

St Mary's Church of England High School (VA)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117595
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339040
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	663
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maureen Bruce
Headteacher	Ms Stephanie Benbow
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2007
School address	Churchgate Cheshunt Waltham Cross
Telephone number	01992 629124
Fax number	01992 643354
Email address	admin@st-maryshigh.herts.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Inspection number	339040

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2009

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, observed two tutor periods and an assembly, held discussions with three governors and the school's local authority improvement partner, met with senior and middle managers, and held meetings with panels of students from the main school and the sixth form. Two of the lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and an assistant headteacher.

Inspectors looked at achievement data, lesson plans and school improvement plans. They also considered records on exclusions, attendance, racist incidents and bullying, as well as policies and procedures for promoting, monitoring and evaluating equalities and community cohesion. In addition to the survey of parents' views, a sample of students completed a written questionnaire and a staff survey was also conducted. The headteacher helped to plan aspects of the inspection and observed the inspection team meetings where judgements were discussed and made.

- The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:
- the extent to which standards of work have improved since the school was last inspected
- how well teachers know what students are capable of, to challenge them appropriately in lessons
- how well students with special educational needs are supported in lessons
- how effectively governors and other leaders have challenged the school to raise students' achievement
- the way that sixth-form provision is managed, including through the sixth-form consortium.

Information about the school

St. Mary's Church of England High School is smaller than most secondary schools. The sixth form is also smaller than is usually the case; students are offered a wider range of courses through a consortium of other local schools and colleges. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is around twice the national average. The proportion of students who do not speak English as their first language, or who are known to be eligible for free school meals, is also above average. A broadly average number of students have special educational needs. Most students join St. Mary's from local primary schools, but a small number come from schools in neighbouring local authorities.

St. Mary's was awarded mathematics and computing specialism in 2007. The school holds the Healthy Schools, Safer School, BikeIt School, and Investors in People awards. It is also an 'INSPIRED' school, recognising its work to promote race relations. The school is due to move into new buildings, on a nearby site, in early 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement, the quality of teaching, and aspects of leadership and management including governance.

There are some strengths to the personal development outcomes achieved by students at St. Mary's, and they enjoy good pastoral care and support. Their attendance is above average, and their behaviour is satisfactory. They feel safe in school and have a good understanding of what it means to live healthily. Their spiritual and moral development is good, and they make good contributions to their school and the local community. There are good relationships between students from different backgrounds. Given these positive features, then, it is not good enough that standards of students' work are significantly lower than those in other schools nationally. Standards have declined since the last inspection. Students are of average ability when they join St Mary's, and so they make inadequate progress during their time at the school. Their basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) are not developed well enough and this gives insufficient preparation for the next steps in their lives. An important factor in this underachievement is the inconsistent quality of teaching and assessment. There are some good lessons, where students really enjoy learning. However, there are too many inadequate or just satisfactory lessons, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics, and science. Too often, teachers do not recognise what students are capable of, or fail to provide work that motivates them to achieve as well as they could.

Nonetheless, students have positive attitudes to school which have been improved or sustained through good partnerships with parents and governors. This is shown clearly in significantly improved attendance rates. The Extended Schools provision has been established well and provides good support, particularly for the most vulnerable. The school will be moving shortly into new buildings and this project has also been managed well. These factors, and a broadly satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, show that the school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Nevertheless, leadership and management are inadequate because systems for monitoring the school's performance have not been used well enough to raise standards of teaching and learning. The school provides inadequate value for money. Much sharper self-evaluation and challenge is required - on all levels, including in lessons - for the school to make rapid and significant progress in raising standards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly raise, and then maintain, the standards achieved by students in lessons and in their examination results by
 - ensuring that all teaching sets high expectations of students' capabilities through providing a range of activities that constantly challenges them to achieve their best
 - making effective use of assessment, including questioning techniques and marking, so that students of all abilities are motivated to improve their work and become more confident learners.
- Strengthen leadership and management through
 - a greater collaborative approach to school development, alongside the delegation of whole-school responsibilities to senior managers
 - increasing the use and understanding of data by middle managers and classroom teachers to sharpen self-evaluation, improve teaching, and effectively target better outcomes for students.
- Ensure that the governing body effectively fulfils its duties to monitor and challenge the work of the school by
 - setting and achieving rigorous targets for students' performance in examinations
 - applying consistent strategies to the planning, monitoring and evaluation of all statutory equalities and community cohesion policies.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Overall standards in examinations at the end of Year 11 are low because:

The school has not achieved its targets, including those set for mathematics and information technology when it was awarded specialist school status. These low standards and inadequate progress were confirmed by work seen in lessons during the inspection. All groups of students make less progress than they should.

