

# St Mary Magdalene Academy: The Courtyard

St David's Church, Westbourne Road, Islington, London N7 8AB

**Inspection dates** 28–29 April 2015

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected    |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Good                        | 2        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Sixth form provision           |                      | Good                        | 2        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching is not consistently good across all subjects and classes. Teachers do not always have a clear understanding about how much progress their students should be making.
- Teachers have not used accurate starting points for each student to help them set aspirational targets. Learning activities are not always pitched at the correct level. As a result, some students, including those who are more able, make slower progress than they should.
- Too many students are not making good progress in English and mathematics. Teachers are not checking that students are making expected progress in line with their prior achievements in these subjects.
- Some middle leaders are not clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- Leaders and governors' evaluation of students' progress is not based on accurate information. Leaders do not always acquire enough assessment information when students join the school. They are therefore unable to judge if students are making good progress from their starting points or not.
- Governors are not checking that the pupil premium funding is making a difference to eligible students or monitoring the performance of different groups of students over time.

### The school has the following strengths

- The sixth form is good. Students are helped to choose courses that reflect their interests and abilities. They are prepared well for their next steps and make good progress.
- Behaviour and safety is good. Nearly all students attend very regularly and consider themselves to be safe and well supported. Staff know students well and help them engage with their learning, using effective strategies that address their different needs.
- The curriculum is good. Students are provided with a wide range of learning opportunities using the resources of the main academy where appropriate. The personal development curriculum is innovative, allowing students to make good progress towards social, emotional and behavioural targets.
- Leaders and governors have an aspirational vision for the further development of the Courtyard. Planned improvements for next year include actions to raise the quality of teaching and strengthen leadership and management.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed and spoke to staff and students in lessons taught at the Courtyard and at the St Mary Magdalene secondary academy. Nearly all observations were conducted jointly with the acting headteacher. A scrutiny of students' English and mathematics books was carried out to check the quality of learning over time.
- Meetings were held with the Executive Director of the academy trust, the acting headteacher, the deputy headteacher responsible for behaviour, a group of teachers and teaching assistants and the Chair of the Governing Body. A conversation was held with a representative from the local authority responsible for special educational needs who also sits on the governing body. Students were spoken to informally throughout the inspection.
- The inspector was unable to take account of parental views expressed through the Parent View survey due to the low number of responses. Account was taken of their views recorded in the school's own parental comments book, which is completed by parents every term.
- The ten staff questionnaires returned during the inspection were considered.
- The inspector scrutinised information about student achievement and checked a sample of individual student files. Records relating to behaviour and attendance were evaluated.
- Documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work and governing body minutes were looked at.
- A review of all safeguarding records and procedures was carried out.

