

# St Mary Magdalene Academy: the Courtyard

Holloway Road, Islington, London N7 8LT

## Inspection dates

9–10 May 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leadership capacity at all levels, including governance, to secure improvements in all key aspects of the school, including the quality of teaching and learning, has been significantly strengthened.
- The headteacher provides very effective leadership and promotes a culture of inclusion for all pupils, as well as collaborative teamwork. Staff, including those new to the school, feel well supported.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are focused on meeting the needs of all pupils, academically and personally. As a result, pupils achieve well, particularly in reading and mathematics. Progress in writing is not as fast.
- The new appointment of the deputy headteacher for teaching and learning has secured a robust assessment system. Assessments are used well to set challenging targets. However, targets for the most able pupils are not always ambitious enough.
- Pupils' achievement is checked and tracked to make sure that pupils sustain good progress. Nonetheless, subject leaders do not plan for improvements individually and are not held responsible for their subject specialism.
- Staff are well trained and vigilant in protecting and promoting pupils' safety and well-being. As a result, pupils feel safe.
- Pupils behave well both inside the classroom and beyond. Individual and group sessions enable pupils to reflect on their learning and behaviour. They grow in confidence and maturity, flourishing into thoughtful and respectful individuals.
- Post-16 students continue to achieve well. They learn with younger pupils as well as having discrete lessons on their own. All age groups benefit from specialist teaching at the main academy, broadening their experiences, interests and subject choices.

## Full report

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

- Speed up progress, particularly in writing and for the most able pupils in English and other subjects, by:
  - providing pupils with more opportunities to apply their writing skills, in extended activities
  - giving pupils harder work when they complete tasks quickly
  - setting more challenging targets for the most able pupils and, if met, review and implement new ones quickly.
- Strengthen leadership, by:
  - sharpening up improvement planning with measurable targets based on pupils' achievement which match those for the quality of teaching
  - planning improvements for individual subjects specifically, making sure that subject leaders are held responsible for the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes for their remit.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher provides strong leadership. She is an effective role model for other senior leaders, particularly those relatively new to post. The headteacher is determined to make sure that all pupils achieve their potential and become active members of society. Staff share her values and are highly motivated. They work well together as a team.
- The headteacher has acted decisively to address the recommendations from the previous inspection, and is supported well by governors. For example, the appointment of the deputy who leads on teaching, learning and assessment has boosted leadership capacity as well as strengthened the quality of teaching overall.
- Improving the quality of teaching is a core function for senior leaders. Observations of teaching, work sampling and learning walks are undertaken regularly to provide valuable feedback to staff about their performance. Leaders regularly cross check their observations with each other to identify key trends in strengths and weaknesses. They use this evidence to tailor training and support precisely to meet the needs of individual staff. Together with an appraisal cycle, this is securing stronger teaching in all subjects.
- This monitoring evidence is also used to gain an accurate picture of the school's overall performance and to plan for further improvements, focused on the right priorities.
- Nevertheless, improvement planning is not sharp enough. Although there are some measurable outcomes, targets are inconsistent. For example, those for the quality of teaching do not match targets for pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders, other than the headteacher, have yet to plan for improvements for their own subjects. Actions to improve English and mathematics are included in the school development plan. Nonetheless, they are too generic and do not focus adequately on specific actions to bring about rapid improvement, particularly in writing. In addition, subject leaders are not held fully to account for their subject areas.
- The deputy for teaching, learning and assessment, working with other leaders, has introduced an assessment system, including baseline measurements for pupils when they start school. Leaders are now able to track the progress pupils make effectively, to identify any potential underachievement and to implement interventions to boost their learning.
- Assessment information and prior attainment are used to set challenging targets to secure good or better progress for most pupils. However, targets are not always aspirational enough for the most able pupils. These pupils sometimes achieve their targets before the end of the academic year, which slows their progress down.
- The curriculum is organised well to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of pupils and students. The strong partnership with the main academy enables pupils and students to choose from a wide range of subject options. All pupils study for qualifications in English; mathematics; IT (information and technology); personal, social and health education, including GCSE citizenship; physical education (PE); amination; science and art therapy. Pupils are then guided to study from a range of

