

# St Mary's Catholic High School

Manchester Road, Astley, Tyldesley, Manchester M29 7EE

## Inspection dates

2–3 April 2019

<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>Requires improvement</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

- This school has been transformed since the last inspection as a result of intelligent and determined leadership, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders, including governors, have secured evident and significant improvement throughout all aspects of the school, most particularly in the behaviour of pupils, their attendance, the quality of teaching and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school.
- The school's mission, based on Catholic principles and values, has guided improvements and provided standards to which all aspire. The ethos and culture permeating the whole school mean that decisions are based solely on what is best for pupils.
- Since the last inspection, despite a slow start, the rate of improvement has gathered impetus. Provision is now good for current pupils.
- Leaders continually review the curriculum to ensure that pupils achieve well academically and personally. However, the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is not as well planned, monitored or evaluated as it might be.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- In previous years, pupils' progress and attainment have not been strong. This was due to variability in teaching and subject leadership. Recent actions have resulted in pupils, especially those in key stage 3, making much stronger progress than in the past. Nonetheless, a legacy of underachievement remains for some older pupils.
- While the achievement gap between boys and girls is reducing, this discrepancy remains for current pupils at the school.
- There are still some weaknesses in the quality of mathematics teaching. Pupils currently in Year 11 have gaps in their understanding, as a result of historically much weaker teaching.
- Leaders have skilfully and precisely identified what individual teachers and subject leaders need to do to perform at a higher level. Leaders have provided high-quality support and guidance to enable the whole teaching body to improve. Teaching, including in the sixth form, is good.
- Sixth-form students are successful in their learning and wider development.
- Pupils and students behave well. They have positive attitudes to learning. They are kept safe and feel safe while at school.

## Full report

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

- Improve pupils' outcomes further by:
  - ensuring that recent changes to improve boys' literacy and engagement in learning are maintained and built upon so that they achieve as well as girls
  - ensuring that the quality of teaching in mathematics addresses gaps in pupils' learning, especially in key stage 4, so that these pupils make the progress that they should in this subject.
- Develop the leadership and management of the school further by:
  - ensuring that the PSHE programme is carefully planned, monitored and evaluated so that leaders can improve any aspects of provision that are not strong.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, governors, the local authority and the archdiocese knew two years ago, after the last inspection, that they had to improve the school from a low starting point. Leaders admit that previously, their attempts to improve the school were not good enough because their actions were not well thought through. They did not prioritise improvements and sometimes leaders did not take sufficient account of what teachers could reasonably be expected to take on board.
- Following this slow start, the pace of improvement has accelerated considerably. Throughout the last two years, improvements have been carefully considered and delivered systematically. Thought has been given to which aspects to improve before others, enabling staff to cope better with change. Improvements are founded on a good rationale and, in many cases, tested in parts of this large comprehensive school before being refined and implemented school-wide.
- Excellent leadership from the highest levels within the school enabled other leaders and staff to respond positively to their disappointments in the rate of previous improvement at the school. Since the last inspection, most staff have shown determination to improve their personal contributions considerably, so that collectively the quality of education that pupils now receive is now significantly better.
- The headteacher has engaged a wide range of expertise to evaluate different and important aspects of the school. He has also ensured that the views of these experts have been taken into account by leaders when guiding school improvement.
- One of the first aspects the school improved was the behaviour of pupils. When the behaviour system was introduced three years ago, it proved controversial with some parents and carers and some older pupils. Of the parents who chose to respond to inspectors using the inspection text facility, a significant group were critical of this policy. Some older pupils also expressed resentment. While leaders, including governors, recognise the significant positive impact this system has had on improving behaviour, they also say a review of this initiative is due.
- Leaders and key staff have shown a determination to increase attendance. Their actions have been successful. Pupils' attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. Leaders have set high expectations for attendance and shown a relentless approach to following up absences. Improvements in teaching, behaviour throughout the school and enrichment opportunities are ensuring that pupils value what the school is offering them.
- Leaders' passionate, determined and intelligent approach to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, captured in the school's 'pupil premium promise', has had a considerable positive impact on their personal development and achievement. Leaders have researched how best to support disadvantaged pupils and applied the strategies that most suit their pupils. Consequently, additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is very well spent.
- Leaders have ensured that all staff are clear about their responsibilities for ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make good progress. The school is now supporting these

pupils from their primary school transition to seeing them off to university, or other training and educational routes. Support is typically individualised because pupils' needs are quite diverse. Each disadvantaged pupil is assigned a mentor who acts as their advocate and provides helpful guidance. Teachers are clear about how to support individual pupils. The progress, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils are closely monitored.

