

St Mary's Catholic High School

Woburn Road, Croydon, Surrey CR9 2EE

Inspection dates

1–2 February 2017

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school is very well led by its headteacher. It is constantly improving. Pupils now get a good deal at St Mary's.
- Senior leaders do sterling work alongside the headteacher. The work of middle leaders, such as heads of subject, has considerably improved. Leaders are really moving the school, and the quality of teaching, forward.
- Teaching usually meets pupils' needs well. Staff provide strong encouragement to pupils to give their best.
- Pupils respond keenly. They take pride in their work. They make good progress and almost all get some good GCSE grades.
- The governing body, too, has improved its work notably. Governors do a good job in holding leaders to account supportively.
- The school spends pupil premium funding excellently. Disadvantaged pupils do very well.
- Pupils who struggle with literacy and numeracy when they join the school are supported effectively. Pupils who speak English as an additional language also get good help and achieve well. However, too much time is spent on this support outside mainstream lessons, and so the pupils miss other important subjects.
- Pupils behave well. Incidents of serious misbehaviour are uncommon. Any that do occur are quickly dealt with by the staff.
- The school looks after pupils very well. It takes the right steps to keep them safe.
- Pupils feel secure, confident and happy. There is a strong sense of community and care, clearly upheld by the school's inclusive Christian foundation.
- Pupils who have particularly high attainment or ability achieve well. However, they could do better still. They are not given as much attention by staff as are other pupils.
- Sometimes teachers do not give pupils the time they require to do important work or to try things out for themselves. As a result, their progress slows.
- In some practical subjects and lessons, pupils do too little essential hands-on work. This hinders their learning.
- Pupils' attendance is slightly below average. This is mainly caused by a small number of pupils being persistently absent.
- The school recognises that there should be a wider range of options to suit pupils' needs, particularly in vocational subjects, at key stage 4.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching still further by:
 - taking more account of the needs of higher-attaining pupils
 - giving all pupils more time to do their work in lessons and to undertake practical tasks when these are needed.
- Improve the curriculum by:
 - offering a wider range of subject options to better meet all pupils' needs at key stage 4
 - ensuring that pupils who require extra support with literacy and numeracy, or who are learning to speak English, do not miss out unduly on the other subjects.
- Reduce persistent absence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher leads with clear vision and moral purpose. He has recruited and built a strong senior leadership team, whose members share his obvious ambition. Senior leaders each have clearly defined duties, which they undertake successfully. They take considerable responsibility and have developed their skills quickly.
- The middle leadership of the school has developed well since the last inspection. Subject leaders know they are accountable for how well the pupils do in their subjects. Increasingly, they take proactive actions in their departments to ensure good outcomes for pupils.
- Senior and middle leaders work effectively to improve teaching. They offer staff valuable, highly evaluative feedback on their lessons to help them improve. Overall strengths and weaknesses in teaching are carefully identified and analysed by senior leaders. This leads to valuable training and guidance to help the staff continually develop their practice.
- The school is, therefore, always improving. It continues to move successfully towards its aim of 'excellence not mediocrity'.
- Leaders and governors make practical and effective plans to drive the improvements. Shrewdly, they ensure that the plans allow the necessary time for improvements to embed and become established.
- The school's self-evaluation is precise and accurate. Senior leaders know what is going well and what needs to improve. They make very good use of external reviews of the school and consultant reports. The school is outward-looking, successfully learning from other schools and contributing to the local educational community.
- The strong leadership is growing a strong, happy school community based positively on welcoming Christian values. Pupils and parents are pleased with the school's improvement.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. The work of staff, including teaching assistants, in this area is well organised. Additional special educational needs funding is used effectively. The progress made by the pupils concerned is firmly improving.
- Staff, in all categories, are happy to work in the school. They are proud of their work and feel well supported. One spoke for others: 'I firmly believe in the vision of the headteacher and am totally convinced we can... continually challenge and encourage the pupils to be the best they can be.'
- The school spends and accounts for its pupil premium funding in an exemplary way. Staff sharply identify the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils. They find effective, imaginative solutions to reduce barriers to these pupils' learning and well-being.
- The school provides a good range of out-of-school-hours activities. The quality of these is constantly rising. Activities closely meet pupils' interests and their academic and social needs. Pupils enjoy sports activities, including matches, for instance.
- The curriculum meets requirements. It enables pupils to achieve well. It valuably

promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It very effectively upholds fundamental British values, such as tolerance and the rule of law. Sensibly, the school is beginning to build up its relationship with the local Muslim community.