## Inspection team

Lesley Cox, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Courtyard is a small special school which will support 36 students when full. It was established as a new free school in September 2013. This is its first inspection. The school forms part of the St Mary Magdalene Academy Trust and is overseen by the Trustees and the Executive Director. It is led and managed by its own headteacher and governing body. Most students travel to St Mary Magdalene Academy for some of their lessons.
- The substantive headteacher is currently on maternity leave and a seconded leader from the academy has led the school since September 2014.
- The school is currently situated in temporary accommodation at a church close to the main academy site. A permanent school building is being constructed and the school plans to move there in Autumn 2015.
- All students attending the school have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and/or speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD). Admissions to the school are arranged through the local authority.
- Students join the school at different points in their education, with most joining at the beginning of Year 9 or in the sixth form. Some travel to attend the school from outside the local authority area.
- All students are capable of achieving academic success at GCSE or entry level and can engage with the national curriculum at Key Stage 4. Students in the sixth form are entered for a wide range of examinations, including at A level.
- Very few students are eligible for the additional pupil premium funding compared to the national average, although the overall number changes as students join the school.
- There are currently very few students who do not speak English as their first language.
- Some students attend level 1 courses in construction or hair and beauty at the Samuel Rhodes MLD School for one afternoon a week.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that all students make rapid and sustained progress, including in English and mathematics by:
  - ensuring all teachers know what students have already achieved when they arrive and set aspirational targets for them to work towards
  - ensuring that teachers plan learning activities that challenge all students, particularly those who are more able
  - ensuring all teachers accurately assess and report on how much progress students are making.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that it is at least good by:
  - ensuring that leaders at all levels know what they are responsible for and are held to account for meeting improvement targets
  - ensuring that systems for gathering, recording and evaluating achievement information are improved and used effectively to monitor how much progress individuals and groups of students are making
  - gathering sufficient information when all students first join the school so that accurate starting points and appropriate targets can be quickly established
  - checking that all policies are up to date and reflect current guidance.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have been over-generous in their evaluation of how much progress students are making. This is because systems for establishing a secure baseline for achievement when students join the school are not effective. Leaders therefore do not know if the progress students make in lessons is good enough. Systems for tracking behaviour and attendance are more efficient and leaders monitor these carefully to ensure there are no inequalities or discrimination issues that need to be addressed.
- Systems for writing and reviewing school policies are still developing. Leaders have not ensured that all policies have been updated in line with current guidance. For example, the safeguarding policy does not yet reflect the *Keeping Children Safe in Education* guidance, issued in April 2014, although staff have received training that reflects the new guidance. Other policies, such as the Special Educational Needs Policy and Report, reflect the practice and outcomes of the main academy and not those of the Courtyard.
- Some leaders require further development to help them to become effective middle leaders because they are new to their roles and lack experience. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) of the main academy was unaware that they also held responsibility for students at the Courtyard. However, this has not prevented leaders from supporting the special educational needs of all students appropriately.
- The acting headteacher monitors the quality of teaching regularly. When teaching has been judged to be less than good, additional support and guidance have been provided. While teaching standards across the school have improved, inconsistencies remain. Leaders have recognised that further support for the effective management and teaching of English is required to ensure that students make better progress.
- Leaders have worked hard to establish the new school and have gained the trust and support of staff, students and parents. The academy director and governors have ensured that leaders have not been distracted from teaching and learning priorities by managing the new building and premises development themselves.
- Performance management arrangements have been adopted following the procedures used by the main academy. These apply to both qualified and unqualified staff and progression through the appropriate pay scales is dependent on agreed targets being met.
- The Courtyard has been well supported by the academy trust of St Mary Magdalene and strong partnerships with teachers and leaders from the mainstream school benefit all students and staff. Leaders have developed links with a local outstanding school for students with special educational needs which has provided training about autistic spectrum disorders.
- The quality of the curriculum offered to all students is good. The school makes effective use of the resources of the main academy and other providers. A wide range of subjects can be studied either by joining mainstream classes or receiving small group or one-to-one tuition at the Courtyard. Leaders have developed appropriate academic and vocational pathways for students to follow that support their needs, prepare them well for life in modern Britain and improve their skills in literacy and numeracy. The curriculum promotes good social, moral, spiritual and cultural development through a regular programme of assemblies and visits that link closely to activities taught in lessons. All students participate in a self-discovery programme that reflects the ethos and global citizenship values of the academy trust.
- Some students study construction or hair and beauty courses at another school for one afternoon a week. Leaders check that they are on target to achieve appropriate qualifications and are kept safe, by providing effective support for them.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that vulnerable students are supported well because staff work closely with their families and a wide range of professionals and agencies.
- Students in Year 11 and the sixth form are provided with independent information, advice and guidance that help them make informed choices about their next steps. Most students in Year 11 join the sixth form and nearly all students complete the courses they join. Leaders ensure that they are prepared carefully for forthcoming changes by arranging work placements and helping them to make appropriate applications for colleges or universities. Careers information for younger students is provided as part of their citizenship lessons and reinforced by tutors.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are very proactive in supporting the school and give generously of their time and expertise. They have arranged for the school to be housed in a high quality, attractive building until the permanent site is developed. They have a clear vision for the role of the school, supporting students with special educational needs within the local community. They work closely with the local authority, which is represented on the governing body. Governing body minutes demonstrate that searching questions are asked and governors are providing strong support and high levels of challenge to school

leaders. However, they do not always check that what they are being told is correct or secure their understanding by asking for further information. For example, they have not recognised the limitations of the current assessment tracking system.