- The school makes good use of additional funds to help pupils who join the school with lower literacy and numeracy standards, to catch up and then keep up. Additional funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) makes a good contribution to their support and education. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that teachers are guided in how to support individual pupils with SEND and other staff employed to help these pupils are well trained and skilled.
- The areas identified at the last inspection as in most need of improvement have been addressed. These included the development of systems leaders use to fully understand how well all aspects of the school perform. Leaders now have an entirely accurate understanding of the quality of the school's work, because they analyse and evaluate high-quality information. This clarity enables them to identify precisely the aspects that need further improvement. Their shared experience of successful improvement has given the leadership team the skills and confidence to develop the school's performance further.
- The quality of teaching has been skilfully improved. Leaders evaluate teachers' effectiveness professionally and accurately. Teachers are involved in discussions about how to improve. Support, training and guidance are all of high quality.
- Leaders have adopted a sharper approach to evaluating the curriculum. This has enabled them to identify what was capping the achievement of some pupils who entered the school with above-average starting points. Leaders have addressed this past weakness for current pupils. The curriculum is now being constantly reviewed and adapted to meet the changing needs and aspirations of all pupils, including the most able.
- The current approach to PSHE education is not as well planned as other aspects of the curriculum. Furthermore, the systems to check the impact of this programme do not enable leaders to identify where weaknesses lie and what changes are necessary to ensure that pupils gain the maximum benefit from this provision.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Many of these aspects are covered through the religious education (RE) programme. In addition, there are many opportunities for pupils to experience and participate in cultural, artistic and sporting activities. For instance, visiting drama groups deal with issues surrounding bullying and crime. One group worked intensively with Year 8 pupils on building their self-esteem and encouraging them to make positive changes in their lives.
- Leaders recognised that boys have not achieved as well as girls over previous years. Action, based on analysis of the reasons for this, is now improving the achievement and attendance of boys. Leaders are ensuring that teachers raise their expectations of what boys can achieve. Improved teaching, as a result of good professional development, is beginning to help boys participate in their learning with more enthusiasm. The school is becoming much more systematic in providing a wider range

of enriching opportunities that interest those boys who, in the past, were disengaged.

- The school's careers advice, information and guidance is another aspect that has seen considerable improvement. It is strongly linked to the local context and Greater Manchester's 'six key growth' sectors. A well-planned programme, which includes generous support from local employers, begins in Year 7 and meets the changing needs of pupils as they move through the school and sixth form. Pupils get opportunities to experience the world of work. They are given impartial advice about a wide range of destinations and qualifications. The skills that pupils will need to gain employment and become effective employees are systematically developed throughout their schooling.
- The evident improvements across the school are relatively recent but, nevertheless, sustainable. Consistently, younger pupils are learning and developing well. Increasing numbers of older pupils are benefiting from the much-improved education offered by the school.
- A large majority of responses to the staff survey indicated that the school is much improved since the time of the last inspection. Teachers that inspectors spoke to endorsed this view. Overall, teachers conclude that leaders have been successful in finding the balance between achieving school improvement and reducing staff workload. However, about one in ten members of staff do not share this positive view of the school's position.
- Parents' views, as expressed through responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire and free-text comments to the inspection team, show that some have concerns about high staff turnover. It has indeed been high. However, staff turnover has reduced over the past three years and has not been a concern this year. Parents generally recognise the improvements that the school has made since the last inspection and are happy with the school. They cite the quality of communication systems as a particular strength.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors recognised that they too had to improve their contribution to school improvement. They undertook two reviews of governance and sought external guidance. The governing body is now much stronger. Collectively, governors have an excellent set of skills, are passionate about the school and effective in promoting a strong Catholic ethos.
- Governors are much clearer about how they should discharge their responsibilities. They have a much better understanding of how well the school is performing as a result of the improved quality of information and analysis that they receive from school leaders. Governors are more effective in holding leaders to account. They have played an important role in the school's recent improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's procedures to recruit only suitable persons to new posts are thorough.
- Staff, including new and temporary staff, are well trained to respond to concerns they may have about a pupil. They know how to respond should a pupil disclose information

about a potential safeguarding concern to them.

