



# St Mary's High School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 117595  
**Local Authority** HERTFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 290887  
**Inspection dates** 8–9 March 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Tony Beaver

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Churchgate
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Cheshunt, Waltham Cross
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Hertfordshire EN8 9ED
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01992 629124
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	680	<b>Fax number</b>	01992 642204
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	112		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Terry Hoare
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Stephanie Benbow
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 January 2005		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	8–9 March 2007	290887

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Mary's is a Voluntary Aided Church of England school. It is smaller than average, mixed, 11–18 and comprehensive. The sixth form is one of three within a local consortium. Students come from south east Hertfordshire, west Essex and north London. Average numbers claim entitlement to free school meals. About one in three students has a minority ethnic background. Very few are at an early stage in learning English. Average numbers have learning difficulties; none have disabilities. Fewer students than usual have a statement of Special Educational Need. The numbers of students who join the school other than at Year 7 are broadly average. The number on roll has fallen significantly in recent years because of demographic changes locally, but numbers are now rising again. The school will have specialist status in mathematics and computing from September 2007. A new school building is scheduled for 2009.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school accurately evaluates its effectiveness as satisfactory. It has continued to improve considerably in the relatively short time since its last inspection and has a number of good features. Strong impetus towards further improvement is vigorously sustained, and the school has successfully bid to become a specialist in mathematics and computing from September 2007. It has good capacity to improve further.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is highly effective in inspiring other leaders and managers to achieve well. Morale is high across the school. Governors are supportive and well informed. Leaders and managers at all levels have effectively handled the difficulties of a reduction in student numbers which are now rising. The management of the department supporting students with learning difficulties has improved, and is satisfactory. Links with parents and other partners in education are good. Very strong links are maintained with the diocese, and particularly with St Mary's Church.

Students achieve satisfactorily. Standards have risen from a low base a few years ago to those expected nationally, and it is essential that this improvement is sustained. In 2005, over half the students in Year 11 gained five or more higher GCSE grades. Results in 2006 were slightly lower, but the improving trend was maintained. More able students make rapid progress to take GCSE examinations in Year 10. Year 9 national test results in 2006 improved significantly on those of 2005. Students with learning difficulties achieve in line with others. The few students who are at an early stage in learning English make sound progress with the language.

Students' personal development is good. Relationships are good. Students enjoy learning together in a community which warmly embraces all faiths, while maintaining Anglican Christian ideals. The very large majority of students behave well, and have positive attitudes to learning and the school community. A very small minority do not attend regularly enough. Students say they feel safe and racism and bullying are rare. Their awareness of the need to live a healthy lifestyle is increasing.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and much is good. A few lessons are outstanding. The school's evaluation of teaching is well informed by rigorous monitoring, and its very latest monitoring indicates continued improvement in quality. However, in a very small minority of lessons, teaching is not consistent in matching work effectively to interest learners and meet all needs.

The curriculum is good. The range of vocational opportunities has increased considerably in the last two years, supporting students' experience of the working world well. The school is an inclusive and harmonious community that takes equally good care of students from a very wide range of social, ethnic and religious backgrounds. All safeguarding requirements are met. Students receive good guidance and support with their work and, consequently, standards show a rising trend. Although the progress of students with learning difficulties is satisfactory, support for them varies in quality and the progress of some individuals is not well assessed.

Since the last inspection in November 2005, the school has maintained a good rate of improvement. Although, through the reduction in numbers, a financial deficit has been incurred, the school's leaders have driven change forward undeterred. Governors have successfully negotiated arrangements with the local authority to eliminate the debt, and the school gives satisfactory value for money. A new building is scheduled for 2009.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards attained are below average, but students' achievement and progress are satisfactory. Their personal development is good. They enjoy their studies and are very happy with what the school provides. Most students complete the courses they begin. Increasing numbers are entering the sixth form and most go on to higher education. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Much is good and some outstanding. Students are often prompted to take responsibility for their own learning and do so well. The school provides a good curriculum, including an extensive enrichment programme. Teachers give students good care and guide them well in their studies, monitoring their progress closely. Students profit from the many opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. The sixth form is well led and managed. Links with partner schools are good. Consortium arrangements are particularly well managed.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Sustain and make fully consistent the improving trend in standards at all ages.
- Ensure consistency in the quality of teaching and learning to engage the interest of learners, by matching work well to all learning needs.
- Help the very small minority of students who do not attend regularly to appreciate the value of regular attendance at school.
- Ensure accurate assessment of the progress of those students with learning difficulties, for those few whose progress is not reliably assessed.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students enter the school in Year 7 attaining average standards. They usually reach nationally expected standards in the Year 9 national tests. Results improved greatly in 2006, after a fall in 2005, and targets were met.

The 2005 GCSE examination results reached the national average standard. Over half the year group gained five or more GCSE grades A\* to C and almost all students obtained graded results. In 2006, although the overwhelming majority gained five GCSE grades, fewer gained five or more higher grades than in 2005. Overall, there is a rising trend in standards in the main school and sustaining this is a high priority.

In general, students from all social and ethnic backgrounds make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Boys' progress has usually not matched that of girls in Years 10 and 11, but boys' improved their rate of progress considerably in 2006. During the inspection, students made satisfactory and often good progress in lessons. Students with learning difficulties progress at a similar rate to that of others. The few who are at an early stage in learning English make sound progress with the language.