- Governors do not monitor the progress of different groups of students closely enough. They do not check that pupils entitled to the additional pupil premium funding are making sufficient progress. They do not know if the funding is making a difference to them or compare their progress with other students.
- Governors have kept a close eye on the quality of teaching and know where improvements are needed. However, they have not acted quickly enough to support the unqualified staff they have appointed or ensured that leaders were empowered to carry out the roles they have been given. They have ensured that staff receive rewards appropriate to their performance.
- The governing body has ensured that the school is financially secure and fulfilled all its statutory safeguarding responsibilities.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students, including those in the sixth form, is good.
- Students are successfully helped to develop positive attitudes to learning and overcome any anxieties. This is reflected in their high attendance rates and good levels of engagement in lessons, both on site and elsewhere.
- Students demonstrate high levels of tolerance for the behaviours and different learning styles of other pupils. Low-level disruption to learning is uncommon and when it does occur, it is well managed and learning recommences quickly.
- Students move sensibly around the building and between the Courtyard and the main academy site, demonstrating high standards of consideration towards others. They are careful of the beautiful church building they are currently taught in and treat their surroundings with respect.
- The new behaviour and rewards policy has been implemented consistently throughout the school and students are aware of the high expectations that staff have regarding behaviour. As a result, the frequency of behaviour incidents is starting to decline in all year groups, apart from in Year 10.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because some students do not always demonstrate a love of learning by working independently or being self motivated. For example, some students still require the encouragement and support of adults to stay on task for longer periods.
- Although most staff and parents express no concerns about behaviour, a small number of staff do not think that behaviour is always good. A very small number of students have been persistently disruptive or aggressive and have been excluded. In these cases, the school have reviewed the provision offered and arranged for additional support to be made available.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- All activities are carefully planned and risk assessed so that the appropriate levels of support can be provided. Students say that they feel safe and know where to go for help when they need it.
- Transitions between activities are well managed. Students know their schedules and are prepared carefully for any unexpected changes. They understand how to keep safe when attending lessons off site.
- Students are taught about e-safety and cyberbullying. Incidents of bullying are rare and are quickly followed up to ensure that they are not repeated. A high quality personal, social and health education programme includes sex and relationship advice and students are prepared well for their adult lives.
- Tutors support students' pastoral needs very effectively. They discuss and support individual concerns, raising awareness of any challenges their students will face as young adults within the wider community.
- Safety is not outstanding because leaders have not ensured that the safeguarding policy has been updated and arrangements for inducting new staff in safeguarding procedures are not always implemented quickly enough.

## The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Although teaching across subjects, classes and key stages is improving, it is not consistently good. Teachers do not always plan appropriate activities to meet the needs of all students. This is because they

do not establish students' starting points accurately enough when they join the school from Year 9.