- Safety and safeguarding are promoted through teaching pupils how to identify and deal with potential dangers. These include the use of social media, when pupils are out and about in their communities and when at home. Pupils feel safe.
- The school reviews the effectiveness of safeguarding policies and procedures frequently and, since the last inspection, site security has been improved.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- The quality of teaching is good and improving because the leadership of teaching has improved. Senior leaders are systematically developing the skills and capacity of subject leaders to drive improvement in their subjects. Increasingly, subject leaders are being held to account for pupils' achievement in their subject areas.
- The quality of teaching in English has been strong for some time and more recent improvements in the teaching of science are reflected across all year groups. Improvements in the teaching of mathematics have been slower because the school has experienced difficulty in recruiting and retaining effective teachers of mathematics. Despite this, improvements have recently been seen in this subject area. Teaching is strong in the performance arts, engineering and in most areas of the humanities.
- The school has also been successful in improving the skills of teachers across subjects in better promoting boys' literacy skills, which is beginning to have a positive impact on the progress that they make.
- It is evident from pupils' work that most teachers plan learning activities well and sequence learning carefully. Teachers who have very good subject knowledge set challenging questions and tasks. They ensure that pupils have both the resources and time to explore ideas. Pupils say that they appreciate being able to discuss their ideas and opinions in more depth, a strategy introduced to better engage boys. However, a few teachers tend to accept work from pupils that is not of suitable quality or is inaccurate. In the past, this was particularly evident with boys. However, as a result of a stronger leadership focus on boys' learning, this is improving quickly.
- Generally, teachers follow the school's policy on marking pupils' work and giving them feedback. There is less consistency in complying with the school's expectation about how pupils respond to teachers' feedback and guidance.
- Teachers set homework which matches the school's expectations. Parents consider homework to be appropriate both in terms of frequency and quality.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good and a considerable strength of the school, reflecting its ethos.
- The school is providing an increasing range of opportunities for all pupils to grow spiritually, socially, morally and culturally. There are also many opportunities for pupils

to develop their leadership skills and participate in community activities. Complex issues that affect young people, and issues of social justice, are discussed throughout the school and are included within the RE curriculum. Pupils are expected to think deeply about their beliefs and express them. They learn about people from different backgrounds to their own and with different beliefs.

- The welfare of pupils is taken very seriously by all staff. This includes promoting strong mental health and resilience if experiencing difficulties. Pupils say there are many adults who they could and would turn to for guidance when they are experiencing anxieties or have a concern for others.
- Pupils say that bullying is much less of a problem than it once was. They say that when incidents are reported to staff, they are usually dealt with efficiently and effectively. Staff agree. They feel strongly that pupils are safe and well looked after.
- The pupils who attend alternative provision do so because they have complex and demanding medical needs. The school works closely with these providers, monitoring pupils' safety, welfare and development

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The typical behaviour of pupils now is very much better than it was two years ago, when the school was last inspected. The behaviour system is having a positive impact because expected standards of behaviour were raised significantly. The culture around the school now is one of calm and responsible interaction. Pupils generally accept their responsibility to ensure that the school is a safe environment where all can feel secure. Improved behaviour has made a big contribution to pupils' improving rates of progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are positive. Interruptions to learning are rare and, when they do happen, they are relatively minor.
- Attendance has risen steadily over the past three years and is now above average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has declined significantly. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has shown considerable improvement. Parents are now much more supportive of the school in helping pupils to attend well. Typically, pupils are punctual whether they are arriving at the start of the school day or moving between lessons.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because, over time, they have not been good enough. The 2018 published data for Year 11 pupils indicated that their overall rates of progress fell compared to previous years. Teachers in two subjects did not adapt well to curricular changes. The progress of the most able pupils was limited. Some disadvantaged pupils and boys made weak progress. The progress Year 11 pupils made in mathematics was especially weak.
- Despite evident weaknesses in the published data, there were a considerable number of successes. Pupils' progress in English has been consistently strong for a number of years and their progress in science has been improving steadily. Over time, pupils have

achieved well in history. Their success in engineering has improved rapidly. It is now very strong. When taking into account the very large proportion of pupils who take at least one modern foreign language, pupils achieve well in this area. Girls have performed well over many years.

