

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic High School, A Catholic Voluntary Academy

Newbold Road, Upper Newbold, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S41 8AG

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 June 2024

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

The headteacher of this school is Maria Dengate. This school is a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by William Hayes.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since October 2012.

What is it like to attend this school?

One parent captured the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of parents and carers who expressed an opinion when they said: 'I feel lucky that I get to send my children here.' Pupils' conduct and attitudes towards one another, with adults and visitors are exceptional. They are welcoming and courteous while also industrious. Warm and trusting relationships are underpinned by a strong and inclusive ethos of care alongside high expectations at this popular school.

Pupils thrive at school both academically and socially, including in the sixth form. Classrooms are busy and purposeful learning spaces. Pupils receive consistently high-quality teaching that stimulates their interest and engagement in all subjects. They know that staff care about their success. The quality of pupils' classwork is of sustained high quality in all year groups. As a result, pupils attend and achieve remarkably well in all subjects by the end of key stages 4 and 5.

A unique aspect of the school's provision is a first-class programme for pupils' personal development. The elements of the school's innovative 'Inauro' scheme ensure that pupils feel safe and well prepared for life in modern society. Sixth-form students are well integrated into the life of the school. They are exceptionally positive role models for younger pupils.

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

Leaders have a precise understanding of the school's strengths and future development priorities. Governors are highly effective in holding leaders to account. At the heart of the school's success is an unwavering commitment to nurturing a strong culture of collaboration that puts pupils' interests first. The morale of staff is buoyant and united.

The high levels of academic and social achievement are rooted in exceptionally strong and cohesive opportunities for professional learning and development, complemented by robust arrangements designed to constantly check the quality of the school's provision. Staff value these approaches, particularly teachers who are embarking on their careers.

Pupils study a broad and ambitious curriculum for as long as possible, including some subjects, such as drama and citizenship, exceeding the subject content required of them by the national curriculum. The suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate are popular with most pupils. The school also ensures that pupils can progress their studies in subjects which meet their interests and aspirations across different year groups, including three modern foreign languages and hospitality and catering, for example. In all subjects the curriculum is exceptionally well organised, including in the sixth form. Teachers and supporting adults have complete clarity about what is taught and when.

Pupils benefit from being taught by specialist staff. Teachers' subject knowledge is consistently strong. They use this to design lessons that ignite pupils' curiosity about new ideas and concepts. Staff use assessment well to check that pupils' understanding is secure before moving on to new activities. Pupils are remarkably articulate in answering questions and showing their understanding to staff and fellow pupils. The quality of pupils' extended written work is of a notably high quality. In sixth-form lessons, students say that interactive learning experiences help them to remember more. Inspectors saw this in mathematics, for example.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported in school. The oversight of the provision for these pupils is strong. The school is uncompromising in its commitment to supporting pupils with SEND while also promoting their increasing independence and self-confidence. Many parents spoke of staff going 'above and beyond' to provide the help and support their children need, including in the sixth form. Vulnerable pupils achieve well. They produce similarly high-quality work to their peers and strive to meet the school's high expectations of all.

Reading is well promoted in school. Pupils frequently read independently as part of formal dedicated sessions. The school's strategies to support pupils who need additional help to strengthen reading accuracy and comprehension are well established, enabling these pupils to flourish as well as their peers.

The school takes pupils' personal and character development seriously. The 'Inauro' programme holistically connects exceptionally well pupils' study of: personal safety; personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education; relationships and sex education; and careers advice and guidance. Pupils have a strong understanding of equality and moral issues. They embrace the school's Catholic and British values in their conduct with others. The programme is complemented by an extensive range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities that are inclusive of all pupils. Pupils wear their ASPIRE reward badges with pride, showing their commitment to service, faith, endeavour and academic progress.

The 'Inauro' programme extends throughout the sixth form. Students excel in leadership and community initiatives that enable them to be very well prepared for early adulthood. They receive expert guidance about their next steps towards higher education and non-university pathways.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138470
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10324147
Type of school	Secondary
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	1350
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	316
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	William Hayes
Headteacher	Maria Dengate
Website	www.st-maryshigh.derbyshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 and 3 October 2012

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Hallam. The most recent section 48 inspection of this Catholic school, which is an inspection of the school's religious character, took place in April 2018.
- The school makes use of two unregistered alternative education providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, including for the sixth form and senior designated lead for safeguarding. Inspectors also met with other lead staff including heads of year, the school's family resource worker and the school's coordinator for pupils with SEND.
- The lead inspector met with three members of the board of trustees, including the chair. He also spoke by telephone to representatives from the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, drama, geography, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum with subject leaders, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also reviewed curriculum documentation and visited lessons for a range of other subjects, including history, science, sociology and PSHE.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of school documentation, including school policies, use of additional government funding and the school's records for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in school and around the school site during social time. They spoke with several groups of pupils, both formally and informally. Inspectors also observed morning assembly time.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created a positive and open culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and Ofsted's surveys for school staff and pupils. The lead inspector also spoke to some parents in school and by telephone.

Inspection team

Chris Stevens, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Ellenor Beighton	Ofsted Inspector
Kathryn Hardy	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Martin	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Sheppard	Ofsted Inspector

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