- Leaders are thoughtfully developing the curriculum further. Older pupils are not given many vocational subject options in key stage 4, which some need. The pupils themselves would value more choice. Senior leaders have begun discussions with other local providers to make further options available in a cost-effective way.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is spent suitably, along with general school budget money, to ensure that all pupils develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need. This work is effective, but too much time is spent unnecessarily on it outside of normal class lessons. Therefore, the pupils involved miss lessons in sport, science, humanities and the arts.
- Occasionally, aspects of school administration do not work well. For example, there are more timetabling glitches than there should be. Some school documents are incomplete. In themselves, these are not serious problems but taken together they do lead to some inefficiency. Pupils themselves point out that the school does not always run as smoothly as it might.
- Senior leaders and governors value the well-dovetailed and focused support and challenge the school receives from the local authority and the archdiocese.

Governance of the school

- Governors do a much better job now than at the last inspection. Two independent reviews of governance have been carried out since then and the school has acted carefully on the recommendations.
- The governing body is well organised. It is effectively led by its chair, a national leader of governance, who initially came to help but then wanted to get more involved.
- Governors know the school well. They ask suitably challenging questions of senior leaders, which help keep the school on its toes. They also carefully uphold the school's inclusive Christian ethos, where everyone matters, regardless of their background.
- Governors ensure that staff performance management and pupil safeguarding are managed correctly.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School procedures are well organised. The safeguarding policy is thorough.
- Staff are properly trained in child protection and know what to do in different circumstances. Pupils know how they should keep themselves safe, including when online.
- The school has correct procedures to deal with the risk of radicalisation. It teaches pupils about this and other aspects of safeguarding well. Inspectors observed an assembly where pupils were offered very clear and relevant pointers about how to recognise and deal with extremist views.
- The school has good evidence that where pupils become particularly vulnerable, or are at risk, it deals with the causes. Staff work well with other agencies, including the on-

site police officer and, as needed, with families.

- Staff check carefully that those pupils who attend provision away from the school site are properly cared for, achieve well and are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is clear and well organised. Teachers explain things sharply, showing good subject knowledge. They help pupils see the relevance of what they are learning. Pupils are usually clear in lessons about what they need to do and why.
- Pupils feel motivated by the teaching. Staff often go the extra mile to show that they really value the pupils and that they truly seek to understand their needs and personalities, well beyond a set of data. This is a great gift to the pupils, who recognise and appreciate it. One said with feeling, 'The teachers do a good job for us.'
- Staff offer pupils trusted guidance and feedback. This is given kindly, upholds the school's caring values and builds pupils' confidence. Pupils are, therefore, willing to 'have a go', even at things which look difficult. They feel secure and well supported in their learning, able to give of their best.
- Mathematics and English are generally particularly well taught, but the improvements made to teaching in the last two years apply widely across subjects.
- In a lesson about Shakespeare, the teacher directly inspired pupils with her knowledge of the plays. She challenged some misconceptions pupils had, using humour, positive relationships and bags of energy. She enabled pupils to explain how Shakespeare's poetic language related to character and place. In a drama lesson, the teacher gently but persistently encouraged pupils to work together confidently in producing a contemporary performance, each contributing well as an actor, producer or technician.
- The many pupils who speak English as an additional language are taught well. Those with little English soon learn to speak it functionally. In lessons, staff often reinforce key vocabulary, grammar and local idiom effectively. Many pupils are prepared successfully for GCSE examinations in their home languages too. This shows value for their background, giving them confidence and success.
- The school has recently introduced raising achievement plans for each class, which provide information about the learning needs of each pupil. This has the effect of raising the expectations of staff. It is helping staff to provide work which is increasingly closely related to each pupil's needs.
- The specific teaching of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good and well organised. Some pupils in older year groups have underachieved in the past but, because of the better provision, they are beginning to catch up.
- Pupils who are higher attaining are a relatively small group. Those who met with inspectors feel that staff give more attention to lower- and middle-attaining pupils. Inspection evidence supports their view. The school has taken some steps to deal with this. There is, for instance, a special tutor group in Year 10 for higher attainers. Nevertheless, these pupils are not consistently stretched or inspired as much as they could be. In a mathematics lesson, for instance, harder questions were not given as much attention by the teacher as other questions which were less demanding.

- In some lessons, teachers work through many examples, or explain the same thing several times, and the teaching becomes unduly repetitive. Pupils are ready to move on sooner. They lose some interest and have little time to practise their skills. At these times, they do not learn as deeply as they might.
- In some practical subjects and lessons, teachers provide pupils with few opportunities to undertake the necessary practical work, which would show the pupils the value and purpose of theory they have learned. In a music lesson, the teacher explained some points well, but the pupils did not make any music. They were ready and clearly needed to 'have a go' in order to practise and understand fully what the teacher had said to them. Likewise, in some physical education lessons, pupils were insufficiently physically active to gain maximum benefit.
- Senior and middle leaders are increasingly aware of these improvement points. One subject leader volunteered, 'We know we need to let the pupils go a bit more sometimes.'

