



St Mary's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 101814
Local Authority Croydon
Inspection number 286193
Inspection dates 18–19 October 2006
Reporting inspector Anne Feltham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Woburn Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Croydon
Age range of pupils	11–16		CR0 2AB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8686 3837
Number on roll (school)	725	Fax number	020 8781 1264
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Jack McVicker
		Headteacher	Mr Ejiro Ughwujabo
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	18–19 October 2006	286193

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic High School is a smaller than average secondary school, situated in the centre of Croydon. It is in an area of significant economic and social deprivation. Most pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and around half the pupils have a first language other than English. Pupils enter the school with standards which are below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is average, although this has been higher in recent years. More pupils than is usual join the school after Year 7. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. In 2003-05 the school experienced a turbulent period because of instability in senior leadership. Leadership and management of the school are now stable.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's Catholic High school is a rapidly improving school, which operates effectively. It is now recovering well, following a troubled period of senior leadership, which affected all areas of school life and resulted in external intervention. Pupils' achievement and standards are now satisfactory overall. They make good progress in Years 7-9, but this slows down in Years 10 and 11. Where standards are lower, poor skills in writing, speaking and listening are slowing down progress. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and good work takes place, particularly in mathematics, design and technology, history, citizenship and English as an additional language (EAL) lessons. There are weaknesses in some subjects, however, and senior leaders are working hard to rectify these. Pupils behave well in class and relish opportunities to work in an active way. They do not always have sufficient opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills or their ability to use information and communications technology (ICT) in different subjects. The school recognises that teachers need a more consistent approach to marking pupils' work. Pupils enjoy being in this school: one described it as 'a community - it feels like a family'. Teachers care well for their pupils and a new facility for pupils at risk of exclusion has the potential to improve support further for the most vulnerable members of the school community.

The new headteacher and his senior team are leading the school well. They have already put in place a number of appropriate measures to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour and improve their achievement. They now monitor work in classrooms rigorously and tackle issues of concern. The great majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school and appreciate recently introduced ways of improving communication with them, for example a regular newsletter and academic review days. A change in role for the heads of year, now designated learning managers, is enabling them to begin to monitor the progress of individual pupils more effectively. The school recognises the variation in subject leaders' effectiveness, and has good measures in place to address weaknesses. The school provides an appropriate curriculum for pupils in Years 7-9 and is widening its curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11. These vocational courses are new, and the school recognises that it must resource them further to ensure their success.

The school's governors, whilst committed to the school and instrumental in bringing about its new stability of leadership, have until now been insufficiently involved in monitoring pupils' achievements. The school now has a clear vision for the future, is beginning to share this very effectively with all members of the community and is well placed for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement, by focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning across all subject areas.
- Develop pupils' skills as independent learners, together with their speaking and listening skills and their use of ICT.

- Clarify and strengthen the roles of middle and senior leaders in order to achieve a consistency of approach to marking, data analysis and target-setting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are broadly average. Progress is generally improving year on year, with standards rising over time in Year 9 and Year 11.

Progress is satisfactory overall, with girls making better progress than boys. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress overall. Progress is good in Years 7 to 9, including that of pupils whose first language is not English, and exceptional in maths and science. Progress is satisfactory in Years 10 to 11, and generally much better in mathematics than in English.

Pupils enter the school with below average attainment. Standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 4 are below those nationally and results fell slightly in 2006. Attainment is below average in English and remained static this year. Pupils perform much better in English literature than in English language. The school has started to analyse the performance of different ethnic groups.

Standards at the end of Year 9 have risen this year. Targets set were met or exceeded in English, mathematics and science. The school has rightly identified that the gap in attainment between mathematics and the other two subjects has widened this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. The inspection shows that this is even better than the school's self-evaluation. In this diverse community, the majority of pupils feel strongly that bullying and racism are rare and, when incidents occasionally occur, they are dealt with fairly. The school is striving to provide a safe environment where pupils enjoy their learning and develop an awareness of the need for a healthy life-style. Pupils participate in extra-curricular sporting events and understand how to make healthy choices in the canteen. Some pupils feel that the school's facilities impact negatively on their well-being, but they feel confident that staff presence at the beginning and end of the day makes them feel safe around the site borders.

Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong, and show a strong awareness of the impact that negative behaviour may have on others. They respond very positively when given opportunities to take a lead in class or work collaboratively which shows preparedness for their future economic well-being. Attendance levels are satisfactory and are improving, as a result of the steps taken recently by the school.

Social development is good. Pupils participate fully in assemblies, taking responsibility for some of the content and they are generally developing skills which help them to contribute to the community. Achievement in pupils' home and heritage languages is

celebrated. Visiting groups, such as those introducing Black History Month, help students to challenge stereotypes and develop their understanding of culture and history. Consequently, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with some good features. Pupils are making adequate progress but the pace at which they learn is slowed down by the inconsistencies which exist in classroom practice. For example, in the very best lessons, teachers' expectations are high, pace is lively and the work is challenging. Unfortunately this is not always the case. In too many lessons there is a tendency for teachers to talk too much and for the set tasks to be undemanding.

