

Inspection of a good school: St Mary Magdalene Academy

Liverpool Road, Islington, London N7 8PG

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 April 2022

Outcome

St Mary Magdalene Academy continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if the inspectors were to carry out a section 5 inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils said their school is like a family. They like the way that they are welcome to arrive early and stay late. During this time, pupils may study or do additional activities with their friends. Pupils said that they are happy in school. Leaders teach pupils how to stay safe and they have effective systems to train staff in keeping pupils safe.

Leaders have high expectations of all pupils, from the early years foundation stage through to the sixth form. Pupils experience a rich and ambitious curriculum. For example, all pupils learn Mandarin, from the Reception Year to Year 7. Many pupils choose to continue with it from Year 8, with some students studying it at A level. All pupils in Years 7 and 8 learn to play a musical instrument. Pupils achieve very well in their studies, alongside participating in a range of enrichment activities outside the classroom.

Pupils are polite and respectful to one another and to staff. Pupils move between lessons calmly and behave responsibly at break and lunchtimes. There is very little disruption in lessons.

Pupils are taught about being kind to one another and to not accept bullying of any kind. If bullying happens, pupils are confident to report it. This is because teachers act swiftly to deal with concerns.

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

Leaders provide pupils with an aspirational and balanced curriculum, from the Reception Year to the sixth form. They have given careful thought to what they want pupils to know and remember throughout their time in the school. High expectations for all form the basis of leaders' work. Curriculum thinking meets the ambition of the national curriculum and often goes beyond it.

Across the curriculum, subject content and the way that this is sequenced over time have been considered thoroughly. For example, in geography, pupils in Year 7 learn about the erosion of rivers. They apply and deepen their learning when they study coastal erosion in Year 8. In Year 10, pupils build on this knowledge further. For example, they consider the impact and implications of erosion on people and places.

Pupils' work is of high quality in a range of subjects. Teachers explain concepts and subject-specific vocabulary clearly. This is because they have strong subject knowledge and are skilled at increasing pupils' understanding. In the early years, children's language development is also prioritised. Staff are skilled in modelling language. They encourage children to express themselves accurately and with increasing confidence.

Helpful assessment approaches contribute to the curriculum being taught consistently well, including in the sixth form. Teachers know how to check if pupils have the essential building blocks of learning needed to understand more difficult concepts in the future. These checks on pupils' learning are regular and enable teachers to identify and correct misconceptions, as well as fill emerging gaps in knowledge.

Leaders have made reading a priority. Phonics is taught from the start of the Reception Year. Leaders make sure that teachers have the right training to deliver the phonics programme effectively. Pupils read books that match the sounds they know. If pupils fall behind, teachers support them to catch up quickly. Starting in the early years, teachers take time to read stories to children. This helps to create a love of reading, which continues throughout the school.

Leaders ensure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), access the full range of subjects and other opportunities in the school. Leaders identify pupils' individual needs and provide teachers with the information they need to support these pupils in lessons. Subject leaders think about how to adapt their plans so that all pupils can access the same knowledge. Adaptations focus on making sure pupils overcome any barriers to learning. For example, some pupils with SEND in Years 7 and 8 are taught in a smaller group. They learn the same knowledge as all pupils but do this in an environment where their individual needs can be catered for fully.

Lessons throughout the school are rarely disrupted. Pupils are keen to learn and they work hard in their lessons. High standards of behaviour are promoted through a clear system of rewards and sanctions. This is understood by pupils, and it is applied consistently and fairly by staff. As a result, there is a calm, orderly and studious environment around the school.

Leaders also provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils outside their academic lessons, from music to sport to cooking. Lessons on 'preparation for adult life' provide pupils with the knowledge they need to know for life in modern Britain. This includes, for example, relationships and sex education. Pupils also learn about democracy and the legal system of the United Kingdom. Leaders, working with partners in the world of business and the careers adviser, make sure that pupils have access to a wide range of information and opportunities about further study and future careers.

Staff said that leaders at all levels are supportive. They value how they receive the training they need to perform their roles. Many staff commented on how they all work well together as a team and support one another. They also said that leaders are considerate of their workload. Leaders seek feedback from staff and adapt working practices, when appropriate, in response to this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a strong safeguarding culture. Every adult understands they have a responsibility to keep pupils safe. All staff receive safeguarding training, and this is updated regularly. Staff know how to report concerns and they do this appropriately. When necessary, leaders work well with outside agencies and make sure that pupils get the support they need.

Pupils are taught about potential dangers in the local area and learn about how to stay safe online. Pupils also have lessons about peer-on-peer abuse, and they know whom to report concerns to. Pupils trust their teachers to deal with these issues sensitively and promptly.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2013.

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	134314
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	10211109
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1336
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	257
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rhian Roberts
Headteacher	Victoria Linsley
Website	www.smmacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school operates on two sites. The main site caters for all year groups from Reception to Year 13. The second site, for some sixth-form students and the art studio, is at the Clerkenwell Parochial Campus, Amwell Street, London EC1R 1UN.
- The school is a Church of England school, sponsored by the London Diocesan Board of Schools. The last section 48 inspection of the school was in March 2016.
- The school uses four registered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders from both the primary and secondary phases of the school. Inspectors also met with the chair of the trust and the deputy chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, geography and physical education. Inspectors visited lessons, reviewed samples of pupils' work, met with pupils to discuss their learning and met with subject leaders and teachers. Inspectors also looked at subject plans for music and art and visited lessons in Mandarin, psychology and music.
- Through discussions with leaders, trustees, governors, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how pupils are safeguarded. Inspectors also looked at records related to safeguarding, including records of pre-employment checks on staff.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils in both the primary and secondary school. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff about safeguarding, behaviour and their workload. Inspectors also looked at the responses from pupils, staff and parents to Ofsted's surveys, including Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

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