



Inspection report

St Mary's High School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 117595
LEA Hertfordshire

Inspection number 273455
Inspection dates 19 and 20 January 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs S Kara HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Churchgate
School category	Voluntary Aided		Cheshunt
	<i>Diocese of St Albans</i>		Waltham Cross
Age range of pupils	11 to 19 years		Hertfordshire
			EN8 9ED
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 629124
Number on roll	842	Fax number	01992 642204
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr T Hoare
Date of previous inspection	January 2002	Headteacher	Ms S Benbow

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 19 years	4 March 2005	273455

Introduction

When St Mary's High School was inspected in January 2002, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on eight occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in January 2005.

Description of the school

St Mary's High School is a Church of England comprehensive school that takes pupils from south Hertfordshire and north London. The number on roll is smaller than average and has declined steadily in recent years; there are 842 pupils of whom 115 are in the sixth form. About 80 per cent of the pupils are from white British backgrounds and just over five per cent of the pupils do not speak English as their first language. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with the national average as is the number of pupils identified as having special educational needs. A new school is to be built and is scheduled for completion in 2007.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

St Mary's High School is an improving school which is well led and managed. The school's progress in dealing with the areas of weakness accelerated rapidly following the appointment of the headteacher in April 2004. The members of the senior management team work effectively together and provide the headteacher with good support. Examination results have improved in Key Stage 3 and are broadly in line with the national average. They have also improved in Key Stage 4 but remain below the national average. However, results have declined in the sixth form and are well below the national figure. Standards in the lessons have improved and are broadly in line with expectations. Although they have improved, the management and the provision for pupils who have special educational needs remain unsatisfactory overall. The quality of the teaching and learning is satisfactory with many good features. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved significantly and are good. The school has had severe difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff in recent years but this is no longer the case.

Effectiveness of the school's sixth form

The quality of provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. The school's participation in the South Broxbourne Consortium has enabled more courses to be offered and the teachers to benefit professionally from discussion with other sixth-form teachers. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The sixth-form examination results have declined steadily over the last four years; however, the right steps have been taken to ensure this trend is reversed. The new sixth form manager has improved the students' attitudes to work and encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their achievement and their contribution to the day-to-day life of the school.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of January 2002 required the school to address key issues concerned with leadership and management, standards, the quality of teaching and learning, attitudes and behaviour, accommodation and staffing and the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The inspection also required the sixth form to address key issues concerned with standards, status and profile, the environment and support and guidance. In May 2003, a further key issue was added concerned with the management and provision for special educational needs. There has been good progress in relation to all of the key issues except for those concerned with special educational needs and raising standards in the main school and the sixth form where progress has been reasonable.

Capacity to improve

The school's capacity to improve is good. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's future. She is driving improvement forward at a fast pace, and by raising the expectations that the pupils and the staff have of each other and of themselves, standards are rising. There is a revitalised team spirit and mutual respect amongst nearly all of the staff and pupils. The school's procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of its work are effective.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. However the key priorities are to:

- continue to raise standards throughout the school;
- continue to improve the quality of the teaching and learning;
- ensure that the leadership, management and provision for the pupils who have special educational needs are more effective.

Achievement and standards

In recent years, the results of the Key Stage 3 national tests in English, mathematics and science have improved both at the expected Level 5 and the higher Level 6. There was a modest rise in 2004 in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 and above in mathematics and science, but in English the increase was significant, from 55 per cent to 84 per cent. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher level more than doubled in English to 41 per cent, increased significantly in mathematics and fell slightly in science. Although the proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher GCSE grades increased by four percentage points to 41 per cent in 2004, the results remained below the national average and well below the results of schools with a similar intake. The number gaining one or more GCSE passes was below the national average. The pupils who took GCSEs in 2004 made less progress overall during Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 than pupils nationally. While the boys underachieved compared to the girls several years ago, this has been addressed and more recently the girls have lagged behind the boys in achieving passes at the higher grades.

Standards in lessons are rising. In English, for example, the pupils often achieved above the age-related expectations while in mathematics and science standards were broadly in line with expectations. The quality of the pupils' learning has improved in line with the quality of teaching. The pupils' more positive attitudes to their work have enabled them to learn more independently and they have a greater desire to do well both in lessons and in examinations. The school does not have sufficient information on the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and so cannot judge whether the impact of additional

support is effective. In some lessons the work was well matched to individual pupils' needs and so all of the pupils, including those who have special educational needs, made satisfactory progress but there is no clear strategy on how this should be achieved.

In the sixth form, examination results have fallen steadily for the last four years and in 2004 they were well below the national figures. In contrast, however, standards in lessons were broadly in line with course expectations.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good which is a marked improvement since the inspection in January 2002 when they were poor. The pupils are courteous to adults and respectful towards each other. Several initiatives have led to these improvements. Training in the management of behaviour has ensured there is a consistent approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour. The pupils have been consulted about meaningful rewards and sanctions. The evaluation of the use of the withdrawal system for pupils who misbehave has led to good support being provided for both teachers and pupils who have used the system most frequently, and a dramatic reduction in the number of pupils withdrawn from lessons. Those pupils who have more significant behavioural needs enjoy working in the newly established student support centre and they have responded well to the friendly and pertinent advice. The number of pupils excluded has fallen steadily over recent years but is still too high.

