

Inspection of St Matthias Academy

Alexandra Park, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2BG

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

School leaders and local governors have an overgenerous view of the quality of education at St Matthias. Ineffective monitoring has led to delays in identifying and addressing the issues quickly enough. There are weaknesses in the curriculum, including in reading and mathematics. This means that too many pupils are not receiving a good quality of education. Trust leaders know precisely what needs to be done. However, it is early days and more work is needed to secure the necessary improvements.

Pupils like this school. Teachers and pupils have strong relationships. Pupils feel safe and happy. Consequently, most pupils attend increasingly well. Pupils are confident that adults will sort out the rare incidents of bullying that occur. However, some pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties do not behave as well as they could, and at times learning is disrupted.

Leaders want pupils to succeed. They provide a wide range of enrichment activities, such as music and art. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their enjoyment of construction skills and fitness lessons. Staff have a deep understanding of the challenges pupils face. They prioritise helping pupils overcome obstacles caused by physical and mental health difficulties.

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

The quality of education varies between St Matthias' three sites. School leaders have not ensured consistency in some curriculum subjects, including mathematics and reading. Some staff do not have a strong enough knowledge of the subjects they teach and how to implement them effectively. Recently, the trust chief executive officer (CEO) has secured an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She understands the need to improve the identified areas rapidly and robustly.

Some curriculum subjects, such as art and science, are well considered and ambitious. However, some leaders do not have the expertise they need to ensure that the school has a coherently planned and sequenced curriculum. In mathematics, leaders typically organise broad knowledge and skills effectively, but, too often, teachers do not break it down into the smaller steps needed for pupils to access their learning fully.

Leaders have not considered well enough how to place reading at the heart of the curriculum across the three sites. Older pupils do not receive a curriculum that inspires a love of reading. These pupils are unable to talk about books they have read or authors they enjoy. Leaders have secured training in phonics to improve the delivery of the early reading curriculum for primary school pupils. However, this has been delayed due to COVID-19.

At the Brentry site, staff ensure reading is prioritised. For example, they set out reading material at the start of every day to engage pupils in the reading process and foster a love of reading.

The school's approach to assessing pupils' learning does not enable staff to check what pupils have learned and remembered. Consequently, pupils' learning is not individualised enough. For example, mathematics assessments lack detail and rely on anecdotal evidence rather than secure information. This means that specific, planned support for the improvement of mathematics is imprecise.

Pupils behave well and engage in learning when the work set is suitable. However, the curriculum does not consistently meet their needs. This disrupts learning. Leaders have not ensured that staff have consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Staff do not routinely remind pupils of how they are expected to behave, or challenge inappropriate behaviour.

Pupils gain confidence and have high aspirations for their futures. The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. Leaders ensure that pupils receive strong careers advice and guidance. For example, during the inspection Year 11 pupils attended a careers fair.

The school promotes pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding well. Pupils raise money for charities and celebrate festivals from different faiths. However, some pupils do not have a secure understanding of life in modern Britain. For example, they do not know about democracy and law.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have secured important improvements to safeguarding recently. The focus on increasing pupils' understanding of sexual abuse and harassment, including consent, is impressive. Pupils have a detailed knowledge of how to stay safe online.

Staff understand the school's safeguarding procedures. They know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare. Concerns are followed up swiftly. Leaders work with a range of other agencies effectively to support pupils and their families. Leaders complete and record all the required checks to assure themselves that all staff working in school are safe to do so.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- School leaders and local governors have an overgenerous evaluation of the school. This has delayed the much-needed improvements to the curriculum.

Leaders need to focus on developing the agreed curriculum and monitor the impact on pupils' learning.

- Some staff do not have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. This leads to weaker implementation of the intended curriculum. Leaders need to ensure that all teachers are equipped with strong subject knowledge and pedagogy so that they can deliver the curriculum consistently and pupils learn well.
- Leaders have not put in place an effective system to help staff assess what pupils know and remember. As a result, some staff give pupils work that is not matched to their needs. Leaders need to agree, implement and monitor a robust system of assessment.
- The promotion of reading for pleasure is inconsistent across the school sites. Leaders have not prioritised reading for older pupils. This means pupils are reluctant readers. Leaders need to ensure that pupils are provided with additional, high-quality reading materials so that they are inspired to read more widely.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 school and you are 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	144285
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10218371
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Academy pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stephen Bradshaw
Headteacher	Aileen Morrison
Website	www.stmatthias.learnmat.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Matthias converted to become an academy pupil referral unit, part of Learn@ Multi-Academy Trust, in September 2017. When its predecessor school, St Matthias Park Pupil Referral Service, was last inspected in November 2014 it was judged to be good overall.
- A new CEO joined the trust in September 2021.
- The school operates from three premises. The primary provision opened in September 2021 and currently has key stage 2 pupils.
- The school uses one alternative provider.
- Most pupils who attend St Matthias Academy have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are working with Bristol City Council to define the school's designation and roll more accurately.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors visited the three school sites.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, curriculum leaders, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and staff.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from the local governing body. She talked to the chair of trustees, a local authority commissioning manager and the trust's school improvement adviser by telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics, art, and personal, social and health education. Inspectors also considered some aspects of the science curriculum.
- For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered a range of school documents, such as leaders' self-evaluation, improvement plans, the CEO's notes of visits and the school improvement adviser's reports.
- Inspectors reviewed records relating to pupils' behaviour, attendance, restraints and bullying.
- Inspectors considered how the school protects pupils and keeps them safe. Inspectors met with safeguarding leaders, reviewed a range of documentation and talked to staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Sue Costello, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Catherine Leahy

Ofsted Inspector

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