- The progress of those pupils currently at the school is much improved. Different groups of pupils are making the progress that is expected of them by the school. Less-able pupils are making particularly strong progress in a range of subjects. Current pupils, especially in key stage 3, are making stronger progress than their peers in the past. This is due to good teaching, significantly improved behaviour and pupils' more positive attitudes. Nonetheless, pupils currently in Year 11 have a great deal of catching up to do in order to make up for their uneven gains in learning earlier in their schooling at St Mary's.
- Strategies to support disadvantaged pupils and boys are having a highly positive impact on the progress that these pupils are currently making. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is now broadly similar to others in the school. While the progress of boys is much stronger than was the case previously, they still continue to lag behind girls.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving, but it remains a relative weakness compared to other subjects. This is because weaker teaching in the past has left pupils, particularly those in key stage 4, with gaps in their knowledge and skills. This means that pupils often have to return to past learning to secure their understanding before they move on with the next stage of the mathematics curriculum.
- The progress made by pupils with SEND is also strong and improving. They are well supported. Staff have been well trained to meet the individual needs of these pupils. Good-quality communication between staff in this school and pupils' primary schools ensures that this transition is as smooth as it can be.
- Current pupils are now much better prepared for the next stages in their education, because they are receiving much more effective teaching and are making stronger progress.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders have a clear vision of the type of provision they want to offer and how this fits with other post-16 providers locally. As in the main school, leaders fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of the provision through analysis of detailed information and accurate evaluations.
- Study programmes are well designed so that they closely match the needs and aspirations of students. There is a good range of opportunities through academic and vocational courses. Leaders constantly review the curriculum, taking into account Greater Manchester's 'six areas of development'. Where numbers justify, leaders will seek to offer courses requested by students. Due to very good guidance when students consider their choice of sixth-form courses, and good teaching, a very high proportion continue their studies throughout the two years of sixth form.
- Provision to support those students who join the sixth form without a strong pass in either English or mathematics is very good. Strong teaching enables very high



proportions of these students to resit their GCSEs and attain a good pass.

- There has been a historical picture of students making good progress through their sixth-form programmes, particularly on vocational courses. However, last year there was a dip in overall progress measures. There were a number of reasons for this. Some new courses were not taught well enough. In other cases, teachers took time to adapt to the new, more challenging, vocational specifications adopted by the school. Building on last year's experiences and improving teaching generally, students currently in the sixth form are making good progress.
- Students are highly complimentary about the care and support that they receive. A typical comment was, 'If it wasn't for my teachers, I wouldn't be where I am now.' Students in the sixth form are strong role models for younger pupils and exhibit high standards of behaviour and maturity. Leaders ensure that students develop their leadership and employability skills through a wide range of opportunities. Sixth formers also take up many responsibilities to support the wider work of the school.
- Students receive high-quality information, advice and guidance about their next steps. By the time students complete Year 13, they have experienced the world of work. Very few students leave the sixth form without a clear destination path and having secured a place in training, education or employment.
- Safeguarding procedures are as effective as in the main school. Pupils leave the sixth form as well-rounded individuals, well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment and the challenges that lie ahead.

## School details

Unique reference number	106538
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10087831

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,546
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	299
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jack Farrimond
Headteacher	Andrew Dawson
Telephone number	01942 884 144
Website	<a href="http://stmaryschs.org.uk/">http://stmaryschs.org.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:enquiries@smchs.co.uk">enquiries@smchs.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	November 2016

## Information about this school

- The school is situated in the Archdiocese of Liverpool and within the Wigan local authority.
- The school received a section 48 inspection of its religious provision in June 2014.
- The school is larger than average, with a sixth form. About a fifth of pupils are disadvantaged.
- Although there have been many changes to the staffing body since the last inspection, the senior leadership team is substantially the same.

- No pupil currently attends alternative provision to extend their curriculum or to receive special support with managing their behaviour. A small number of pupils attend other providers to receive medical treatment.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other leaders and managers. The lead inspector met with eight members of the governing body, one of whom is also the chair. The lead inspector met with representatives of the local authority and the archdiocese. He also met with the school improvement partner. Another member of the inspection team met with the local authority pupil advocate.
- Inspectors met with three groups of pupils. They also talked to and observed pupils during their social times.
- Inspectors met with three groups of teachers and staff. They also spoke to individual teachers.
- School documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks, and information about pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. Inspectors considered the school's records of checks on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors visited classrooms, often with leaders, to speak with pupils, look at their work and observe their learning. A sample of pupils' work was scrutinised.
- The headteacher and other senior leaders were party to many of the inspection activities.
- Ofsted received 153 communications from parents by text. These, and 336 parental responses to Parent View, were taken into account by inspectors. Inspectors also considered the responses of 93 members of staff and 18 pupils who submitted their views through inspection questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Neil Mackenzie, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dawn Farrent	Ofsted Inspector
Stephanie Gill	Ofsted Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector
Ruth Makin	Ofsted Inspector

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