In the sixth form, students gain below average results on AS and A-level courses. Results of advanced vocational courses have been above average. Most complete the courses they begin. Overall, students achieve satisfactorily.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Personal development and well-being are good in the main school and sixth form. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, particularly the spiritual dimension. During Eucharist in St Mary's Church, many students participated in Holy Communion and asked to be blessed. Students of different faiths and those without religious conviction say how much they enjoy these occasions. Students enjoy coming to school and attendance rates are rising. However, the school's target for attendance is not sufficiently challenging. The school is a harmonious and safe community where racism and bullying are rare. Relationships are good, and students respect each other's efforts in discussions, debates and presentations. The vast majority of students behave well, feel safe, and understand the consequences if they misbehave. However, a very small minority do not behave well enough in lessons. Students increasingly choose the healthy-lunch options. Younger students enjoy sports clubs. Older students tend to lose interest in sporting activities. A small minority do not bring their kit to physical education lessons. There is a good level of involvement in school and community activities, but the school does not yet record and analyse levels of participation in sport. All students gain qualifications in functional English and mathematics, and learn a good range of work-related skills.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory across the school, and enable students of all backgrounds and abilities to learn successfully. Much teaching is good, and a few lessons are outstanding. In general, students enjoy lessons and make at least the progress that they should. Lessons usually sustain a good learning pace. Teachers' use of assessment information is often effective in enabling them to monitor students' progress and identify what more is needed for them to achieve higher standards. In

the many good lessons, students are suitably challenged and respond well. Relationships among teachers and students are good in most lessons, and students appreciate the helpful advice they receive. Much of the marking is helpful to students in enabling them to improve their work. Not all teaching consistently matches work well enough to meet all learners' needs, and in the few lessons where this is the case, the teachers' control of students' behaviour deteriorates. Appropriate steps are taken to direct students to adopt safe practices in practical activities.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. The school has successfully applied to be a specialist in mathematics and computing, accurately reflecting its considerable strengths in those areas. The wide ranging needs of students of very varied abilities and backgrounds are well met. Consequently, students say they enjoy learning. Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are well provided for. Newly introduced requirements for science in Years 10 and 11 are helping all students specialise in their chosen sciences. Effective liaison with the local college provides a good range of vocational courses that better meets the needs and interests of students in Years 10 and 11. Accelerated programmes enable more able students to take GCSE subjects early. Students' understanding of the working world is enhanced by good careers guidance and enterprise days. Work experience in primary schools and hospitals enables some to contribute to the local community. Students in all years are very pleased with the good range of extra-curricular activities, especially in the performing and creative arts. Older students have few opportunities in sport. The sixth form curriculum provides a very wide range of advanced and lower-level courses through well established consortium links. Sixth formers enjoy varied enrichment activities.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. Careful attention is given to health and safety. Staff are successful in developing an inclusive school where no groups are disadvantaged. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current government requirements. Staff successfully support students who have a range of behavioural, emotional and social needs. There are well developed arrangements to help excluded students return to the classroom. However, support for students with learning difficulties is not of consistently good quality, and the progress of some of these students is not effectively assessed. A well planned enrichment programme enables gifted and talented students from several schools to work together at St. Mary's. The Year 6 students are very well supported to make the transition into secondary school. As students progress through the school they receive good guidance on their choice of courses and future pathways. Students know how well they are progressing. They

say that academic review days are very effective in explaining to their parents how well they are doing.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Leadership and management are good and give the school good capacity to continue its improvement. The headteacher gives the school very clear direction. She has the full backing of governors and staff. Her vision for its future development is shared by governors, her senior management team, middle managers and teachers alike. This common sense of purpose has raised the morale of both teachers and students. The new management structure has clarified the roles of senior and middle managers. Middle managers have taken up their new responsibilities with enthusiasm and energy and are increasingly effective. The leadership and management of the department for students with learning difficulties have improved since the last inspection, and are satisfactory. The quality of education and students' performance are rigorously monitored and expectations and targets are challenging. The school has a caring ethos and lays high priority on providing equal opportunities. The effect of a reduction in student numbers has been well managed, and numbers are currently rising. Staffing is again stable. Shortcomings in accommodation have been remedied to some extent by timely refurbishment and a new building is scheduled for 2009. Governors carry out their responsibilities well. They are closely involved in the school's life. They support and challenge its leadership effectively. The sixth form is well led and managed. Numbers of sixth form students show a rising trend. The complex consortium arrangements are very well managed.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	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	2	
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	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

9 March 2007

Dear Students

St Mary's High School, Churchgate, Cheshunt, Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire, EN8 9ED

Thank you all very much for your help during the recent inspection of your school. You spoke openly about it, and this helped inspectors to decide how good your school is. This letter tells you the results of the inspection.

Inspectors were very impressed with the continued improvements that have taken place since your school was last inspected two years ago. Results in GCSE examinations have risen, and it is important to keep those results on an upward trend. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and many lessons are good. Some are outstandingly well taught. However, in a few lessons the planned activities do not meet your needs. You have a good choice of courses in Years 10 and 11, including vocational opportunities. Sixth formers have an impressive range of courses available through the consortium. Your school takes good care of you and helps you to know your standard of work and how to improve it.

Inspectors saw that you get on well together, whatever your religious beliefs. The vast majority of you behave well and want to learn, but a very small number misbehave in lessons. A very small minority of students do not attend regularly enough to take advantage of their educational opportunities.

Inspectors agree with you that your headteacher is having a big impact on making your school better. The staff support her well in working to improve the school. Your school has achieved specialist status in maths and computing from September next. A new building is scheduled for 2009, and some of you will be the first to use it. Inspectors are convinced that your school has improved in the last two years, and with your help, good behaviour and hard work, it should get even better.

We wish you well and hope that all of you will go on to achieve your best.

Tony Beaver

Lead Inspector