other subjects, including drama, modern foreign languages, psychology, tourism, construction and hair and beauty. The qualification pathway is dependent on the pupils' and students' levels of ability and interests. Extra-curricular activities enrich pupils learning, enjoyment and sense of achievement, in school and at the main academy, including IT/coding, arts, crafts, science and many different sporting activities.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through visits, visitors and planned activities. Pupils learn about the horrific events of the Holocaust and explore injustice, tolerance and the rights of individuals. Personal, social and health lessons focus on democracy and promote the pupil voice through elections and voting. This helps pupils to understand life in modern Britain.
- Leaders are keen to secure value for money and to maximise the impact that funding has on pupils' achievement and personal development, including the special educational needs and pupil premium funding. Individual support and interventions are personalised to meet the specific needs of pupils. These include additional speech and language sessions and bespoke emotional and mental health strategies from external agencies. As a consequence, all pupils, including those eligible for the pupil premium, achieve well. Indeed, disadvantaged pupils are currently making more progress than other pupils in the school.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors candidly admit that the last inspection galvanised them into action in order to become more effective. The external review and an audit of skills clarified their roles and responsibilities. They have a clear understanding of their remit and monitor more closely the work of leaders and the impact their actions have on all aspects of the school's effectiveness. Governors gather their own evidence through regular visits to the school. As a consequence, they have an accurate view of the school's performance and are in a better position to provide leaders with both challenge and support in equal measures. Each governor oversees an aspect of the school's work, including the use of the pupil premium and how this is used to secure good or better achievement. Governors have made sure that the new premises are fit for purpose, bright and well equipped. They are determined to maintain a rapid rate of improvement.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding lead provides a clear steer for safeguarding. She has created an open and honest culture where everyone; both staff and pupils feel confident to report any issues they may have. She makes sure that everyone has a collective responsibility for safeguarding. In addition, she supports and advises staff and pupils, manages referrals of those pupils causing concern, and liaises effectively with external agencies. Staff have up-to-date training and understand their roles in keeping pupils safe. All the required checks are undertaken to make sure that adults are suitable to work with children. The safeguarding governor monitors all aspects of safeguarding on a regular basis, resulting in all statutory requirements being met in full. The welfare of pupils is paramount. As a result, pupils are kept safe and secure.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils' motivations, interests and needs. As a consequence, they provide the right type of activities to ensure that pupils engage well in their learning. The strong relationships between staff and pupils secure calm and purposeful lessons, thus relaxing pupils, and reducing their anxiety levels.
- Staff model learning effectively, which ensures that pupils have a good understanding of what they are to learn next. Staff also encourage pupils to explain their thinking, providing powerful opportunities to promote their confidence, while simultaneously promoting other pupils' understanding.
- Communication and social skills are promoted at every opportunity, within lessons and discretely through tutor and self-discovery groups. Staff provide clear instructions and constantly explain to pupils what they are learning about.
- The teaching of reading and mathematics has improved significantly. Pupils display a love of reading, and enjoy a wide range of different texts, from comics to non-fiction books. Staff maximise opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills in every lesson so that pupils can access key information. As a result, pupils are confident, fluent and accomplished readers.
- Mathematics is taught well because the teacher has excellent subject knowledge and his passion entuses pupils to want to learn more. He has a good insight into how pupils learn best, keeps a keen focus on how well they are achieving and mostly pitches the work at the right level of challenge. As a consequence, progress in mathematics is speeding up significantly.
- The English lead has introduced strategies to improve pupils' writing skills. In each lesson pupils know what they are expected to achieve, with clear steps to success. Staff encourage pupils to reflect on their learning, to identify what they have achieved and what they need to work on next. As a consequence, pupils are becoming more independent in their writing.
- However, this is not consistent in every lesson. Occasionally, pupils who find work easy complete the task quickly. They then wait patiently for other pupils to catch up. This is especially so for the most able pupils, preventing them from making more progress and learning independently.
- Much effort has focused on developing pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply these skills and to write at length in this subject and across the curriculum.
- In other subject areas, work is organised well to ensure that pupils learn at a good rate, and that they are well prepared for the end-of-year examinations, including in science, art and IT.
- Those pupils who are academically and socially able are taught by subject specialists at the main academy. All pupils attend mainstream lessons for PE, taught by specialist PE

