

St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School, Menston

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108094
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	324707
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1169
Sixth form	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bob Lavery
Headteacher	Mr Michael Pyle
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2006
School address	Bradford Road Menston Ilkley West Yorkshire LS29 6AE
Telephone number	01943 883000
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Mary's is a larger than average secondary school. Most students come from the Roman Catholic communities of towns to the north west of Leeds. The school serves a socially mixed, but relatively advantaged, area and the proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is below average. Over 92% of the students are of White British heritage. The school has specialist status in sport and holds a number of recent good practice awards including Sportsmark Gold, the Healthy Schools award and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school, where standards are high and students achieve well. Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are above national expectations for their age and attain standards by the end of Key Stage 4 that are well above average. Students' performance at GCSE is steadily improving. Students achieve well because of the good teaching and outstanding support that they receive: in a high proportion of lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was good or better. Particular strengths of the teaching include the use of discussion between students to develop ideas, the selection of varied and interesting activities and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning. In the small number of less successful lessons, learning was slower because teachers' planning did not cater sufficiently for the individual needs of students of different abilities.

Good leadership and management have helped the school to improve in recent years, both in terms of students' academic results and in the pastoral care offered. Self-evaluation is strong and the school has good capacity for further improvement. A commitment to promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination is evident in all the school does. Managers are increasingly taking opportunities to listen to the views of students and this has contributed to improvements in teaching. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion, particularly through the high number of students who participate in a wide range of local and international projects. The impact of sports college status is impressive, both within and outside school, for example, in developing students' leadership skills. Extensive work with local primary schools, initiating a sports club for disabled young people and extending opportunities for local young people to be coached in tennis have all made excellent contributions to the local community. Parents are highly supportive, and the school enjoys a justifiably strong local reputation. For example, 98% of the parents who returned the inspection questionnaire felt that their child was safe and well cared for in school and was also making good progress in lessons. One parent commented that, 'My children find the teaching and learning enjoyable, innovative, challenging and aspirational' – the school has very high expectations of behaviour, social skills and academic achievement.'

Students' personal development is outstanding. Behaviour in lessons and around school is excellent because teachers have high expectations and develop strong relationships with students. Students say that they feel very safe in school. Where very rare incidents of bullying occur they are dealt with well. Attendance is well above average as a result of rigorous monitoring of absence and highly effective links with parents. Students benefit from outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. The curriculum is well matched to students' needs and this contributes to their good progress. Curricular provision supports the development of students' moral, social and spiritual education through group work in lessons and sports coaching and mentoring. The school has identified where current provision is less strong and recognises the need to develop further its range of vocational courses and to broaden opportunities for students to undertake more work-related learning and enterprise education.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards in the sixth form are above average and improving, and provisional 2008 results suggest that the rising trend of results has been maintained. Standards are lower than in the main school, because of the school's open-access policy which encourages students from a

wide range of backgrounds, not just the most able, to find a suitable course. Students achieve well overall and particularly well in A level mathematics and French. Students' achievement on vocational courses is satisfactory. A developing curriculum includes new courses in physical education and health and social care. The school recognises the need to develop vocational opportunities further through its established partnership arrangements with neighbouring schools and other post-16 training providers. The good progress that students make is the direct result of the good teaching and excellent academic guidance that they receive. The sixth form is well led and managed. Good use of data helps to track and support the progress of individual students and also contributes effectively to the school's evaluation of its provision. Students feel well supported and cared for and know that their views are listened to. They show excellent personal qualities: they are confident, sensible and articulate young adults who enjoy school and relish the additional responsibilities they have. Several students benefit from training to become learning mentors so that they can support students in the main school on academic, social and emotional issues.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the curriculum to include further opportunities for students to follow vocational pathways and work-related learning.
- Improve personalised learning through teaching that gives a greater focus to the needs of the individual.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with attainment that is above expectations for their age. In 2007, results in national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above average. Similarly, at GCSE, results were well above average: the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics was 78%, compared with a national average of 46%. Provisional results for 2008 suggest that high standards have been at least maintained and in some cases improved, continuing a long-term rising trend of results. Students achieve well. They make good gains in their learning throughout the school and particularly so in mathematics, where achievement is outstanding. Observations made during the inspection confirm the good progress suggested by the school's results. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive appropriate support and as a result they too make good progress. Across a range of subjects, the school either meets or comes very close to its challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their spiritual development benefits from opportunities for collective worship and participating in pilgrimages and retreats. Students show very positive attitudes to school and their behaviour is outstanding. Students' high levels of enjoyment are demonstrated by their excellent attendance and high levels of participation in extra-curricular activities, especially in sports and the arts. The number of exclusions from school is low. Students say that they feel very safe in school. Year 7 students, when they first join the school, particularly appreciate the support they receive from the Year 12 'shepherds'. Students' willingness to adopt healthy lifestyles is outstanding: they respond very positively to the school's emphasis on developing high levels of physical and emotional health. Students make excellent contributions to the community. They develop good workplace

