

St Matthias School

Deans Road, Wolverhampton WV1 2BH

Inspection dates 17–18 March 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher's drive to improve the school galvanised leaders to ensure teaching improved rapidly. As a result, pupils' achievement is now good. His strong sense of moral purpose ensures the school maintains a very clear focus on equality of opportunity and respect for difference.
- Senior and most middle leaders have embraced change and been open to new ideas. This has enabled them to introduce new systems that have significantly improved outcomes for pupils.
- Rigorous monitoring systems are in place to ensure any underperformance – whether in terms of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour, or the quality of teaching – is tackled quickly and effectively.
- The curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education. It supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well, including their understanding of British values.
- Governors' confidence in school leaders has helped to maintain leaders' ambition for the school. They provide leaders with systematic and well-informed critical challenge.
- Teaching is significantly improving the progress pupils make. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and also ensure they enjoy learning. Pupils are able to improve their own work because of the valuable feedback they get from their teachers.
- Attitudes to learning and punctuality have improved significantly. Attendance is now above the national average overall and for most groups. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is calm and purposeful. Pupils feel safe at school.
- There has been a rapid improvement in the progress being made by current pupils compared to that evident in previous published results. As a result of effective teaching, pupils are now making at least good progress in a range of subjects and particularly quick progress in English. The gap between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is narrowing rapidly. In English it has closed.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all middle leaders have developed the skills and strategic understanding to lead their subjects as well, and ensure that teaching is as highly effective, as in the best. As a result, in a few subjects, pupils' progress is relatively slower.
- The attendance of a few pupils is not yet high enough to ensure their learning is not affected.
- The impact of stronger leadership and teaching in mathematics is not yet enabling pupils to make as rapid progress as in English and some other subjects.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the skills and strategic understanding of all middle leaders so that they can lead their subject areas as well as the best in the school, and, as a result, ensure that the quality of teaching is as good, and that pupils make as quick progress, as in the strongest subjects.
- Bring about improvement in the few remaining areas where teaching is not yet ensuring that pupils consistently make good progress by:
 - ensuring that the effective planning for different abilities, which is expected by the school, is always translated into effective learning activities
 - supporting the development of effective questioning so that all teachers are as good as the best in being able to challenge pupils to think hard, deepen their knowledge and understanding, and encourage the development of pupils' oral skills.
- Use the effective systems already in place to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils to improve the attendance of the few remaining pupils where this is not yet high enough.
- Ensure that the good-quality leadership and, mostly, good-quality teaching in mathematics enables pupils to make similarly rapid progress as that made by pupils in English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher's drive to improve the school, and governors' confidence in his ability to do this, have enabled him to galvanise leaders and motivate staff to ensure teaching improved rapidly so that pupils' achievement is now good. His strong sense of moral purpose has been a key influence on staff and pupils, ensuring that equality of opportunity, inclusivity and respect for difference are important features in this school. An example of this is that all pupils in the school have British sign language lessons to ensure the deaf pupils in the school are fully integrated, both socially and academically. The ambitious culture and inclusive ethos he has encouraged provides a safe, caring environment where pupils can achieve their potential and develop their social skills in readiness for the next stage of their lives.
- During the period in which the school was in special measures, there has been a real transformation in the effectiveness of leadership at all levels. Senior and middle leaders are thoroughly committed to the school and its pupils. They have welcomed the links with other schools and external consultants and the help they have provided. Open attitudes and external support have enabled school leaders to introduce considerable and effective change to systems, resulting in significantly improved outcomes for pupils. However, leaders are in no way reliant on this external support. Middle leadership, particularly in English, mathematics and science is strong and is having a significant impact on the progress pupils are making.
- Self-evaluation at whole-school and subject level is thorough and accurate. Leaders have systematically addressed all areas for improvement from the last inspection report. Their detailed analyses of the reasons for the decline in achievement of Year 11 pupils in 2015 led to prompt and effective action, particularly at subject leader level, which means that pupils currently in the school are making good progress.
- Leaders have the capacity, the will and the ambition to sustain and build on the improvements that have taken place since the school became subject to special measures. They recognise the importance of succession planning and are taking steps to embed this more effectively. All staff have worked hard to improve the quality of education provided by the school and to make it into the good school that it now is. Staff are very positive about the school. All of the 56 staff who responded to the most recent school survey said they were proud to work at the school, know what the school is trying to achieve and judge that the school is well led and managed.
- Rigorous monitoring systems are in place to ensure any underperformance by pupils is identified quickly and appropriate interventions put in place to raise achievement. There is an equally strong focus on monitoring and analysing the attendance and behaviour of groups of pupils to ensure strategies are targeted appropriately. Robust processes ensure that where the quality of teaching dips, effective and supportive actions are in place to bring about improvement. These systems are now much more streamlined and cohesive, and leaders have a very good understanding of the interrelationships of attendance, behaviour and teaching on pupils' achievement.
- Teachers are well supported by whole-school and individualised training and development. Recently this has focused particularly on deepening learning and providing pupils with real challenge in learning. Staff have embraced this enthusiastically and with very positive effect on pupils' progress. External support is also used well. For example, in art, teaching and assessment is being supported very effectively by an art consultant and an artist in residence and, as a result, pupils are making much improved progress.
- Performance management is linked closely to the teachers' standards and to pupil progress. A variety of evidence is used to ensure that decisions about teacher appraisal are robust, with each member of staff being held accountable in relation to their particular responsibilities. Inspectors saw clear evidence of how this more rigorous system influences decisions about pay and progression.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. It promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well, and includes a strong emphasis on British values. The provision to promote British values is clearly mapped across the curriculum so that leaders and governors can be confident of how, when and where this aspect of the curriculum is delivered. The focus on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is seen as integral to the raising of their achievement. The quality of this provision is regularly monitored by school leaders and by an external review process.
- Extensive extra-curricular sporting and other activities provide opportunities for pupils to develop their interests. A wide range of additional sessions to support learning are also provided, including opportunities for pupils who find it difficult to complete homework at home. The use of electronic tablets by all pupils facilitates this well.
- Careers guidance and support is a strong feature of the curriculum from Year 8 onwards. Pupils are encouraged to have high aspirations and many opportunities are available to encourage them to learn

