

Inspection of St Mark's West Essex Catholic School

Tripton Road, Harlow, Essex CM18 6AA

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 February 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Expectations of pupils at St Mark's are high. They celebrate their achievements and those of others. They know how to behave well. Pupils are consistently respectful and polite.

Pupils are clear about what they are learning and why. They value feedback given in lessons and routinely use this to help them improve their work.

Behaviour is calm and purposeful. Bullying rarely occurs. If it does, pupils know that leaders will resolve it quickly. They are confident to share concerns regarding this with school staff.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of enrichment opportunities that link to the school's mission to ensure 'opportunities for all'. For example, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) regularly win county boccia competitions.

While the sixth-form curriculum is in most cases as effective as that in the rest of the school, for a significant part of the independent study programme, the guidance, content and expectations are not clear enough. This results in sixth-form students not achieving as well as they should.

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

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum. They have put in place a curriculum that is well designed. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well. Leaders know that reading is important to ensure that pupils can access the full curriculum successfully. They have established a well-constructed programme to support the weakest readers. This helps these pupils to learn to read fluently and consequently to be able to access the curriculum across the school.

Teachers deliver the curriculum well. They are well trained and have strong subject knowledge. Teachers plan activities that help pupils build knowledge on prior learning. Teachers spot misunderstandings quickly and correct these.

Leaders identify pupils with SEND accurately. They review appropriate information to plan effective support strategies for these pupils. Teachers are knowledgeable about the needs of pupils with SEND. As a result, they are able to adapt activities and resources expertly and appropriately to meet pupils' needs well, for example by using specialist balls with bells inside them in physical education (PE). Pupils with SEND feel that they are well supported in lessons.

The expectations for how well sixth-form students will achieve do not consistently reflect the expectations in place throughout the rest of the school. For the most part, leaders have planned a curriculum that enables the delivery of key subject knowledge. However, the independent study programme that runs parallel with taught sessions is not planned well enough. It does not complement students' class

delivery, and therefore sixth-form students do not build up the skills and knowledge they need sufficiently to achieve well in the subjects they study. Furthermore, sixth-form students are not always clear about what they need to do to improve.

Following the pandemic, sixth-form attendance is low. Additionally, sixth-form students' attendance is not as rigorously monitored as it is for other pupils in the school. When students miss school, it is unclear how they are helped to catch up. This is because leaders' approaches and expectations are inconsistent. As a result, attendance is not closely checked, and students do not achieve as well as they could.

Leaders have implemented a clear behaviour policy that all staff understand and apply consistently. They address any low-level disruption quickly. As a result, pupils understand what is expected of them and behave appropriately. Being polite, respectful and empathetic are everyday, typical behaviours for pupils at the school.

Leaders have prioritised pupils' wider development. There is a well-considered curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education. Pupils state that everyone should be treated the same, and differences should be celebrated. There is a culture of understanding of others. This is reflected in the interactions pupils have with each other.

There is a range of careers events and opportunities available. Work experience and encounters with employers are appropriate, including in the sixth form. High numbers of pupils remain in education or enter employment after Year 11 and Year 13.

Staff value the actions leaders have taken to reduce staff workload. This enables staff to focus on teaching.

Governors hold school leaders to account. They ensure that leaders seek external advice to check and validate decisions that are being made, for example in the recent use of the local authority school effectiveness adviser to review the mathematics curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders' agreed systems for safeguarding are thorough. Staff are well trained and know how to log incidents and concerns. Leaders follow these up in a timely manner. They secure the help of appropriate agencies for vulnerable pupils. Leaders are tenacious when supporting pupils to ensure that pupils' needs are met.

Pupils learn a lot about how to stay safe, including when online. Leaders ensure that training covers risks that are relevant to the local context. For example, training covers how to identify concerns regarding county lines. Those responsible for recruitment checks on staff are meticulous in their approach.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not considered carefully enough the whole-curriculum provision for sixth-form students. Expectations of what students should be doing when not being directly taught are unclear. This leads to students spending time in school not learning. Leaders need to ensure that they put in place well-thought-through curriculum provision that supplements appropriately the teaching students receive in class.
- The processes for monitoring the attendance and progress of sixth-form students who miss school are not effective. The work of form tutors and sixth-form leaders is inconsistent. There are no clear systems in place to ensure that when students miss school, they have the opportunity to catch up with their learning. This results in low attendance and students not being clear about the next steps they should take to improve. Leaders should consider what systems are required to ensure that staff understand and are well trained in how to check on students' academic progress if they are absent, and equally are able to improve the attendance of students so they do not miss their learning.

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	137058
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10255095
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
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	1,044
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	186
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Steve Gleeson
Headteacher	Elaine Heaphy
Website	www.st-marks.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Leaders use one registered and one unregistered provider of alternative provision.
- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character. Its most recent section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character took place in November 2018. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within five school years.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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.
- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of the governing body (including the chair of governors), and representatives from both the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in art, mathematics, history, and design and technology. 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 looked at a range of documents, including the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, a sample of safeguarding records, and documents relating to behaviour, attendance and the provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors considered 60 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 39 written comments from parents and carers. There were no responses to the staff or pupil surveys. Inspectors spoke to pupils and staff throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Chris Stainsby, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Carrie McMorn	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Hemmings	His Majesty's Inspector
Charlie Fordham	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023