



St Mary's College

Independent School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

DfES Registration Number 852/6003
Unique Reference Number 116567
Inspection number 301614
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Reporting inspector Mr Peter Griffiths HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group
3-16

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

St Mary's College is a co-educational Roman Catholic independent school for pupils aged three to 16 years. There are 303 pupils on roll. It was founded in 1922 as a boys' school. In 1992, the junior department started taking girls and in 2000 the senior department became open to girls. About a quarter of the pupil population is now girls. St Mary's is a Christian college whose mission statement is embodied in the lives and works of the de la Mennais Brothers whose aim is to make Jesus better known and loved. The school welcomes other faiths and over half the pupils are non-Catholic.

Evaluation of the school

St Mary's is a good school: the pupils and parents think so and the inspection team agrees. Christian values are at the heart of the school: the recognition of the uniqueness of the individual is reflected in the curriculum of the school and its pastoral care system. This is a school where every child matters. They are well cared for and feel safe and this contributes to their desire to do well. Pupils enjoy coming to school and many take part in the wide range of extra curricular activities.

The headteacher and staff have developed a curriculum that is well matched to the needs of the pupils. Good teaching throughout the school ensures that pupils show excellent attitudes to their work. As a consequence, the achievement of pupils of all ages and abilities is outstanding.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. The Foundation Stage curriculum supports pupils' progression to the Early Learning Goals. The school has responded positively to the last Ofsted inspection by making considerable improvements to the outdoor provision offering Reception children a choice of activities and freedom of access to good resources. In the junior school, although there is a deliberate focus on developing pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, pupils follow a broad curriculum that includes French from Year 3. In the senior school, the broad curriculum is well matched to the needs of individual pupils. Curriculum support, offered to pupils with

learning difficulties, has enabled them to follow the full programme through to GCSE. Curriculum planning is good or better although the school has not identified best practice that might serve as a standard for other subjects to aspire to.

The schools' provision for personal, social and health education, rooted in the Christian ethos of the school, is taught through other subjects. The provision is not mapped in sufficient detail for the school to be sure its programme is meeting all the needs of its pupils.

There is an extremely wide range of extra curricular activities available to pupils. Engagement of pupils in cultural activities, including trips and visits, is outstanding.

Throughout the school, teaching and learning are good and at times outstanding. In the Foundation Stage and the junior department, class teachers and teaching assistants use observations and assessments to identify learning priorities and plan relevant, stimulating learning experiences for all pupils.

Teachers employ a wide range of teaching styles to deliver very effective lessons which are carefully planned and extremely well executed. Lessons proceed at a cracking pace providing pupils with challenging, interesting and enjoyable learning experiences. Teaching assistants are well briefed and make very valuable contributions to supporting teaching and helping pupils to learn.

A programme to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning is in place although the programme needs to be more systematic. Teachers in the junior and secondary departments have worked well together, for example, to plan for the transfer of pupils at the end of Year 6.

Pupils are regularly assessed. Teachers make very good use of questioning and discussion to determine pupils' understanding. Pupils who are not making satisfactory progress are readily identified and appropriate recovery programmes are put into place. Very good use is made of mentors to support the older pupils. The high quality of the feedback to pupils ensures that they understand how to make further progress.

At all stages, pupils enjoy their learning so that their progress and achievement are outstanding. By the end of the Foundation Stage children have achieved above average results in most of the early learning goals. In the junior school, pupils achieve at National Curriculum levels that are well above those expected. In the senior school, pupils' performance at GCSE is consistently very high. In 2006, 97% of pupils achieved five or more GCSE subjects at grades A*-C.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Throughout the school, pupils' behaviour is excellent. They readily engage in conversation and show respect for the views of others. Attendance is good. Christian values underpin the ethos of the school. Pupils are happy to be at the school and feel relaxed and in tune with the school and its values. The school has a chaplain and the chapel is open all day for meditation, prayer or for silence. The voluntary prayer groups held in Advent and in Lent are well supported. Each class has a day of recollection at a local pastoral centre. This helps pupils to reflect on their social, moral and spiritual life. Teaching reflects the presence of other faiths and cultures in the school and in the wider society. Pupils make very good contributions to their community. They readily accept responsibility for the care of others and this makes a positive contribution to the respect that pupils show for others. Through the recently established school council, pupils recognise that they have a role in making this a successful school. They readily contribute their ideas knowing they are valued.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Overall, the provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. However, while the school has implemented a planned programme of alterations to the buildings, currently, pupils with disabilities do not have access to all parts of the site and to all teaching areas.

The staff are committed to the ensuring the welfare of all pupils. They are well deployed and supervision is good. The school is positive in its response to any reported incidents of bullying. As a result, pupils feel valued and safe within this inclusive community readily identifying members of staff they would approach if they had a problem.

Pupils are encouraged to follow active, healthy lifestyles. They all participate in a wide range of physical activities that includes swimming for some year groups. Many pupils represent the school through a range of sports. Pupils have a good understanding of the need for a healthier lifestyle. The school is seeking to move towards the provision of healthy meals at lunch time but, currently, pupils are not always able to make appropriate food choices.

Appropriate policies and practices have been put in place to safeguard the pupils. There is an effective health and safety policy which ensures that regular safety checks of the building and grounds are undertaken. Thorough risk assessments are carried out. Procedures for the administration of first aid are appropriate and the policy offers comprehensive guidance to staff. The child protection policy reflects the latest guidance.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school undertakes the full range of checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children and young people. Teachers are experienced and work well together.

School's premises and accommodation

The schools' spacious grounds offer a wonderful resource that is well used not only for sport and recreation but also as a teaching environment for subjects such as science. The relatively new accommodation for the Nursery and junior departments is of a high standard. Rooms are of a good size and are enlivened by displays of pupils' work. The school has begun a programme to improve the decorative order of the secondary department. New glazing and the decoration of some rooms has considerably improved the teaching environment. The school has sufficient specialist teaching rooms although, over time, they will need some updating. Resources are generally good.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Detailed and comprehensive information is contained in the handbook for prospective parents. Induction procedures are good. For example children entering the Nursery or the Reception class make several visits before they start so that they can become familiar with the facilities. Parents are invited to meetings before their children start so that they can be given information about the school and its expectations. Parents are regularly consulted and their views acted upon. For example, consultations over the format of reports have resulted in improved provision. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire report that they are happy with the information they receive and with the progress their children make.

Procedures for handling complaints

The overwhelming majority of parents feel very comfortable about approaching the school with problems. A few parents are unsure of the complaints procedure.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- create further opportunities for teachers from the junior and secondary departments to work together to share the most effective approaches to teaching and learning and curriculum planning
- ensure that the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is more systematically undertaken across the school
- involve the pupils in considering how the food available in the tuck shop and lunches could be healthier.

College details

Name of school	St Mary's College
DfES number	852/6003
Unique reference number	116567
Type of school	Roman Catholic co-educational
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1922
Age range of pupils	3-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	Boys: 219 Girls: 84 Total: 303
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6750 (Senior) £5100 (Junior)
Address of school	St Mary's College 57 Midanbury Lane Bitterne Park Southampton Hampshire SO18 4DJ
Telephone number	0238067 1267
Fax number	0238067 7776
Email address	stmarysoffice@aol.com
Headteacher	Brother James Davis
Proprietor	Brothers of Christian Instruction
Reporting inspector	Mr Peter Griffiths HMI
Dates of inspection	13-14 February 2007