

Inspection of a good school: St Mary Magdalene Academy: The Courtyard

Holloway Road, Islington, London N7 8LT

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 February 2023

Outcome

St Mary Magdalene Academy: The Courtyard continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Parents and carers, pupils and staff associated with this school sing its praises. Pupils say the school staff support them really well. They feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Staff build positive and trusting relationships with pupils as the first and most important step to their future education. Throughout the day, staff check how pupils are feeling and identify any support that might be needed.

Pupils learn how to talk about their emotions and develop strategies which help them to remain calm and ready to learn. Pupils say that staff listen to them and understand. Leaders and staff have high expectations for all pupils.

Pupils have time and space to understand their own unique qualities. They learn to celebrate their strengths and to make plans for their future lives. Diversity and inclusion are championed in the school at every level. This includes the pupil body. There is a very strong ethos of tolerance and respect that permeates the school. New pupils and staff settle into this positive culture very quickly.

Leaders have well-established systems to support pupils' behaviour. Leaders' vision for a positive approach to behaviour is shared universally. Bullying is never tolerated.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious and broad curriculum. It is well sequenced and takes into account the particular communication and interaction needs of the pupils. There is a strong focus on English, mathematics and personal development. Pupils learn other subjects, including cooking, drama, performing arts and world studies. Pupils have regular physical education. They take part in local gym sessions, rowing and boxing as well as more traditional activities.

Pupils often start at this school with gaps in their knowledge. Leaders have ensured that careful assessment identifies these gaps and that teaching addresses these. Teachers check what pupils have learned and can remember regularly.

Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Sometimes pupils need help to regulate their emotions and staff provide this in a consistent and calm way.

The support for pupils' wider development is strong. Pupils learn topics that support their well-being and independence. For example, pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and about safe and healthy relationships. In careers education, pupils learn about the world of work. Leaders provide group and individual sessions to give pupils advice about the choices they will make for their future. Leaders work in a coordinated way with other agencies, including mental health professionals and speech and language therapists, to ensure that pupils get the support they need in a joined-up way.

Reading is a priority. Pupils read a wide range of high-quality books in lessons and for enjoyment. If pupils cannot read with accuracy when they start at the school, they receive individualised teaching to help them catch up. Teachers use modern and classic literature to teach key academic content. Pupils also discuss important ethical and moral issues, for example the difference between right and wrong, understanding different relationships, different types of family and religious and non-religious beliefs. Pupils learn to express their own views and to consider the views of others. Pupils learn the skills and knowledge that they need to gain meaningful qualifications. They also develop into resilient, independent adults.

Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. Teachers have a passion for the subjects they teach and they skilfully use pupils' interests to engage them in learning. In some areas of the curriculum, however, the key bits of knowledge that pupils need to learn are not clearly identified. This means that when pupils tackle a complex task, they sometimes have not secured the underlying learning that they need in order to complete the task successfully.

Adults who work at the school feel well-supported. They say that they can get help if they need it from leaders. Staff receive training that is relevant and helps them with the jobs that they do. Teachers and other adults appreciate the way that leaders encourage their creativity.

Leaders provide a wide range of other activities which support pupils' personal development, for example trips to the local city farm, many different theatre visits and a regular residential trip. There are many school clubs and activities, such as choir, drama, arts and crafts and chess. Pupils enjoy the extra activities that staff organise, such as podcasts, the student council and school theatre productions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. All staff are vigilant. They know how to spot the signs that a pupil may need help and they respond quickly if they are concerned. Staff have regular training and supervision.

Leaders have ensured that all statutory requirements are met, including the checks on staff employed at the school.

The whole school community understands why pupils at the school may be more vulnerable as a result of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example how to notice controlling behaviour and the possible dangers of social media and the internet.

Leaders take swift action to involve external agencies if a pupil needs additional support. Leaders work closely with these partners in a coordinated way.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders have not identified the component knowledge that pupils should learn before they move on to more complex tasks. This means that pupils do not consistently acquire a deep knowledge in these subjects. Leaders should fine tune the curriculum so that it is very clear exactly what pupils should learn and remember in all subjects.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2017.

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.

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	139418
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	10255522
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	22
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Eliot Brooks
Headteacher	Deborah Shepherd
Website	www.smmathecourtyard.org
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 May 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties as their primary need. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- The school is a single academy trust. The members of the board of governors are also trustees. The headteacher is the accounting officer for the trust.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision. However, pupils sometimes access courses at mainstream schools.
- The school uses an additional site to accommodate increasing numbers. This site is at Westbourne Road, London N7 8AB.

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, the deputy headteacher, the heads of department for pastoral care, careers and the sixth form. Inspectors also met with the chair of governors and other governors. Inspectors also met with the leader with responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion.
- When evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the leader responsible for safeguarding, the deputy safeguarding leads and the safeguarding governor. Inspectors also scrutinised the school policies and record-keeping systems.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including world studies, cooking and hospitality, performing arts and physical education.
- Inspectors considered the views of 23 members of staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey. They also considered 12 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and 14 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey.

Inspection team

Gary Pocock, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ann Pratt

Ofsted Inspector

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