about different career options. The strength of this provision is reflected in the fact that almost all Year 11 pupils progress on to further education, training or employment.

- Pupil premium funding is well targeted. The school has a clear action plan that includes appropriate success criteria. A dedicated member of the leadership team has overall responsibility for this area. In this school, where approximately two thirds of pupils are eligible for free school meals, leaders' actions have secured substantial improvement in the progress and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Similarly, the Year 7 catch-up funding is used well and is having a very positive impact on raising reading standards. This is reinforced by regular whole-school reading opportunities, such as 'Fiction Friday', and a strong focus in all lessons on promoting good levels of oral and written literacy. Despite these positive developments, leaders recognise that there is more that could be done to encourage more regular reading for pupils, particularly where they are unlikely to read at home.
- Relations with parents are strong. The most recent parental survey indicates parents' high level of confidence in school leaders and staff to provide their children with a good education. Each of the 152 parents who responded to the survey said they would recommend the school to others.
- Case study evidence about Year 11 pupils educated in alternative off-site provision, mainly in local authority pupil referral units, and the school's monitoring records about their achievement, attendance, behaviour and personal well-being indicate the extent of their challenging lives and the positive impact of the education and support they are receiving.
- Despite the strengths apparent in much of the school's middle leadership, not all middle leaders have the leadership skills and strategic approach of the best middle leaders in the school and, as a result, in a few subjects pupils are not making as much progress as they might.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the governing body have a depth of relevant experience and expertise that benefits the school. They are very well informed about educational issues and about the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
 - They are supportive of leaders but challenge them systematically and hold them stringently to account. This is particularly the case for the use and impact of pupil premium funding and the levels of progress and attendance of all groups of pupils.
 - Governors helped leaders to maintain and develop their ambition for the school during the period when they were in special measures. They have been instrumental in creating the strong and robust performance management system now in place.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Relevant staff have extensive expertise and systems are robust. Policies are detailed and up to date and appropriate training is received by staff and governors, including 'Prevent' training.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- All teachers have strong subject specialist knowledge and use this well to inform and plan their teaching. School policy requires teachers to use information about pupils' starting points to plan lessons that support and challenge pupils of all abilities to make good progress in their learning. The school's monitoring records about teaching and its impact on learning over time, and lesson observations during the inspection, indicate that mostly this is done very well.
- Records about the quality of teaching over time, meetings with pupils during the inspection and observations in lessons confirm that teaching is having a significant impact on improving the progress pupils make in their learning. Excellent relations exist between teachers and pupils. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, ensure that pupils enjoy learning and are fully engaged and are almost always challenged according to their ability. As a result, pupils want to work hard and do as well as they can.
- Teacher development has encouraged a strong focus on effective questioning to deepen knowledge and understanding and challenge pupils to think hard. Linked to this is an expectation that when pupils answer questions orally, they do so in full sentences so that they regularly practise articulating their ideas and views. Evidence of the success of this approach is provided in school monitoring records and was observed regularly in lesson observations during the inspection. However, leaders have identified a few areas where further work needs to be done to develop these skills.
- Teaching assistants are used appropriately to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs and disability; teaching assistants' skilled contribution is evident in the way that they not only support pupils but also encourage them to become self-reliant learners.
- Teachers consistently follow the school's policy on marking by identifying what pupils do well and what

