

# Inspection of St Mary's Independent School

57 Midanbury Lane, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hampshire SO18 4DJ

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Inspection dates: 3–5 December 2019

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Inadequate**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Early years provision

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**No**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

There are noticeable differences between older and younger pupils' experiences of school. In lower year groups, pupils are upbeat about the education they receive. They told inspectors how happy they are and how much they enjoy their learning. As pupils move up through the school, their views become more negative. Overall, pupils' experiences are not good enough.

Older pupils are disheartened because they do not get a good deal day-to-day. For example, some have experienced more than one change in teacher. This is having a negative effect on their learning. Some pupils in upper year groups feel that they do not have enough opportunities to pursue their interests.

Because teachers expect the best from younger pupils, they try hard and are keen to succeed. This is not the case in older year groups, where teachers' expectations of pupils are generally too low. In some classes, teachers do not insist that pupils behave well. On occasion, older pupils are hostile towards their classmates. Teachers and leaders do not always deal with this well. However, pupils across the school are united in feeling safe. They trust their teachers to look after them.

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

Leaders, directors and governors have not created a unified, positive culture throughout all year groups in the school. They have not ensured that pupils across the school receive a good-quality education and behave well. As a result, the school does not meet part 1 of the independent school standards (ISS). Pupils do not benefit enough from attending an all-through school.

The quality of education across the school varies between subjects and between key stages. Leaders and teachers have been improving different aspects of the curriculum. For example, they have made sure that pupils study a wider range of academic and creative subjects. Other improvements are further ahead in some key stages and subjects than others. For instance, plans in history in key stage 2 are effective. They enable pupils to gain a detailed understanding of different historical periods. However, key stage 3 history plans are not fully developed. In a number of subjects across the school, plans do not emphasise the key concepts that pupils need to master over time. In general, plans do not take enough account of the knowledge and skills pupils bring from key stage 2.

Teaching is too variable. Recently, there have been changes in staffing which have made teaching more inconsistent for older pupils. Younger pupils are inspired by the knowledge that their teachers share with them. Teaching in some subjects enables pupils to fill gaps that they have in their knowledge and skills. However, this does not happen in all subjects. As a result, some pupils do not achieve highly enough in the GCSE examinations they take.

Teachers and leaders have developed early reading well. Leaders with expertise have trained staff in how to teach phonics. Staff keep careful tabs on any pupils who are falling behind and step in to help them to catch up. They are rightly in the process of matching the books pupils read at home more closely to their phonic capabilities. As pupils move into key stage 2, they explore themes and characters in the rich, whole texts they read.

Early years is effective. Children make a good start and settle well into routines. Teachers and assistants ensure that children build up their knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They thoughtfully introduce pupils to new vocabulary, which adults in the setting practise with them. As a result, children can confidently use new words in different situations. The school meets the requirements of the early years framework.

Pupils' attendance and behaviour are poor overall. Too many pupils are regularly absent. Some older pupils interrupt their teachers, making it harder for their classmates to learn. A number of pupils told inspectors that this unruly atmosphere is affecting their learning. Others felt that teachers did not always respond when they raised concerns about some forms of bullying. In classes lower down the school, pupils behave well, are considerate towards others and attend regularly. Generally speaking, teachers and leaders do not have enough expertise in meeting the behavioural needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is new in post and has already made some improvements to the provision for pupils with SEND. These largely focus on making sure teachers identify pupils' learning needs and that any additional help they receive is appropriate. Support for pupils whose first language is not English is strong.

Leaders have ensured that some aspects of the ISS relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are met. The school's religious ethos supports pupils' spiritual development. Leaders have carefully planned the topics that are included in the revamped personal development programme. They ensure that pupils receive relationships and sex education and careers information, and learn about different groups in society. The programme encourages pupils to think deeply about British values. However, some topics in the programme are not as well planned as others.

Older pupils feel that they do not have enough opportunities to hone their individual talents. Pupils sometimes share their views about the school with their peers and with staff. However, this process is not always effective. There are inequalities within the school because younger pupils get a better deal than older ones.

The school does not meet part 8 of the ISS. Governors, directors and leaders have not sufficiently prioritised dealing with the weaknesses that they have identified, including issues with accountability. Governors and directors have not challenged each other or school leaders enough about the negative culture in the school. Some issues have become more difficult to tackle as a result.

Relationships between staff and leaders, including those responsible for governance, are not consistently positive across the school. The parent body are split in their opinion of the school. Some parents praise it highly, others are concerned about staffing changes and a number of other issues. Leaders, governors and directors are keen to improve the school's culture and relationships with stakeholders. Their plans to do this do not go far enough.

Leaders, directors and governors have made all reasonable adaptations so that the building is accessible to all pupils. However, the school does not meet two standards in part 6 of the ISS relating to the provision of information. Leaders have not ensured that the number of complaints that the school has received is available on the website. The address and telephone number of the body that owns the school is not listed on the website.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The designated safeguarding lead is exceptionally rigorous when pursuing safeguarding concerns. She liaises closely with external agencies, challenging them when she thinks it is appropriate. Leaders carefully oversee recruitment processes, which are tight and fully meet requirements. They work closely with staff, keeping them up to date with current concerns and any changes to strengthen existing policies.

