

St Mary's RC High School

Lugwardine, Hereford, HR1 4DR

Inspection dates 4–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
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.

- Students make good progress and the proportion achieving five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, is typically significantly above average.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects motivates students.
- Teaching is good and there are examples of outstanding teaching across several subject areas, including English and mathematics.
- Behaviour is outstanding and attendance is above average because the school's distinctive ethos promotes a caring and accepting learning environment where students feel happy and secure.
- Leaders are improving teaching by supporting teachers to put into effect the latest research in best practice in the classroom.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and hold senior leaders effectively to account.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Boys' achievement is good but they do not make the same accelerated rates of progress as girls.
- Not all students know what grade they are working at because the systems to record attainment are not being consistently applied.
- In mathematics, students eligible for the pupil premium do not progress as well as other students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons, six of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and subject leaders, groups of students and the Chair and members of the Governing Body, and spoke with parents at a Year 9 parents' evening.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 117 parents who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire, and the five parents who contacted the inspection team by email. They analysed the results of the 16 replies to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at the school's data on students' progress, lesson plans, minutes of meetings and records relating to behaviour, safety and attendance. They also reviewed the school's checks on how well it is doing and school improvement plans.

Inspection team

Lisa Fraser, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Deborah Wring

Additional Inspector

David Bowles

Additional Inspector

Suha Ahmad

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most secondary schools.
- The majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from service families, is well below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The school does not make any use of alternative provision.
- The headteacher is a national leader in education and has recently begun to support senior leaders in a nearby secondary school.
- St Mary's RC High School is federated with St Joseph's RC Primary in Ross-on-Wye and the headteacher leads both schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by supporting teachers to:
 - enable boys to make the same rates of accelerated progress as girls by developing strategies to enhance their learning both in school and at home
 - make sure that students eligible for the pupil premium achieve as well as their peers in mathematics by monitoring their progress closely and adjusting support where appropriate
 - implement robust tracking systems so all students know the grade or level at which they are working.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with skills in reading, writing and mathematics which are well above average. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of students achieving five passes at GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is high. A very large proportion of students exceed nationally expected progress in both English and mathematics.
- In mathematics, a small number of students were entered early for their GCSE examination last year with no negative impact on their attainment.
- In 2013 the proportion of more-able students who attained the top grades increased. A third of all GCSE grades awarded were A* or A, and an above-average proportion of students achieved the top grades in French, geography and religious education. Students' attainment in chemistry, physics and biology was also above average. This is because students, particularly girls, are extremely well motivated and keen to do well.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make the same good progress as their peers because they receive good support from teaching assistants in lessons.
- Year 7 catch-up funding has been used to provide extra teaching assistants and reading schemes. As a result, weaker readers have made good gains in their learning.
- Older students say they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning. They appreciate the good input from the school's careers adviser and the numerous careers conventions and events which help them to make the transition to post-16 study.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium who achieve five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is now in line with their peers. Additional funding has been spent on providing students with extra support through teaching assistants and specific schemes to improve their reading. However, the school has been less successful in making sure these students progress as rapidly as their peers in mathematics. This is because senior leaders are not monitoring the impact of additional funding in enough depth or adjusting plans where appropriate.
- Inspectors observed boys' good progress and engagement in lessons during the inspection. However, boys are not yet making the same rates of accelerated progress as girls because teachers have not developed an effective range of strategies to enhance boys' learning further in lessons or through homework.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is typically good. Some examples of outstanding teaching were seen in several subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Teachers convey high expectations and their good subject knowledge and evident enthusiasm for their subjects motivate students. Teaching is outstanding when students understand the relevance of what they are learning to their everyday lives. For example, students made outstanding progress in a Year 11 religious education lesson when encouraged to reflect and offer their own responses to the question of whether Christmas has lost its religious meaning.