- Systems for reporting achievement and progress are not applied consistently or fully understood by all teachers. Some teacher assessments are not supported by the quality of work seen in students' books.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of students because they are not always aware of what they are capable of achieving. This means students are sometimes provided with work that is either too easy or too hard, or is repeated unnecessarily. Observations and checks on the quality of work in books suggest that students generally make the same amount of progress because they are all doing the same work at the same speed. More able students could work faster and make better progress.
- In English and mathematics, teaching is constrained by the level of examination that students have been entered for. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to check the wider understanding of students or provide them with chances to practise and apply the skills they have learnt. This slows progress and prevents higher levels of engagement by some students.
- Sixth form teaching is more effective because teachers have a better understanding of what students have already achieved and they are entered for courses that meet their individual needs.
- Teachers are being helped to develop their skills and expertise through appropriate training. They are increasingly provided with opportunities to work with subject specialists from the main academy. This has helped them to moderate students' work and plan programmes of study that can be delivered across mainstream lessons and in smaller groups at the Courtyard.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support the learning of students at the Courtyard. They are valued members of the team who undertake additional responsibilities to enhance the learning and well-being of students. In some lessons at the main academy, they are not utilised as effectively as they could be because teachers do not involve them in the planning and assessment of learning activities.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy has a high priority and strategies for developing these skills are applied effectively. All teachers provide regular feedback to help students improve. For example, errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are highlighted and time provided for students to make corrections. Tutors provide opportunities for students to read regularly and encourage them to access the library at the main academy. Staff are skilled in modelling and promoting good communication skills. They ask thoughtful questions that encourage students to respond. This allows them to check understanding and reinforce learning. As a result, most students can demonstrate improvements in these skills.
- All staff help deliver the self-discovery programme which has been developed by the school to meet the social, emotional and behavioural needs of students. Students make good progress in these lessons because adults understand their individual needs well and target learning activities appropriately. Global citizenship values are reinforced and students are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because too many students are not making good progress in English and mathematics. An analysis of the available assessment tracking information, carried out by the inspector, showed that the number of students making and exceeding expected progress in these subjects is low compared to national proportions. However, because the assessment information collected by the school is unreliable and starting points have not been accurately established, the precise number making expected progress or better remains unclear.
- A few students are more able and have achieved well in Key Stage 2 national tests in English and mathematics. These students make less progress than they should because they are not always taught at the correct level when they join the school.
- Students join the school at different points in their education and with different levels of attainment. Specific needs, identified in statements and education, health and care plans, are carefully evaluated as part of the referral process and appropriate support is provided. This ensures that students generally make good progress towards their social, emotional and behavioural targets.
- Students begin their Key Stage 4 courses in Year 9 but are not entered early for examinations. This allows them time to adjust to their new placement and become increasingly confident about their abilities.
- Hardly any students were entered for examinations last year as the number of students enrolled at the school was very low. This year, more students in Year 11 and the sixth form will be entered for examinations in a range of subjects including at entry, GCSE and A level. The school predicts that most will reach the targets that have been set for them.
- Sixth form students make good progress from their starting points. Most are on track to gain accreditation at an appropriate level in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, art, information technology, and home cooking or in performing arts subjects.

- An analysis of students' individual assessment information showed that there are no significant differences in the performance of different groups within the school. Due to the very small number of students eligible for the additional pupil premium funding and the lack of any validated examination information to date, it is not possible to judge how well this group is achieving compared to their peers within the school or nationally in English and mathematics.
- All students make good progress in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. This is because staff constantly reinforce these skills across all subjects.
- Students who attend vocational courses elsewhere make good progress because they are well supported, attend regularly and their achievements are monitored carefully.

### The sixth form provision

is good

- The quality of the sixth form provision is good.
- Students in the sixth form generally make better progress than their peers in Key Stage 4 because their needs are better understood by teachers when they first arrive. Leaders know what students have already achieved and use this information to help them select appropriate courses to study.
- Students are provided with good quality information and support to help them prepare for their adult lives when they leave the school.
- The school helps older students to become increasingly independent when moving between sites, working unsupported in lessons and undertaking leadership roles. Consequently, they learn how to keep themselves safe and behave well.
- Students' pastoral and social needs are supported well. They are able to work within smaller groups at the Courtyard but are fully included within the pastoral systems of the main academy. This allows them to benefit from the rich social, moral, spiritual and cultural opportunities the school and the academy trust provide.

## 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> | 139418    |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Islington |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 450274    |

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

|                                               |                              |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                         | Special                      |
| <b>School category</b>                        | Academy free school          |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                    | 14–19                        |
| <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>    | 27                           |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 9                            |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                  | The governing body           |
| <b>Chair</b>                                  | Jonathan Rust                |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                            | Emma Robinson ( Acting)      |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>     | n/a                          |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 020 7607 4771                |
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