

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

Lugwardine, Hereford, Herefordshire HR1 4DR

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 December 2024

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very proud of their school and attend regularly. Almost all who responded to their survey said they would recommend St Mary's to a friend. Pupils achieve well across the curriculum. This is a result of high expectations which leaders set for them.

The school provides many opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, emotional, social, physical and intellectual development. Pupils, including those who require emotional support, greatly appreciate clubs that enable them to role play while participating in games.

The strong behaviour of pupils is rooted in the school's values and the 'four Ps – punctual, polite, prepared, and productive'. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They say that there is always an adult to speak to.

Pupils have the opportunity to take GCSE examinations from four languages offered – French, German, Polish and Spanish. As a result, uptake is high. In the wider curriculum, they achieve very well in business – where uptake is well above the national average.

There are numerous opportunities for pupils to support others. For example, pupils recently raised £3,000 for charity. The school has made sure that different pupil groups are well represented in the school production of 'Shrek'.

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

The school has developed an ambitious and well sequenced curriculum to enable pupils to learn and remember more. It has also introduced a wider range of courses to broaden the

offer, including health and social care, hospitality and catering, and travel and tourism. Entry levels are high in the English Baccalaureate subjects, which are at the heart of the GCSE curriculum. This means pupils have access to a wider selection of qualifications. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very high for pupils overall. However, this is not so for the small number of disadvantaged pupils.

The bespoke reading programme in Year 7 helps those at an early stage of reading who need to catch up, including disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, they develop their confidence and become fluent readers.

Leaders have provided a range of additional support programmes to raise achievement, including for disadvantaged pupils. In the most recent examinations, this had more of a beneficial impact in mathematics compared to English. For example, 'rockstars' and revision sessions are having a positive impact on pupils' learning in mathematics.

The school has made rapid progress implementing a consistent approach to checking what pupils know and can remember. This is particularly successful in English and mathematics but also in many wider subjects, such as business. In these subjects, pupils know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Targeted questioning enables teachers to check pupils' understanding. Pupils understand the meaning of 'progressive overload' in circuit training in physical education.

Leaders have adapted the curriculum suitably for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Additional adults are well trained to support their specific needs. Teachers ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are fully integrated into lessons to access the learning, for example by carefully considering where pupils sit, so they can access help.

The school promotes personal development well through educational visits, activities and special events. Leaders closely monitor this to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are fully represented. This includes, for example, going to the theatre and a visit to a chocolate factory for pupils studying business. Pupils can enjoy a range of sports and competitions, including athletics, netball and rugby. Boxing supports pupils' emotional development well. Pupils have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, such as the piano or oboe.

The governing body thinks strategically, for example in evaluating new initiatives and considering the future structure of modern foreign languages in the school. It has a range of expertise, including in education, safeguarding and business, which it draws on well to challenge and support leaders.

The school has developed close and effective partnerships with the diocese and the Heart of Mercia Trust. This has enhanced opportunities for training and sharing of good practice with other schools for leaders and teachers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Disadvantaged pupils have not achieved as well as other pupils nationally. As a result, they are not as well prepared for the next stage in their education or training as other pupils. Leaders and governors should ensure that the steps they are taking lead to disadvantaged pupils making rapid gains in their learning in order to close the gap with their peers.

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 outstanding 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 outstanding for overall effectiveness in January 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	116992
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10343839
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	750
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lynn Johnson
Headteacher	Stuart Wetson
Website	www.st-maryshigh.hereford.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 and 30 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- An assistant headteacher with responsibility for assessment has been appointed since the last inspection.
- The school currently does not use any alternative provision.
- The school has a Christian ethos. It is part of the Diocese of Cardiff. The last section 48 inspection took place in April 2019. The next scheduled inspection should take place by January 2026.
- 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 any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, other leaders and staff.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the diocese.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the Heart of Mercia Trust.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. They reviewed responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils. They considered information on pupils' behaviour, attendance and personal development.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector heard pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- 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 an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Mark Sims, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

John Parr

Ofsted Inspector

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