The school is committed to improving pupils' literacy skills, but has not placed sufficient emphasis on developing speaking and listening. In good lessons, key words are used well and pupils are encouraged to improve their writing. There are good opportunities for them to discuss ideas, explain their thinking and make oral presentations. These opportunities are not planned for sufficiently. There are too few opportunities for pupils to use ICT in lessons and, apart from interactive whiteboards, staff rarely use computers to enliven learning. This limited use of technology restricts originality, and slows the pace of learning. This is particularly true in vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11, where pupils need access to resources from the world of work. The quality, consistency and regularity of marking is variable. Similarly the use of assessment information to tell pupils how well they are doing is variable across subjects and teachers.

Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning is a new and positive development which is beginning to have an impact on pupils' achievement but it is too early to show in examination results.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and adequately meets the needs of pupils. The curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11, has undergone much recent change. All Year 10 pupils now follow a vocational option with a good choice of subjects available, such as leisure and tourism and art and design. Flexibility is also evident with a small group of pupils in both Years 10 and 11 pursuing an alternative curriculum offered in association with a local further education college. This programme is designed to improve the pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, as well as offering a taster in trades such as construction and hair and beauty. Although the school is rightly pleased with these developments, there are some issues to be resolved. Teaching in the vocational subjects is not always adequately set in an appropriate context and a coherent programme for work-related learning has not been established. The school

acknowledges these shortcomings; in order to promote economic well-being, further improvements are needed. For example, there are few curriculum partnerships with business and commerce, such as mini-enterprises.

The linguistic diversity of the school's population is acknowledged and pupils are encouraged to enter GCSE examinations in their home and heritage languages. Enrichment and extra curricular provision is satisfactory, with a suitable variety of activities offered in sport and some opportunities in music and drama.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school evaluates its provision of care, guidance and support to be good. The inspection judges it to be satisfactory overall at this stage of development. Although inspectors agree that teachers demonstrate good general care and support for their pupils, close and systematic monitoring of pupils' progress is at an early stage of development. The school has begun to develop the role of learning managers to improve this. Pupils know the levels at which they are working but are unclear about the specific steps they need to take in order to improve in each subject. Teachers recognise that they could do more to promote the benefits of learning and to support pupils to develop their independent learning skills. Support and guidance for pupils through work- related learning is not consistent.

The newly established learning support centre offers focused provision for vulnerable pupils or those at risk of exclusion. The facility provides mentoring and staff are working with these pupils to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. It is, however, too early to evaluate the impact of these measures. Child protection procedures, including those concerned with staff recruitment, are adequate. The school deals well with health and safety issues.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of the school's leadership and management is satisfactory overall with some clear strengths. Following a period of significant uncertainty and change, the new headteacher and his senior team are providing good leadership to the school. They are implementing increasingly effective measures to raise pupils' achievement. Senior leaders have a good knowledge of their school's strengths and weaknesses, and self-evaluation is honest, realistic and generally accurate. Most parents and carers are supportive of the school and appreciate the recently introduced strategies to improve communication with them.

The school has rightly prioritised the improvement of teaching and learning, and senior leaders monitor classroom work closely. Improvement in the quality of teaching in some areas of the school reflects the successful impact of these measures. Most teachers have responded positively to professional development opportunities.

Changing the ethos of the school has proved challenging but there is clear evidence of success.

Subject leaders are enthusiastic about their subject, and are beginning to increase their understanding of key aspects of their role. Some monitor the work of their teaching teams effectively and are seeking ways of tracking pupils' progress and setting clear targets for improvement; but practice is inconsistent across subjects. There remains overall variation in the quality of subject leadership and weaknesses in the leadership of some subjects. The school recognises these and has put appropriate measures in place to tackle them. Learning managers have an impressive understanding of the importance of their role and a clear focus on raising achievement of the pupils in their care. There is, however, currently some confusion about line management arrangements for middle leaders. Further work is needed in developing a shared understanding between all school leaders of how to use information to diagnose key areas of weakness in pupils' performance, including specific groups of pupils.

School leaders are supported adequately by a governing body which, whilst committed to the school, is only just beginning to challenge issues around pupils' learning and achievement. Following a period of significant turbulence and uncertainty, senior leaders have now established a sense of stability in the school community, with a clear vision for future development. The school gives satisfactory value for money and has good capacity for further improvement.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. First, I should like to thank you for your warm welcome. You helped us, for example, in finding our way around your school and by giving us your views and answering our questions. We enjoyed visiting your school. Here are some of our findings:

- Your school is now improving rapidly, after a time when staffing difficulties affected school life. Your new headteacher and his team are concentrating well on improving your learning to make sure you achieve as well as you can.
- School staff are working hard to make sure that you attend school regularly.
- We've seen particularly good work going on in design and technology, mathematics, citizenship, history and EAL lessons. Your behaviour in class was good.
- The majority of your parents and carers are happy with the school, and are pleased that they now have regular newsletters and opportunities to come and talk about your progress.
- We were particularly impressed by the way you seize all opportunities offered. Yours is a very exciting and diverse school community: it's good to see you sharing elements of your heritage with your friends and improving your own life chances, for example by getting qualifications in your first languages.

We have asked your school to help you make as much progress as possible, and to make regular checks over time to ensure this happens, in order to improve GCSE results. We have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to work with each other to share your thinking out loud and to take the lead in class. You also need to use ICT more to enliven your learning in some subject areas.

You are rightly proud of your school, and we wish you all well as you continue your learning, working hard and aiming high.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Feltham HMI

Lead Inspector