

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England High School (VA)

Lieutenant Ellis Way, Cheshunt, Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire EN7 5FB

Inspection dates: 17–18 September 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and sixth-form students feel happy and safe at school. Most pupils are confident, friendly and supportive to one another. They value being part of the school community.

Pupils told us that they like to learn. They feel that many teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and lessons are not usually disrupted. They say they learn lots in English. However, pupils say that they also have a few lessons a week which are not well taught or well managed. This can be made worse when teachers are absent and pupils do not behave well for temporary teachers. When this happens, pupils' learning suffers.

Pupils behave well at break and lunchtime. Some pupils' behaviour in the corridors can be more boisterous as they move between lessons. This can be unpleasant for other pupils, particularly younger ones.

Most pupils say that bullying does not often happen. When it does happen, teachers and heads of year tackle it very quickly so that it stops. Pupils, parents and carers trust their pastoral team to take good care of them.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are increasingly ambitious for pupils. There is a broad choice of subjects for pupils to study in Years 10 and 11. For example, leaders encourage pupils to study languages for as long as possible. Consequently, there is a high proportion of pupils who study GCSE languages.

The school is working towards providing a high-quality education for all pupils. It already provides this in some subjects. In subjects such as English and languages, curriculum leaders and teachers plan carefully. There is a sharp focus on what pupils should learn as they move through the year groups so that they can be successful at each stage in their learning. However, in other subjects, such as mathematics and science, the planning and teaching are not of the same high quality. For example, planning in mathematics does not always follow a logical order. Teachers' absence has also hindered the quality of what pupils access across a number of lessons. When teachers do not consider what pupils already know, the work is too easy for some pupils and too hard for others. This can lead to disruption in some lessons. These weaknesses in planning and teaching impact most negatively on disadvantaged pupils and the most able. As a result, these pupils are not achieving as well as they should in national examinations by the end of Year 11.

Where the curriculum and teaching are stronger, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are better supported to access the subject. Some of these pupils receive additional support in their literacy and numeracy. While this work is helping pupils to catch up in spelling and numeracy, they are not making the same strides in catching up in their reading. Leaders do not know enough about why

this is the case.

Pupils are confident in their plans for the future. The school's careers programme helps pupils to make appropriate choices about their next steps. Pupils access good-quality careers guidance about university, employment and training from early in their time at the school. All pupils meet employers from a range of local and national businesses.

Leaders are proactive in promoting pupils' personal development. School time is set aside each week for pupils to reflect on personal qualities and what it is to be a good person. This is linked to a theme of the week, such as 'courage' or 'what it takes to be a good friend'.

The school also offers a range of extra-curricular activities, such as sports clubs before school, at lunch and after school. Pupils from different year groups told us about the value of extra-curricular activities, such as auditioning to attend a debating competition at Broxbourne Council or winning public speaking competitions. Leaders continue to develop the range of trips and visits in the school so that they add more value to the curriculum on offer.

Sixth-form students are confident and mature young adults. They feel the school listens to any of their concerns. Students attend well but their punctuality is not as good. Almost all students complete their courses successfully. In the main school corridors, leaders celebrate the successes of former students, including the high proportion that go on to study at university. Sixth-form students achieve well in national examinations in a wide range of subjects and courses.

Over time, leaders and governors have not been rigorous enough in checking the school's effectiveness. For example, they do not know enough about whether the additional funding they receive for disadvantaged pupils is making a real difference to these pupils. Leaders and governors do not know whether these pupils are accessing the curriculum as well as they could, including extra-curricular opportunities.

Some leaders do not have enough understanding about those pupils who access alternative provision. For example, inspectors were given an incomplete list of alternative providers that the school was using. Inspectors did not receive an accurate list until day two of the inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school takes pupils' welfare and safety seriously, making sure that there is a focus on protecting pupils from local risks. One deputy headteacher has developed expertise in working with pupils to avoid gang recruitment and knife crime. He takes a leading role in working with other Hertfordshire schools.

All staff are trained to spot whether any pupil is becoming at risk as early as possible. Leaders then quickly find the right help from the many outside experts that they use. The school adds 'wraparound' support to their pupils for other local issues, such as domestic abuse and mental health issues. Leaders provide a range of services to pupils if they need it, such as counselling.

Despite weaknesses in leaders' record-keeping regarding alternative provision, they do make appropriate checks on whether these schools and providers are suitable and they make regular checks that pupils are being kept safe when they are there.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and the appropriate authority)

- The curriculum in mathematics is less well developed than it is in English and languages. Leaders need to ensure that science teachers know how to adapt the curriculum so that the most able pupils make progress and acquire knowledge according to their ability. Mathematics and science have been impacted negatively by temporary teachers. Leaders have worked creatively to address these staffing issues. However, leaders now need to ensure that planning and teaching across subjects build logically across all lessons and year groups. Leaders need to make sure that pupils' access to the curriculum is not inhibited by staff absence.
- Teachers need training and guidance so that they adapt their planning to meet the needs of pupils in their lessons. This should particularly consider how to best support the most able and those from disadvantaged backgrounds to acquire knowledge over time that allows them to achieve well.
- Some lessons are disrupted by low-level poor behaviour. Leaders need to strengthen teachers' behaviour management and pupils' abilities to self-regulate their behaviour. This includes in corridors during lesson changeover.
- The reading programme in key stage 3 is not yet fully effective in helping those pupils that need to catch up quickly. Leaders need to evaluate why the funding and additional school resource have not led to the planned progress. Governors need to monitor this work of leaders more effectively to ensure that pupils catch up in their reading, as they are in their spelling and numeracy.
- The school's funding to improve the participation and achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not effective. Leaders do not know enough about why this is not working well. Leaders and governors need to review the use of this funding. They need to consider more precisely how this is being used to ensure that these pupils access the curriculum more effectively, including the wider opportunities being offered by the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138360
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10110233
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,203
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	170
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Debbie Chilton
Headteacher	Nicholas Simms
Website	www.st-maryshigh.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 May 2018

Information about this school

- St Mary's is an average-sized secondary school.
- The school is a Church of England school within the Diocese of St Albans.
- The school uses three alternative providers: Hertford Regional College, Rivers Education Support Centre and Construction Training Partnership.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors met with the new headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead and the senior staff responsible for behaviour, staff training, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, and the business manager. The lead inspector met with the clerk to the governing body and held a telephone conversation with the director of education for the Diocese, who is also one of the four members of the

academy.

- We observed pupils at work and scrutinised the work in their books and folders. We spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. Inspectors also selected and met separately with four groups of eight pupils in Years 7, 10, 11 and 13.
- We reviewed the school's single central record and its records of vulnerable pupils. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during both structured and unstructured times. We reviewed feedback from the 46 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and their 17 free-text responses. There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaires for pupils or staff.
- The following subjects were considered as part of this inspection: English, mathematics, French, Spanish, science, personal, social, health and citizens education, art, drama, physical education and music.

Inspection team

Georgina Atkinson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Gerard Batty	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Leonard	Ofsted Inspector
Diana Osagie	Ofsted Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector

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