skills and are well prepared for the future: almost all of them continue into education and training after the age of 16.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The key strengths in teaching are excellent subject knowledge and effective lesson planning. Teachers establish good working relationships with students, reinforced by high expectations and well paced lessons with an appropriate level of challenge. As a result students display very positive attitudes to learning. Students benefit considerably from regular opportunities to work in pairs and groups, where they can discuss their ideas and consolidate their learning. In a small number of lessons teachers talk for too long and work is not sufficiently tailored to students' individual needs. The effective use of ICT, particularly the interactive whiteboards, is evident across the curriculum. Managers monitor teaching rigorously and this serves to promote consistently strong teaching across the school. The quality of marking is good overall, although there is still variation between subjects. Where marking is good, teachers provide helpful comments and suggest strategies to enable students to improve. Staff value the opportunities for professional development that are offered by the school's working groups and benefit considerably from the sharing of good practice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum, which meets all statutory requirements, meets students' needs well. The introduction of option choices at the end of Year 8 successfully raises the challenge for all, including the most able students. Students say that they like the range of choices available and describe clearly how having a choice contributes to their personal development by engaging them in planning for their future. Vocational provision, including work-related learning, is satisfactory and developing. Some aspects of extra-curricular provision are particularly distinctive features of St Mary's. For example, the Sport On Saturday sessions, which offer sports for local children with disabilities, and sports leadership courses, which enable older students to take part in delivering sports and fitness sessions to the community, are very successful. Students also appreciate the opportunities offered by the international Bambisanani Partnership, which helps them to learn more about education and life in the developing world.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Appropriate child protection systems are in place and safety checks on new staff satisfy national requirements. Very high levels of individual care and support are provided for all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The pastoral team knows students very well and works extremely effectively with a range of external agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable students attend regularly and do not underachieve. Outstanding transition and induction arrangements for new students include a highly successful 'deanery day' to ensure that students settle in quickly. Students are very well supported in selecting appropriate courses or employment routes at the end of Year 11. The citizenship programme has improved since the last inspection and is taught effectively through religious education, together with input in other lessons. The school's system for monitoring academic progress is good. Students

have clear targets and regular reviews allow staff opportunities to monitor progress. Where individual students are found to be falling behind their expected progress, the school provides effective intervention and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership at all levels is helping the school to maintain and improve high standards. Recent restructuring of staffing has led to fewer managers with wider responsibilities. This has helped in creating a shared sense of purpose among managers at all levels. A coordinated approach to improvement planning has led to effective self-evaluation, with realistic assessments of where strengths and weaknesses lie. As a result good practice in stronger departments has been shared across the school and this has helped to increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better. The school has improved since the last inspection. For example, all the areas for improvement have been addressed successfully and GCSE results have improved. The school's capacity to improve further is good. Managers have used targets effectively resulting in a rising trend in standards over several years. Through good financial management, the school has dealt effectively with a deficit budget, resources are well managed and it now provides good value for money. Governors know the school well and provide good levels of support and challenge. Links with other providers to offer wider choices at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are developing and are yet to have a major impact on the curriculum offered.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

You will recall that a team of inspectors and I inspected your school recently. This letter is to tell you about what we found. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views. We also valued the high number of returns of the inspection questionnaire from your parents and carers.

The inspection team and I agree with your views and those of your parents and carers: St Mary's is a good school. Standards are well above average and you make good progress in your learning. You achieve well because of the good teaching and outstanding support that you receive.

St Mary's is not just a good school, it is an improving school. Results are getting steadily better and teachers are increasingly taking account of what you, the students, think, and this is contributing to the school's improvement. We were impressed by your excellent behaviour, the way you work well together and your positive attitudes to learning. Your level of attendance is very impressive. Keep it up! The headteacher and his team run the school well. In order to make St Mary's an even better school we have asked him, the governors and staff to ensure that more teaching focuses on the needs of individuals within the class. We support the school's plans to increase opportunities for you to follow vocational pathways and work-related learning.

You can play your part in making St Mary's a better school. Continue to contribute your views and support each other in your learning. I wish you well for the future.