

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Catholic High School

Manchester Road, Astley, Tyldesley, Manchester M29 7EE

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 October 2024

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a real sense of community at this school. Older pupils enjoy running clubs for younger pupils. For instance, pupils in Year 11 run a boys' choir. Students in the sixth form are directing the whole-school production. Alongside developing pupils' interests and talents, this fosters strong and caring relationships. Pupils feel comfortable and happy in school.

The school's expectations of pupils' achievement, particularly those who are disadvantaged, have risen considerably. Pupils benefit from high-quality pastoral care. Most pupils achieve well across a range of subjects.

Pupils respond well to the school's 'warm strict' behaviour policy. They follow routines diligently. Pupils are polite and friendly. They are confident, resilient and able to engage thoughtfully in debate.

Student leaders are proud to wear their coloured ties. The school helps to develop pupils into active citizens. For example, one of the student committees successfully led a campaign to reduce litter pollution on the school site. Pupils participate in charitable events such as raising money for the homeless. They are aware of different cultures and religions and the importance of being welcoming and accepting of everyone.

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

The school has ensured that the curriculum is broad and ambitious. It has identified the key knowledge that pupils should learn. In most subjects, the curriculum allows key concepts to be revisited so that, over time, pupils build a secure body of knowledge. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects. In the main, teachers deliver the

curriculum as leaders intend. They frequently check what pupils have learned. However, at times, some teachers do not use assessment information as effectively as they could to address gaps in learning. This results in some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), not embedding knowledge.

Teachers consistently follow the school's 'think first, think twice' policy to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are supported well in lessons. This helps to ensure that these pupils are prioritised for support. Coupled with high expectations and clear identification of barriers to learning, this results in these pupils are learning better than they have previously.

The school has improved its process for identifying any additional needs that pupils may have. As a result, these needs are identified earlier. Staff effectively adapt learning to meet these pupils' needs. That said, some pupils with SEND are not achieving as well as they should. This is partly because the variability in how well staff use assessment information particularly impacts on these pupils. Added to this, some of these pupils have low rates of attendance, which means that they miss out on crucial learning. Nevertheless, students in the sixth form with SEND achieve well. They typically progress to appropriate next steps of employment, education or training.

Improving pupils' reading so that they can successfully access the curriculum has been a priority. The school's work to identify and fill gaps in pupils' reading knowledge has borne fruit. Clear pathways of support for pupils who may find reading more difficult ensure that they get the help that they need to catch up. At lunchtimes, the library is a hive of activity. Pupils are encouraged to sit and enjoy reading a book.

The school is taking action to improve pupils' attendance. There is a wealth of support available to pupils which has led to some improvement in attendance. Nevertheless, the school recognises that improving pupils' attendance remains a key priority, especially for some students in the sixth form and pupils with SEND. In lessons, pupils are focused and engaged in their work.

The school has crafted an interesting programme to cater for pupils' wider development. Pupils learn about healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way. They engage well with work experience and learn about different career paths. Pupils enjoy enrichment activities including theatre visits, sporting events and cooking lessons. Sixth form students are knowledgeable about university finance and apprenticeship pathways. They also learn valuable life skills such as the meaning of clothing care labels. Overall, pupils are prepared well for life beyond school.

The governors carry out their role effectively. They support the school well in driving forward improvement. Staff are proud to work at the school. They are helped to manage their workload with an annual calendar set in advance. Initiatives such as a ban on emails outside of working hours has improved staff well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils' attendance rates are not improving quickly enough. This means that they are not benefiting fully from the school's curriculum or its work around personal development. The school should ensure that it supports pupils, including those in the sixth form and those with SEND, to attend school more regularly.
- Some of the school's assessment methods are not used as effectively as they could be to help pupils to embed and consolidate learning and to inform teachers' next steps. As a result, a small number of pupils, including some with SEND, do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure that it supports staff to use assessment information to check that pupils do not have gaps in learning before introducing new concepts.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 for overall effectiveness in April 2019.

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	106538
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10348042
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
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	1569
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	258
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Neil Gredecki
Headteacher	Denise Brahms
Website	www.stmaryschs.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 April 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection there has been a new headteacher and a new chair of governors appointed.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- This Roman Catholic School is in the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The school's last section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, was in June 2019. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place before August 2027.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 spoke to the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff.
- The lead inspector held discussions with a representative of the local authority and the archdiocese. She also spoke with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also spoke to some subject leaders.
- Inspectors observed behaviour at lunchtime and spoke to pupils about their views of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments and the responses to the staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

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