- Teachers use well-focused questioning techniques, not only to check students' understanding but also to deepen their knowledge and extend their learning. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson on simplifying algebraic fractions, students' achievement was outstanding as a result of the teacher's expert use of probing questions which encouraged students to demonstrate their understanding and learn from each other.
- Students are particularly articulate because there are numerous opportunities in lessons to explore and share their ideas in pairs and groups.
- The quality of verbal and written feedback received by students is good. They are given clear advice about what they need to do to improve their work. However, students are not all aware of the grade or level at which they are currently working.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning, are keen to do well and take an enthusiastic part in lessons, working especially well collaboratively. Inspectors observed excellent behaviour both in lessons and around the school. This contributes to the outstandingly calm and orderly learning environment. Students show high levels of respect for the school's facilities.
- Attendance is above average because students are proud of their school and value what it offers them. Relationships between students and their teachers are very strong. Students feel well supported in their learning and respond positively to teachers' encouragement to achieve their very best by persevering through any challenges.
- Parents and students agree that students are safe in school. Students have an excellent understanding of bullying in all its forms, including cyber-bullying and homophobia.
- Senior leaders are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all. Students are confident that school leaders take a firm stance against any rare instances of discriminatory behaviour. Incidents of bullying are very low as a result of the school's distinctive ethos which promotes a caring and accepting community.
- Opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills are numerous. Older students spoke enthusiastically to inspectors about their role as peer mentors, in addition to other responsibilities such as prefects and house and sports captains. During the inspection, a group of Year 7 students developed and led a thought-provoking assembly on the theme of Advent which was well received by their peers. As a result of these opportunities, students grow in confidence and maturity and they are particularly polite, friendly and welcoming to visitors.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have created a climate for learning where both students and staff feel happy and secure. As a result, students have outstandingly positive attitudes to learning and achievement has been consistently good over a sustained period.
- Senior leaders encourage teachers to improve their practice by incorporating the latest approaches in learning into their teaching. Training time focuses on research based around best practice in the classroom. Teachers work collaboratively to reflect upon their performance and

to discuss and develop innovative ideas, particularly around enhancing students' sense of well-being.

- The management of teachers' performance is linked to the national 'Teachers' Standards' and now informs decisions around pay. Subject leaders are closely involved in tackling any instances of underperformance in their departments.
- The curriculum prepares students well for the next stage in their learning. Older students speak positively about the benefits of the week's work experience placement they complete. Good transition arrangements are in place as a result of the school's federation with St Joseph's primary school. Students in Years 5 and 6 are regularly taught on the school site throughout the year and this supports them to make the move to high school.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. It is reinforced by the school's ethos, good assemblies which deliver powerful moral messages and outstanding teaching in religious education. Students show high levels of understanding and respect both for their personal faith and for the views and beliefs of others. The wide range of organised clubs and visits on offer are greatly valued by students.
- Several parents spoke with the inspection team and expressed their appreciation for the school's work, particularly the care and guidance students receive. As a national leader in education, the headteacher has very recently begun to support a nearby secondary school to raise standards.
- The systems for monitoring and tracking students' achievement are currently under review. Data are not yet analysed sufficiently rigorously to enable leaders to track the progress of groups of students with precision. This means that actions to ensure that boys match girls' accelerated progress, and students eligible for the pupil premium make the same rates of progress as their peers in mathematics, are not necessarily having the impact needed.
- The school maintains a good relationship with the local authority and receives light touch support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and know about the quality of teaching, the management of staff performance and what the school is doing to reward good teaching and tackle underperformance. As a result, the governing body provides a good balance of support and challenge to senior leaders. Students' safety is a high priority for the governing body: a safeguarding audit has recently been conducted. Governors have a clear understanding of published data and are committed to supporting the school by attending appropriate training. They make sure national 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>

School details

Unique reference number	116992
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	427204

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	742
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Burbidge
Headteacher	Clive Lambert
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2007
Telephone number	01432 850416
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