

Inspection of a good school: St Mark's Church of England Academy

Acacia Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 1SF

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 March 2023

Outcome

St Mark's Church of England Academy continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an inclusive school where pupils are happy and do well. Leaders have high expectations for pupils and ensure that they follow a broad and ambitious curriculum. Pupils develop a deep body of knowledge and produce work of high quality in different subjects. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

Pupils are proud of the contributions they make to the school community by becoming leaders outside of the classroom. These opportunities include joining the student council, equalities group or eco-group, or becoming 'coaching captains' or sixth-form prefects.

Pupils' learning is supported by a wide range of outings and extra-curricular activities aimed at building their confidence, teamwork skills and positive attitudes. Leaders organise educational visits for all pupils, including to Southwark Cathedral, London Zoo and Kew Gardens. Pupils participate in public speaking competitions, social change projects and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. They value the range of sports and clubs on offer, such as Djembe drumming, Korean club, gardening, and the choir.

Pupils are kept safe. They behave well, and attendance is high. Bullying is rare. When it does occur, leaders act quickly to deal with it.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. Credible plans are in place to increase the number of pupils who study the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) at GCSE, with a high proportion of pupils now following the EBacc in Year 10.

The curriculum is well designed. Pupils learn about key ideas and concepts in a logical order. This helps pupils to secure the knowledge they need before progressing to more demanding learning. For example, in modern foreign languages, pupils learn basic grammatical structures. This supports them when they move from constructing simple to more complex sentences. Similarly, in English, pupils learn to identify the style, context and themes of different poems. This helps them go on to analyse and compare more complex contemporary poetry.

Leaders ensure that the delivery of the curriculum is adapted to meet pupils' starting points. For example, at the start of Year 7, the mathematics curriculum focuses on securing pupils' understanding of number. This is to address gaps in knowledge that some pupils have. Subject leaders work well together to ensure, where appropriate, that learning in one subject is reinforced in another. For example, in design and technology, pupils produce their own clocks by studying the Bauhaus and Art Deco movements. They refine their perspective drawing skills and develop their vocabulary.

Teachers frequently check pupils' understanding and address any gaps in their knowledge. This enables pupils to learn and remember more securely in the long term. Teachers benefit from regular training, which enables them to further develop their subject expertise. As a result, they explain ideas clearly and concisely.

Leaders quickly identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This includes working with local primary schools and parents before pupils arrive in Year 7. Teachers are provided with clear and comprehensive information on the needs of each pupil so that they know how best to support them in the classroom. As a result, pupils with SEND are well supported to follow the same curriculum as their peers. Leaders make careful checks on the learning of pupils with SEND. Additional help is put in place for any pupils who fall behind. Those at an early stage of reading are supported to read with accuracy, fluency and confidence through a structured phonics programme.

Pupils value their lessons and take learning seriously. They approach sensitive topics maturely and are keen to contribute to classroom discussion. Pupils work well together, and leaders have put in place clear processes to promote positive behaviour. As a result, disruptions to learning are rare and are swiftly addressed should they arise.

The provision for pupils' wider development is a real strength. 'Lifeology', the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, contributes to pupils' understanding of important topics. These include how to keep healthy, stay safe online, and the importance of respecting differences between people. Additionally, there is a well-thought-through careers programme, which includes enrichment days and dedicated careers weeks. Pupils attend 'coaching time', where they discuss current affairs and debate key issues. Students in the sixth form support younger pupils by, for example, volunteering to listen to them read.

Staff are proud to work here and feel well supported. They comment that leaders listen to them when implementing policies and aim to reduce workload.

Trustees know the school well. They provide a valuable skillset to support the ongoing strategic development of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established robust processes to safeguard pupils. They proactively identify pupils and families in need of support. Cases are regularly reviewed, and record-keeping is kept up to date so that leaders can check that the right support is being given in a timely way. Leaders work with local agencies and external partners to ensure that pupils who need help receive it.

Staff receive regular training and are knowledgeable about local safeguarding risks. They know how to report any concerns they may have. Pupils are safe and trust that adults will listen to their concerns. The curriculum has been designed to help pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

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 November 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	134003
Local authority	Merton
Inspection number	10255445
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	856
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	123
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jay Bhutani
Principal	Hannah Fahey
Website	www.stmarksacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 November 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Anthem Schools Trust.
- The school is a Church of England school within the Diocese of Southwark. The school's last section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character was in January 2016. The school's next inspection will be within the next year.
- Leaders make use of six registered alternative providers.
- 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 educational qualification 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, modern foreign languages and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning, and reviewed samples of their work.
- Inspectors considered other subjects as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, subject leaders and groups of staff. Discussions were also held with representatives of the governing body and from the Anthem Schools Trust.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for the school's safeguarding arrangements. They also looked at safeguarding records, including pre-employment checks for staff.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Olly Wimborne, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Lloyd

Ofsted Inspector

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