they could do even better. Pupils understand the importance of teachers' feedback and are able to improve their work as a result. Exemplary practice of pupils developing the capacity to learn from their mistakes was evident in a number of subjects. In mathematics, as a result of teacher feedback, some pupils demonstrated much deeper learning following detailed revisions to work done previously.

- Assessment by teachers and subject leaders is accurate and is validated by examination boards and by moderation exercises with staff in the high-performing schools that St Matthias now has links with.
- While most teaching exemplifies very good practice, there are still a few subjects, including mathematics, where pupils are not making as much progress as they could. Observations during the inspection and the school's own monitoring of teaching over time suggest that sometimes effective planning is not reflected in actual learning activities, which then fail to meet the needs of pupils with different abilities; and not all teachers have fully developed the skills of effective questioning so that pupils are not always challenged to think hard and deepen their knowledge and understanding, or encouraged sufficiently to develop their oral skills by articulating their views and ideas.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The move to the new school building, the new, smart school uniform, new approaches to behaviour, including standing when visitors enter a classroom, plus the high expectations all staff have about how pupils will behave and what they are capable of achieving, mean that pupils are very proud to be members of St Matthias School. Pupils recognise that they are a community and that all are valued and respected in this community.
- There is strong support for pupils' physical and emotional well-being. This is evidenced well in case studies of vulnerable pupils as well as in discussions with pupils themselves. School records and other evidence indicates strong, personalised support with very good inter-agency work to ensure pupils are well looked after.
- There is very good support for pupils with special educational needs and disability, including for deaf pupils, who are fully integrated into mainstream lessons and receive appropriate support from specialist teachers and support assistants.
- The school has ensured that pupils at risk of permanent exclusion have been placed in appropriate alternative off-site provision to ensure their continued safety. The school's special educational needs coordinator regularly monitors their achievement, attendance and personal well-being and attends review meetings for these pupils. The school's detailed reports indicate strong support and guidance.
- Pupils are very confident that staff at school care for them and do all they can to ensure they are safe and well looked after. Pupils who inspectors met with during the inspection said that feeling very safe at school was an important factor in why they enjoyed coming to school. Pupils say that all forms of bullying are rare and, if it occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. School records support this. Parental responses in a recent survey of 152 parents are overwhelmingly positive about the fact that their children are well looked after at school, that the school keeps their children safe, that their children are happy at school, that pupils are well behaved and that the school deals effectively with bullying.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Attendance has improved and is now above the national average overall and for most groups, including disadvantaged pupils. Punctuality has improved significantly because pupils are keen to come to school to learn and because they understand the importance of 'lost learning time'. Pupils say 'people actually want to get to lessons now'. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen, and there has been a significant reduction in the number of detentions given. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is at least good and is often exemplary in lessons. Year 8 and 9 pupils say that behaviour is 'a lot better' than it was when they joined the school and say that the move to the new school has made it 'improve dramatically'.
- The attendance of a few pupils is not yet as high as others in the school or the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress in almost all year groups and in most subjects. The performance of current Year 11 pupils overall is not as positive as that for younger pupils in the school. This is because of the impact of the relatively large number of pupils on the school roll in Year 11 who are educated off-site, mainly in local authority pupil referral units. The school no longer uses these provisions to the same degree.
- The decline in the attainment of Year 11 pupils in 2015, particularly in mathematics, led to significant changes in the strategies to monitor the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make. These changes are now having a very significant and positive impact on achievement in all years, most subjects, and for individual groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils. The result is a significant and sustainable improvement in the progress pupils in all year groups are making. As a result, higher standards are being attained by current pupils than pupils in 2015.
- The gap between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and that made by other pupils nationally is narrowing quickly or has already closed. In English, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making at least expected progress is well above the proportion of other pupils nationally. In mathematics, the gaps are narrowing rapidly for all year groups.
- The progress made by pupils with special educational needs and disability has improved significantly. In each year group, the progress made by these pupils in English is better than the national average for all pupils. This is the case for Year 7 and 10 pupils in mathematics and for Year 7, 8 and 10 pupils in science. In other year groups, gaps are narrowing rapidly.
- The proportion of the most-able pupils making expected progress and above expected progress compares very positively with national averages for these pupils in English and mathematics. It is well above the national average for all year groups in English and is now above the national average in mathematics in all year groups. Low-ability pupils also make good progress. The Department for Education has rated the school in the top 10 nationally for the proportion of low-ability pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades C or above, including in English and mathematics.
- Pupils in alternative off-site provision do not make the same levels of progress as pupils in the school. The school supports these pupils well and monitors their progress effectively but records indicate that their achievement is influenced heavily by their often very challenging lives.
- The stronger focus on literacy in the school can be seen in pupils' workbooks, which indicate consistent identification of errors, and improvement in spelling and in the overall presentation of work, and in the routine focus on developing oral skills in lessons. Pupils' attitudes to learning observed during the inspection were positive and reflect the school's own evaluation that, for example, current Year 11 pupils overall have a much more positive attitude and work ethos than previous Year 11 pupils.
- Pupils are being well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is seen in their good attitudes to learning, their understanding of the importance of learning and how to improve on their current learning. It is also a result of the school's focus on getting them to believe in themselves and their abilities and the information and guidance that pupils are provided with about future career choices.
- The proportion of pupils making good progress in mathematics, and in a few other subjects, is increasing rapidly, but progress is not yet as substantial and sustained as that made in the strongest subjects, and in particular in English. Improved quality of teaching in these areas, while bringing about these rapid improvements, is not yet always as strong or having the significant impact it is having in other areas.

