

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Deborah Shepherd  
Headteacher  
St Mary Magdalene Academy: the Courtyard  
Holloway Road  
Islington  
London  
N7 8LT

Dear Mrs Shepherd

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary Magdalene Academy: the Courtyard**

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the external reviews of governance and the pupil premium are completed as a priority
- fully establish the new procedures for teaching, learning and assessment so that all pupils make good or better progress.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the executive director, other leaders, members of the governing body including the Chair, and a representative of the local authority. The meetings were to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school development plan, visited lessons to observe

learning and spoke to pupils and staff informally around the school. A range of documents were scrutinised which included information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; school policies and procedures; and records of meetings.

## **Context**

At the time of the last section 5 inspection, an acting headteacher was in post. The substantive headteacher has now returned from maternity leave. The school has experienced a number of staffing changes. The teacher responsible for mathematics left at Christmas. The school remains on the site of St David's Church. It originally expected to take occupancy of the new premises in December 2014. However, the school will now move to its new site in April 2016.

## **Main findings**

Since the last section 5 inspection, you have reviewed the areas for improvement and formed a clear plan for the school. You have undertaken a review of pupil funding and evaluated the curriculum well. Consequently, you have a clear understanding of the challenges presented to you as a leader. You and your leadership team began to implement the actions for improvement at the start of the academic year. However, your deputy headteacher has had to support the teaching of mathematics since the departure of the subject teacher. As a result, the capacity of leaders to implement change has reduced.

The introduction of a new model for teaching, learning and assessment has been a priority. The progress pupils make from their different starting points is closely checked. However, a number of actions within your plan to improve the school have yet to be completed. You rightly recognise that the external review of governance has not taken place in the timescale set within the plan. Furthermore, a review of the use of pupil premium funding has not been completed.

Leaders and governors have reviewed and updated a number of policies and procedures. Teaching staff are now aware of their roles and responsibilities across the school. Procedures for safeguarding are effective. Information within the single central record and associated safeguarding checks is clear and well maintained.

You and your leaders undertake regular evaluations of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You now meet regularly with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body to review the progress made by pupils. Therefore, you are now able to make informed judgements on the quality of teaching and outcomes of all pupils. However, you are right not to be complacent and to expect that the termly visits by governors should challenge the school to improve further.

Leaders correctly identified the variation in pupils' progress between different subjects during my visit, particularly in English. Furthermore, you and your leaders were able to show where teaching staff were not following the school's expectations for teaching, learning and assessment. You have provided training to teaching staff

to set clear expectations and are challenging them to improve where required.

Leaders and teaching staff now use regular assessments to collect information on the progress made by pupils and the support they receive. Established links with St Mary Magdalene Academy enables the work of teachers to be externally evaluated. Teachers carefully review their planning and share good practice with their colleagues. You have identified that the next step for your leaders is to ensure that teaching staff moderate the work of pupils in a similarly consistent way.

During visits to lessons, we scrutinised the work of pupils together. Some of the books we looked at did not meet your expectations. Some pupils are not progressing as expected. Furthermore, in some classrooms, books remained of pupils who have since left the school. You were right to be disappointed by this, as clear procedures are in place for the assessment of pupils' learning and these are not being followed consistently well by all staff.

The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils relate well to visitors, staff and each other. Learners in the sixth form were able to describe their learning and talk about aspects they enjoy. Pupils' behaviour was most positive in those lessons planned well by teaching staff.

Teachers work well with pupils to support their individual needs. Your teaching staff are now more confident in checking the progress made by pupils. They work well together to consider appropriate actions to support the learning of all pupils. Role models of stronger practice are developing. You and your leaders recognise the importance to retain experienced staff as a priority. Therefore, you are providing teaching staff with opportunities to lead initiatives. For example, your teacher responsible for information and communication technology now leads the school's assessment system to monitor the progress of pupils. You and your deputy appropriately support her in this work.

You are confident in the actions you and your leaders have taken since September to improve the school. However, you correctly evaluate that gaps remain and in some areas for improvement actions have not been undertaken as quickly as planned.

The governing body has been particularly slow to respond to the areas for improvement since the last section 5 inspection. While governors perform their statutory duties appropriately, they have not addressed all areas for improvement. The governing body has increased its challenge to the school. However, it has not undertaken an external review of governance or the pupil premium. The governing body has evaluated its strategy to implement changes more effectively. Governors now recognise the need to take further action. They understand that they have not addressed all of the strategic challenges faced by the school, for example supporting and ensuring the successful recruitment of substantive teaching staff in both English and mathematics.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The St Mary Magdalene Academy Trust provides appropriate support for leaders and governors. The local authority officer responsible for special educational needs provides clear advice and guidance to the school. For example, she assists the school in the coordination of external health professionals to meet the needs of pupils. Leaders and governors have accessed a range of external support from the Department for Education and a range of other schools. The governing body has confirmed the appointment of a consultant to undertake an independent evaluation of governance. However, external reviews of the use of the pupil premium and the impact of governance in securing improvements has still not taken place.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for the London Borough of Islington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lambern  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**