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils work hard and take pride in their school and their work, which is often beautifully presented. They are smartly dressed. They conform to the school's positive expectations of them and the care that staff show to them.
- Pupils' views are clearly heard in the school and they are pleased about this. The school council, for instance, has four different sections. It is sophisticated in the way that it represents and acts on pupils' opinions.
- Pupils who met with inspectors understand clearly the importance of staying safe, including when online, and the best strategies to do so. They receive clear teaching about this, which they value. This is an improvement from the last inspection.
- The school is keenly aware that some girls face particular circumstances which can detract from their learning. For example, some are needed to care for their younger siblings. The school is alert to these issues and works sensitively with families where it can to help resolve them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Around the school, pupils behave sensibly and safely. They look out for each other and are friendly and polite.
- When there are incidents of rough behaviour, bad language or bullying, staff deal with these quickly and the poor behaviour does not usually persist for long. The school is very active in its work against racism and homophobia. There are very few incidents.
- Pupils feel safe and secure as a result. One said of the staff, 'We can rely on them to keep us safe.'
- Within lessons, pupils are keen to participate and learn. They generally work with interest and care as individuals and in groups. They listen and respond sensibly.

- In a few lessons, particularly where teachers do not sustain pupils' interest, behaviour deteriorates. It does not usually become disruptive, but at these times pupils 'switch off' and can become restless and bored.
- Attendance is slightly below average. This is mainly caused by a small number of pupils being absent persistently. The school works hard on this, with some success, but some of the causes are deep-seated and require further attention.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions is above average. Staff work effectively and fairly with the pupils who are excluded. The school is particularly successful in ensuring that few pupils are excluded for a second time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make rapid progress from age 11 to 16 across the subjects. Given their generally below-average starting points, they achieve well at GCSE and gain valuable qualifications. Most pupils gained good GCSEs in English and mathematics, for example, in 2016. Nevertheless, GCSE attainment overall was very slightly under the national average. Boys and girls all made good progress, but boys outperformed girls. This is unusual nationally.
- Pupils entitled to the support of pupil premium funding thrive. Current and past disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as the other pupils in the school. They do very well when their progress is compared with all other pupils nationally.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of education. Almost all pupils move from the school to worthwhile further education or employment. This is an improvement. The pupils who left the school earlier than anticipated, due to the recent suspension of the sixth form, were guided correctly and have continued their studies.
- The school has good, reliable evidence of how the current cohorts are doing. Rightly, the school now puts emphasis on ensuring effective teaching and assessment at key stage 3, so that, in future, older pupils should not need to 'catch up' before they take GCSE examinations. Key stage 3 pupils from all groups now make consistently good progress. This is also the case in key stage 4.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school. At GCSE in 2016, however, pupils who had special educational needs had not made as much progress as other groups. The same is likely to be true of the current Year 11 pupils who have special educational needs. They are making good progress now, but have a backlog of slower progress to catch up with from key stage 3.
- Pupils who join the school with limited English do well. In many cases, they perform slightly better across the subjects than other pupils.
- Pupils with particularly high prior attainment, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make better than average progress. But their progress is not as good as that of middle- and lower-attaining pupils. The school recognises that these pupils could do even better and achieve still higher grades at GCSE.
- Year 7 pupils who read to inspectors did so with fluency, sound understanding of the text and interest. It was noticeable, however, that the lower-attaining readers were much more used to reading aloud and being helped by staff than their higher-attaining

peers. The higher attainers read well, but have not been sufficiently helped to develop some higher-order reading skills, such as advanced comprehension.

School details

Unique reference number	101814
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	10023581

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	549
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bernard Tomkins
Headteacher	Patrick Shields
Telephone number	0208 686 3837
Website	www.st-maryshigh.croydon.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-maryshigh.croydon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 January 2015

Information about this school

- This is a small secondary school, located in central Croydon. It serves a diverse area. The largest ethnic group is Black African. There are more boys than girls.
- The school had a sixth form until the summer of 2016. This has now been suspended.
- A larger than average proportion of pupils do not speak English as their first language.
- More than two out of five pupils are entitled to the support of pupil premium funding. This is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- Some pupils attend provision off-site. The three providers used are Phil Edwards Pupil Referral Unit, the Saffron Valley Collegiate and Educational Excellence and Wellbeing. These are all within the local borough.
- The school meets the floor standards, which are the government's minimum

expectation for pupils' progress.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in all year groups and most subjects, in many cases jointly with senior leaders. They observed an assembly.
- Inspectors observed at lunchtimes, breaktimes, at the beginning and end of the day and as pupils moved around the school.
- They held discussions with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, members of staff, pupils, parents, governors and representatives of the archdiocese and the local authority.
- They scrutinised examples of pupils' work and heard pupils from Year 7 read.
- Inspectors evaluated documents, including the school's assessments of pupils, its improvement plan and evaluations, records of attendance and behaviour and minutes of meetings, including from governors' meetings.
- They took further account of the views of parents from the six responses on Parent View, which is on Ofsted's website. They considered carefully the opinions of staff from Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.

Inspection team

Robin Hammerton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Bec Allott	Ofsted Inspector
James Whiting	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector

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