School details

Unique reference number	104387
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10008258

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	475
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arthur Thompson
Headteacher	Dean Coombes
Telephone number	01902 556 400
Website	www.st-matthias.com
Email address	enquiries@st-matthias.com
Date of previous inspection	18–19 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school moved to a new building on the same site in September 2015. It changed its name from Deansfield Community School to St Matthias School.
- The school has a resource base for pupils with hearing impairment that provides opportunities for deaf pupils from Wolverhampton and beyond to be educated in a mainstream environment while simultaneously accessing specialist teaching and support. There are currently three deaf pupils in the school.
- The school places pupils in the following alternative off-site provision: The Braybrook Centre, a key stage 3 pupil referral unit; The Orchard Centre, a home and hospital pupil referral unit; Midpoint Centre, a key stage 4 pupil referral unit; and Nova Training, a private training provider. From 2016, these provisions will not be used to the same extent because the school's permanent exclusion policy is changing.
- The school has received external support and validation for its assessment in mathematics from Haybridge High School and Sixth Form. Within the last year it has established a more formal partnership with Earls High School, whose headteacher is a national leader in education. It has received support for teaching and learning, leadership and management, literacy and mathematics from this academy.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 17 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders, and visited form periods and a Year 8 assembly. They observed pupils arriving and leaving school and also around the school during lesson and non-lesson times.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils, and the chair and five members of the governing body. The lead inspector spoke by telephone to the headteacher of Earls High School, whose school is supporting St Matthias School.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's self-evaluation document, improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, the headteacher's report to the governing body, a range of monitoring records and school data about progress, assessment, behaviour and attendance. They reviewed the single central record and a range of school policies.
- No responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online parent survey) were available. However, the school had undertaken its own survey of parents, staff and pupils in February 2016 when the views of 152 parents, 56 staff and 412 pupils were gathered.

Inspection team

Gwen Coates, lead inspector

Graham Tyrer

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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