teachers.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The deputy for behaviour and safety ensures that staff are suitably supported. Pupils' and older students' personal development and behaviour are monitored closely to identify any trends, concerns and potential triggers in the environment. Many pupils have had prior negative school experiences before joining the school. Some have low self-esteem and self-worth, with significant mental health issues. Each pupil has a key worker, who has a thorough understanding of their personal needs. Their support is effective in ensuring emotional and physical well-being for pupils and students.
- The school works exceptionally well with professionals from a range of disciplines who meet regularly in 'team around the school' meetings. Specialists include health and specialist professionals. They make sure that those pupils causing concern, generic issues associated with the learning environment, transition arrangements and reviews of education, health and care plans are reviewed thoroughly.
- Expertise is shared, with strategies identified to resolve issues on an individual and group basis, sometimes including parents. Weekly counselling is also provided for those pupils who need this type of support. All pupils regularly undertake meditation sessions. Because of this, potential barriers to pupils' learning and happiness are greatly reduced and they make great gains in their personal development.
- The personalised curriculum enables pupils to begin to develop an appreciation of their own capabilities, which in turn enables them to believe in themselves. Activities specifically designed to promote pupils' mental well-being through tutor and self-discovery groups are fundamental in enabling pupils to become more empathetic, reflective, respectful and responsible individuals. Likewise, workshops heighten pupils' awareness of equality and of challenging stereotypes and racism. Pupils told inspectors that they are very proud of their school and of their achievements.
- Pupils have a clear awareness of potential dangers. They know that they should not take any risks and that they should 'keep to the rules'. They trust and respect staff and willingly share their concerns. Pupils know how to keep safe and are very aware of social media risks. They report that there is some bullying but that it is 'not a big worry' and it is dealt with quickly.
- Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships and gender groups provide pupils with specific aspects on how to keep physically and mentally well and healthy.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff implement the behaviour policy consistently and effectively. They model high expectations for behaviour and good manners. They constantly reinforce good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning, through praise and rewards. This means that pupils develop greater self-control, become more self-aware of their own behaviour and how this affects others.
- Pupils conduct themselves maturely in class and around the school. There is a calm atmosphere at breaktimes, when pupils and staff talk and relax together.
- Pupils become increasingly confident and self-assured learners. Nonetheless, they are not always encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and can lack motivation to get on with work on their own.
- Case studies confirm that the school is very successful in ensuring that those pupils with challenging and negative behaviours when they start school are helped to integrate fully to access all that the school offers.
- Attendance is good, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school life.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Pupils enter the school with significant gaps in their learning as a result of negative experiences and/or being non-attenders at their previous schools. As a result, the school has to make sure that pupils make up for lost time to achieve what they are capable of.
- Pupils' abilities are assessed fully when they enter the school, enabling staff to teach pupils commensurate with their capabilities. As a result, their learning gets off to a good start.
- Challenging targets and good teaching secures strong progress, particularly in reading, mathematics, IT and more generally in subjects across the curriculum. However, the school's assessments and inspection observations, including work sampling, confirm that progress in writing is slower than in reading and mathematics.
- Those pupils and older students who are academically and socially able to cope with mainstream classes attend lessons at the secondary academy in a range of subjects. However, the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, do not always make the progress they are capable of because learning time is not always used well enough to maximise their progress. Targets do not always secure accelerated progress for these pupils.
- Effective interventions, alongside good teaching, leads to disadvantaged pupils making good or better progress and often more progress than their peers in English and mathematics. As a result, all pupils and students are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- Students continue to achieve well in this key stage, including in English and mathematics, because they receive the same good teaching as younger pupils. Most pupils in school go on to study at post-16.
- There are some opportunities for students to learn together; for example, specifically for job preparation and in their tutor groups, as well as with younger pupils.
- There is a good focus on developing students' independence, skills for learning and preparation for life in general in school and outside. Students enjoy monthly social events such as visits to the cinema or a meal at a local restaurant.
- It is evident that the school is very effective in preparing each student for their next steps. In 2016, every student went on to further education, university, or apprenticeships. This year, all students have been offered unconditional offers to the places of their choice.
- Almost every student completes a work placement with local employers. Careers guidance and advice is in partnership with parents and the local authority who provides information on potential employment opportunities and qualification pathways.
- Students study the core subjects and have further options to learn from a wide range of subjects, both academic and vocational, or functional skills and qualifications, including at AS and A level.
- The headteacher is currently providing overall interim leadership for this key stage as a result of the post holder being on maternity leave. She provides strong direction, securing continuing good provision for students.



## School details

Unique reference number	139418
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	10031725

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathon Rust
Headteacher	Deborah Shepherd
Telephone number	07940 551400
Website	<a href="http://www.smmacademy.org/courtyard">www.smmacademy.org/courtyard</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:d.shepherd@smmacademy.org">d.shepherd@smmacademy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	28 April 2015

## Information about this school

- The Courtyard is a small special free school, established in September 2013. The school's first inspection in April 2015, judged overall effectiveness to require improvement.
- 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 pupils study for some of their time to St Mary Magdalene Academy.
- The school moved the new premises in September 2016.

- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for autistic spectrum disorders and/or speech, language and communication difficulties. Admissions to the school are arranged through the local authority.
- Pupils 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.
- Just over a third of pupils are eligible for the additional pupil premium funding, which is well above the national average.
- There are currently very few pupils who do not speak English as their first language.
- Some pupils attend level 1 courses in construction or hair and beauty at the Samuel Rhodes MLD School for one afternoon a week.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons in all year groups and observed a variety of activities. Leaders accompanied inspectors on almost all the visits to lessons.
- Pupils' behaviour during lessons, at playtimes and around the school was observed. Inspectors also scrutinised the school's records of behavioural incidents, including bullying logs.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils about their learning in lessons and with a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the most able pupils reading in class, and a group of pupils talked about their reading choices.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders to evaluate the impact of their work to improve pupils' outcomes and strengthen the quality of teaching. This included meetings with the leader for teaching and learning, the leader for behaviour and safety, and subject leaders and teachers, including the post-16 leader.
- Meetings were held with the members of the governing body, including the vice-chair, and members of the multidisciplinary team, including the local authority special educational needs officer.
- Inspectors reviewed work in pupils' books to evaluate the quality of learning in different areas of learning over time. They also scrutinised the school's current assessment information on how well pupils achieve.
- A range of documentation related to safeguarding was scrutinised. This included the single central record of pre-employment checks and records relating to the school's work to safeguard pupils at risk of harm.
- Inspectors spoke to one parent, and took account of the school's parent and staff questionnaires. There were no responses to Ofsted's online parental survey, or staff and pupil questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Mary Hinds, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Geddes

Ofsted Inspector

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