Leaders have prioritised improving many aspects of health and safety, including risk assessments for trips and online safety. As part of this, leaders have introduced effective software for monitoring the online content accessed on all school computers.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Leaders, directors and governors have identified weaknesses in accountability in some parts of the school. However, they have not taken full enough responsibility for these weaknesses. Recent actions designed to improve accountability have led to further issues. Leaders, directors and governors need to put these weaknesses front and centre, working together to develop an effective school-wide culture of accountability.
- Leaders, directors and governors are aware of the divisions within the school community. They have developed plans focused on improving the situation. Planned actions do not take enough account of the negative impact that divisions are having on the entire community, especially the pupils. Existing plans need to be developed extensively.
- Directors and governors need to ensure that the school has capacity in leadership, as well as the necessary resources to tackle the issues outlined in this report. They also need to make sure that all unmet standards are met.

- The quality of education varies between subjects and key stages. Leaders need to ensure that planned curriculum developments are implemented quickly. New and existing developments should take more account of pupils' prior knowledge and skills. Across the board, plans should focus on the subject-specific concepts that pupils need to master and the order in which they should be introduced.
- Some teachers' expectations of the standards pupils should reach are too low. Leaders need to ensure that teachers across the school have the same high expectations. They should also make sure that all teachers receive the training they need to plug any gaps that pupils have in their subject-specific knowledge and skills.
- The way behaviour is managed across the school is too variable. Leaders need to check that teachers adhere to agreed approaches. All staff need to receive training on managing the behavioural needs of pupils with SEND, as well as tackling different forms of bullying. Teachers and leaders need to ensure that pupils attend regularly.
- The school runs a number of trips and visits to support pupils' learning across the curriculum, which pupils praise. However, leaders need to make sure that pupils have the opportunities to nurture their individual talents. They also need to make sure that mechanisms for pupils to share their concerns and make a positive difference to their school community are effective.

## 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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	116567
<b>DfE registration number</b>	852/6003
<b>Local authority</b>	Southampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	10103856
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	242
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	5
<b>Proprietor</b>	St Mary's Independent School Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Nicholas Vaughan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Claire Charlemagne
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£8,085 to £10,506
<b>Telephone number</b>	023 8067 1267
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stmarysindependentschool.co.uk/">www.stmarysindependentschool.co.uk/</a>
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stmiss.co.uk
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13–15 March 2018

## Information about this school

- St Mary's Independent School is an independent co-educational Roman Catholic school for pupils aged from three to 16 years. It is a Christian school whose mission statement is embodied in the lives and works of the De la Mennais Brothers, whose aim is 'to make Jesus better known and loved'.
- The school is a limited company known as St Mary's Independent School Ltd. All members of the school's governing body are also directors of this company. The Brothers of Christian Instruction own the school buildings and oversee the Catholic aspects of the school. Two representatives from the Brothers of Christian Instruction sit on the governing body and are referred to as trustees.

- The school had a monitoring inspection in September 2018. The last full standard inspection was in March 2018, when the school was judged to require improvement.
- The school is an all-through school, with separate buildings for primary and secondary pupils. The early years setting is housed in the primary building. It consists of a Reception class and a Nursery, which includes part-time and full-time placements.

## **Information about this inspection**

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the governors, including the chair of the governing body along with a representative of the Brothers of Christian Instruction. The governors with whom we met are also directors of the limited company that owns the school.
- We held meetings together and separately with the headteacher and the two deputy headteachers, one of whom is responsible for primary and one for secondary. We also met with secondary and primary staff and support staff. We held separate meetings on more than one occasion with groups of primary- and secondary-aged pupils.
- We met separately with the SENCo, the careers leader and personal development leaders. We also met with the school's external human resources adviser.
- We looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives) to examine the quality of education. We did deep dives in English (including early reading), mathematics, history and music. To explore each subject, we spoke with leaders, teachers and pupils, looked at pupils' work and examined curriculum plans for the subject. We visited lessons in most of the subjects being taught during the inspection.
- We scrutinised safeguarding arrangements, carefully reviewing policies, documents and records. We spoke in detail with the designated lead and deputy for safeguarding, other staff and pupils. We checked the single central record, records of recruitment and staff files. We also made a phone call to the local area designated officer (LADO).
- We observed the school at work during the inspection and reviewed a wide range of documentation relating to the independent school standards and the quality of education. We toured the premises and chatted to staff and pupils during lunchtime, including support staff. We also spoke to parents collecting their children from both the primary and secondary buildings at the end of the school day.

- We reviewed the 37 responses to Ofsted’s pupil questionnaire and three responses to the staff questionnaire. We took account of the 75 free-text comments that parents made as part of the Parent View survey, 99 responses made to the Parent View questionnaire and three emails from staff. We also considered a letter from a parent.

### **Inspection team**

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Dan Lambert

Her Majesty’s Inspector



## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school failed to meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
  - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
  - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
  - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
  - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
  - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
  - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.

#### **Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor-
  - 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely.

#### **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
  - 9(a) a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, amongst other matters, sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour;
  - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.

## **Part 6. Provision of information**

- 32(2) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is-
  - 32(2)(b)(ii) where the proprietor is a body of persons, the address and telephone number of its registered or principal office.
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is-
  - 32(3)(f) details of the complaints procedure referred to in paragraph 33, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

## **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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