviewed the school's data and cross-referenced this with the students' current work, noting the impact of the improvements secured in teaching. Standards are rising across all the English Baccalaureate subjects.
- The very small number of students who receive alternative provision off-site make appropriate progress.
- The students who represent a wide variety of other ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language achieve well and many make outstanding progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, make good progress because of the quality of teaching, the early identification of need and the individual support provided. Provision for those who find learning difficult is very well organised and reviewed termly.
- Those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority make good progress. This is because of the wide range of personal and academic support provided, funded in part through the pupil premium. In 2012, these pupils were the equivalent of around one term behind their peers in English and mathematics. The gap is now less than half that. Interestingly, a higher proportion of those known to be eligible for free school meals secured a high grade pass in all the English Baccalaureate subjects compared to other students in the school. Those who have received individualised support during the last year progressed at least as rapidly as the rest of the students.
- The use of early entry to GCSE examinations is very effectively managed to make certain that students can achieve well before focusing on higher grades or moving on to more demanding courses.
- In 2011, inconsistencies in rates of progress were evident in some subjects; for example, in science and religious education. Improvements have been made in the last six months as staff changes have brought better teaching and more challenging examination courses have been introduced.
- Standards in the sixth form are close to or above the national averages and rising. Where there were weaknesses in the 2012 results, for example in mathematics and sociology, prompt action by the senior leadership team has improved the quality of teaching and standards are rising. Students are now making good progress from their individual starting points.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection, a change evident during the HMI monitoring visit in October 2012. During this inspection, three quarters of the lessons observed were good or better, a figure close to the records maintained by the school. The

improvement in teaching secured since September 2012 is the primary reason behind the good progress now made by students. Teaching has improved notably in the English Baccalaureate subjects and good teaching predominates in all subjects.

- Lessons are particularly well focused on the examination syllabus and the marking criteria provided by the examination board. In a Year 10 geography lesson, the teaching was outstanding because it was having a very marked impact on progress. The teacher had planned activities that stimulated learning, questioning assessed progress accurately, and well-chosen resources secured collaborative working.
- Students work well in small groups and staff use this time effectively to tackle the gaps in the students' knowledge or understanding. Peer-group collaboration was evident in most lessons and many pupils provided accurate explanations when questioned by other students.
- Evidence from a scrutiny of the students' books records the improvement in marking since the last inspection, with students now given clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Good teaching was noted in advanced level mathematics and sociology and students spoke enthusiastically about the changes made in provision and the support now available. The school receives regular support from the Russell Group of universities with Phd students offering tuition in their doctoral specialism. HMI visited one of these sessions and found the students captivated by the manner in which the visitor explained major elements of volcanology.
- Many teachers show strong subject knowledge which is consistently used to great effect in all subjects.
- Most lesson planning is detailed and thorough, showing teachers' strong personal knowledge of the students. However, not all staff make full use of the detailed assessment data available to them to ensure that lessons cater for students' different abilities. Where teaching required improvement, opportunities were missed to push students to achieve higher levels through more challenging tasks.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and to the care, guidance and support they receive at school. Behaviour is exemplary and exclusions are below average.
  - Attendance is above average and has been for some time. The monitoring of attendance is rigorous and the school has high expectations of students and their families. Communication with parents and carers is good. Punctuality in the mornings is good.
  - Students have a very good understanding of safety matters, particularly e-safety when using the internet. They state that bullying, racism and discrimination are rare and that they are dealt with very effectively.
  - Students exercise notable social and moral values with other students and adults. They respect the views of their peers and listen very respectfully to the ideas and opinions expressed. In an outstanding tutorial session, the teacher's carefully judged questioning on the topic of assisted suicide allowed Year 10 students to express personal views that would have been a credit to an
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A-level class.

- HMI took many formal and informal opportunities to speak with students, all of whom displayed a very mature attitude.
- Staff supervision is low-key and well distributed. Students are keen to engage staff and visiting adults in conversation when out of the classroom, and many are very keen to say how they appreciate seeing staff around the school.

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

- The headteacher and the senior team make clear their high expectations and lead by example. The working relationship between the senior team and the strengthened governing body has been a key factor in the progress the school has made since the last inspection.
- Staff and students have a very positive opinion of the headteacher's leadership and are proud to be part of the improvement secured.
- The monitoring of teaching by senior staff is rigorous and consistently accurate. From this secure performance management structure, an effective range of staff development opportunities has been developed to drive forward the improvement in teaching. Leaders recognise that continuing professional development for teachers and sharing the best practice that already exists within the school are key to moving teaching to the next level.
- Senior leaders worked alongside HMI in the joint evaluation of teaching during the monitoring visit and during this inspection. The views they expressed consistently matched the judgements given by the inspectors.
- Self-evaluation is robust and the school's actions are carefully planned, regularly reviewed and very effective. The performance management targets set by the governing body for the headteacher, and by the senior team for every member of staff, are linked to improvements in teaching and provision.
- Pupil premium funds are used effectively to improve standards. The improvements made in mathematics, and for those who find learning difficult, have been supported by this government funding and the school's own budget. However, the wide range of information available on the use and impact of the pupil premium is not easily accessible via the school's website.
- The curriculum changes are being trialled in mathematics as a response to government requirements on how subjects are to be examined. The approach received from the other secondary schools in the town, for joint working on sixth form provision, is planned to become a formal partnership in 2014.
- The headteacher and governing body made very good use of their connections with the Catholic community and the effective support of Essex local authority to strengthen the governing body. The headteachers of three outstanding schools work with senior staff and support the governing body's monitoring of standards and achievement.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body is strong, well trained and focused on the needs of the community. The

use of additional educational expertise, by the governing body, has been a critical part of the school improvement successes secured to date. Governors are fully informed about how the school is performing. The governing body is able to provide strong challenge because of the clarity of information available from a senior management team with a relentless focus on high-quality education for all. The governing body is knowledgeable and consistently compares the school's progress to national and local standards. Governors make regular visits to the school and understand where teaching is most effective. They check the impact of senior staff reviews of teaching and ensure that teachers' progress through the pay scales or tenure in the school is related to their effectiveness in raising standards. Governors set targets for the headteacher and check carefully how well these are being met. Governors know how the pupil premium funding is being spent and closely monitor the impact of this and all other spending to ensure that the school budget is being used effectively to help pupils make rapid progress. The governing body ensures that requirements for the safeguarding of students are met.

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## 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>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137058
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	408876

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy converter
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	969
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	184
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Patrick Hay
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elaine Heaphy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 421267
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