Attendance has improved and at just below 92 per cent is broadly in line with the national figure. Attendance in the sixth form remains poor, however, and still needs further attention.

The programme for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and citizenship is developing well and is satisfactory overall. Assemblies, many of which are held in the local church, develop the pupils' spiritual awareness. The pupils respect the moments for quiet reflection in tutor periods. The school helps the pupils consider current world events; for example, they were concerned for the impact of the tsunami tragedy. The curriculum is enriched by residential and day visits, and there is a good and increasing range of out-of-hours clubs. Although there are some ways for the pupils to take responsibility; for example, by participating in the school council's survey of opinions on ways to improve the school, there are too few opportunities for them to do so.

Quality of provision

The quality of the teaching and learning was satisfactory with many good features, which is a significant improvement since the inspection in January 2002. The teaching was satisfactory or better in just under nine out of ten lessons and good or very good in just over six out of ten. The thorough review of the standards expected of teachers has led to systematic improvements in the quality of teaching. Very good teaching was seen in English, geography, history, music, art and drama and in the student support centre. In the

good and very good lessons, the teachers combined their personal enthusiasm and subject expertise to inspire the pupils' interest and response. The management of the pupils' behaviour was subtle and praise was used extensively. The teacher's planning was detailed with concise and well focused learning objectives. The lesson progressed briskly and the skilful use of discussion and probing questions developed the pupils' thinking and application of knowledge. Imaginative teaching methods and activities effectively developed the pupils' independence and study skills and required them to think about new ideas, consider the feelings of others and debate points of view. In these well taught lessons the teacher had high expectations of all pupils and used their knowledge of the pupils' prior achievement to support and extend their learning. When teachers showed the pupils how to improve their test and examination grades the pupils not only appreciated what they had to do but raised their aspirations.

The main weaknesses in the unsatisfactory teaching were: poor management of the pupils' behaviour, low expectations of their response and the teacher dominating the talking.

A recently formed working group has published an exemplary newsletter, *Buzz*, outlining the good practice in teaching that exists in the school. The newsletter, together with the increased opportunities for professional development, has led to a significant increase in the variety of teaching and learning styles used across the school.

The school has a wide range of data on individual pupils' performance. Although marking has improved, too much was superficial and did not provide adequate feedback to the pupils to support improvement in their work.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. The vocational options in the Key Stage 4 curriculum are limited and the school is sensibly looking to develop them further.

The school acknowledges that, while there have been improvements in the provision for pupils who have special educational needs, it remains unsatisfactory overall. Senior managers sensibly sought advice on how to improve arrangements for these pupils and they have just begun to implement it. The teaching assistants' contribution to the pupils' learning has been strengthened by linking them with specific departments but much remains to be done to ensure that they are deployed effectively.

The school site is well maintained and there have been significant refurbishments to the sixth-form area, the public spaces, the staff room and some classrooms. There are some beautiful and inspirational art displays that help raise the pupils' expectations of what they might achieve. The pupils respect for the school environment has grown and vandalism has been significantly reduced.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management. She has made clear the minimum standards expected from

the teachers and the pupils and has acted appropriately to deal with those who have not responded positively to her challenge. The school has been revitalised under her leadership. She receives good support from the senior management team which has been strengthened by the addition of a consultant deputy headteacher and two temporary assistant headteachers. The senior managers work effectively together and provide clear systems and procedures for the staff and pupils to follow. As a result, the middle managers have a greater understanding of their role and are beginning to take more responsibility for the quality of the teaching and learning in their departments or year groups. More rigorous interview procedures, good support systems for new staff and the opportunity for increased responsibilities within the school have significantly reduced staff turnover.

The school's very good process for monitoring lessons has given the senior staff a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. There is a good programme to help teachers make satisfactory teaching better. Unsatisfactory teaching has been identified and effectively dealt with. A good strategic plan has been drawn up and is well focused on five manageable projects.

In the past, the governing body was not sufficiently rigorous in holding the school to account; governors are now much more aware of this responsibility and are beginning to meet it. The governors' effective management of the school's income, combined with helpful financial support from the local education authority (LEA) for special projects, has ensured the budget has remained balanced.

The LEA has provided very good support to the school. A new statement of action has been written to match the school's improvement plan. The school's development adviser has worked creatively with the school to ensure that the staff have received extensive training. Advanced skills teachers have made a useful contribution; for example, in physical education where newly qualified teachers received good subject specialist support.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

St Mary's High School was inspected in January 2002 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in December 2002, in May, July and November 2003, and in March, July and November 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2002.

In January 2005, four HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Forty one lessons and one assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the chair and vice chair of the governing body, members of the senior management team and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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