Despite this, students show positive attitudes to school. They told inspectors that they feel safe, a view confirmed by the overwhelming majority of parents who replied to the inspection questionnaire. Behaviour is satisfactory, overall; many students behave well, but a small number do not and require reminding of what the school expects. Exclusion rates are broadly average. Spiritual and moral development are good, and inspectors were particularly struck by how well students from different cultures and backgrounds get on together. Students make a good contribution to their communities, including having a significant role in the planning and monitoring of the new school building programme. With these positive features and attitudes, it is all the more concerning that students are not making better progress in their studies.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There are some examples of lessons where students work independently and enjoy their learning. For example, in a design and technology lesson visited during the inspection, students were working at a rapid pace on a range of activities to develop their sewing skills. They were progressing well because the lesson was planned thoroughly to meet different students' needs and there was constant dialogue between teacher and students, supported by written assessments that were both challenging and supportive. However the majority of lessons are not of this quality, . A significant number are inadequate or barely satisfactory. The features that make these lessons ineffective include:

- teachers not recognising that students have different needs and abilities, giving all students the same tasks to do and setting them to work at the same speed
- teachers only paying attention to the students who put their hands up to answer, rather than using techniques to get all students thinking and contributing
- work which is not marked thoroughly enough
- a consequent lack of student motivation, ambition and confidence, revealed by work that is left incomplete and poorly presented.

Despite this, working relationships between students and teachers are usually positive. Most students behave appropriately in lessons, and many behave well; they are biddable and compliant, even when the lesson fails to capture their interest or imagination. This

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

is to their great credit. These are all positive conditions for learning, but nevertheless significant improvements in teaching are required if students are to achieve higher standards.

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses provided, including some offered in partnership with other providers. There have been recent improvements to the English curriculum in Key Stage 4 and statistics is offered for more able students, in addition to mathematics. Nevertheless, provision for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is just satisfactory, and provision for ICT across the curriculum remains limited. This is concerning in view of the school's specialist status, together with the poor progress made in reaching specialist school targets. It is clear, however, that the school's provision for pastoral care is a strength. The school has made very good and very effective efforts to reduce absence levels, and the attendance of all groups of students - including those who are most vulnerable - has improved significantly. There are good links with primary schools, and induction arrangements for Year 7 students or those who join the school at other times are very well-regarded by parents and students. Teaching assistants work diligently to support students with special educational needs, although the effectiveness of their work is often less than it could be because too many lessons are not planned to take account of students' individual learning needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection there has been some turbulence in the school's management, requiring the headteacher to take responsibility for directing much of the school's work herself. Appointments made since September 2008 have brought a consultant leader, deputy headteacher, a future leader, and a new inclusion coordinator to the school. There is now a stronger leadership structure in place. The introduction of new management systems has improved accountability for school improvement. The school recognised that middle leaders had not been held to account rigorously enough. Stronger strategies are now in place, with a greater focus on school improvement. Managers are required to report progress on priorities within their areas of responsibility every two weeks. While there is greater delegation of responsibilities, collaborative working practices amongst senior and middle leaders are much less secure. Management systems are not yet sufficiently effective to realise the required rapid

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

improvements in students' academic progress.

Inspectors agreed with the judgements made during the joint lesson observations by the headteacher and assistant headteacher, and the school has a broad and realistic understanding of its performance. Nonetheless, analysis of data is not sharp enough, nor is information understood sufficiently across the school, to enable good and rapid progress. Teachers are given data and told targets for improvement, but too many do not understand how to use this information to improve students' learning. These are key reasons why the school has fallen short of its examination targets since the last inspection. Other outcomes are at least satisfactory. School leaders work effectively with staff to ensure that students feel equally valued and that nobody is discriminated against. Safeguarding procedures are effective. The school has built some good community links, doing much to promote good relationships amongst different groups and improve the school's standing in the locality. However, the effectiveness of the school's work on equalities and community cohesion are satisfactory because, while policies are in place, the planning and evaluation of these important areas are also inconsistent.

Governors are experienced, have a very good understanding of issues surrounding education and care, and serve the school loyally. However, the governing body has presided over the low standards achieved by students since the last inspection, and has not driven the school to reach challenging targets. Governance is therefore inadequate.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Sixth form

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Standards in A-Level examinations are low. Pass rates are significantly below average. However, given that students have achieved low standards at GCSE and that access to sixth-form education is strongly inclusive, with students welcomed whatever their background or prior learning, academic progress is judged satisfactory overall. Some make good progress, but a small number do not achieve their target grades. Students were observed to be making at least satisfactory progress in all sixth-form lessons visited during the inspection, and teaching is satisfactory overall. Retention rates on all courses are satisfactory although there are variations in students' progress between subjects. A wide range of academic courses is available through the South Broxbourne Partnership but the provision of pre-vocational courses is not yet fully in place.

Tutors know and care for their students well and the new mentoring system is beginning to track students' progress. Careers advice for sixth formers is satisfactory and there is an effective programme of information about higher education. Students say that they enjoy their sixth-form education and speak positively about the responsibilities and opportunities that they are given. They develop sensible and mature attitudes and contribute well to the main school and wider community. Students raise money for charity and some volunteer to support younger pupils. Students are growing in confidence and benefit from their time in the sixth form. Attendance is broadly average. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The head of sixth form is supported by the head of the consortium, who is also based at St. Mary's. Procedures for monitoring the progress of students are in place but are not yet fully effective in ensuring that students make good or better progress.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were very supportive of most aspects of the school's work and are content with what the school provides. Inspectors agree with the very large majority who say that the school keeps students safe, keeps parents well-informed and takes account of parents' concerns. While a small minority of parents do not think that the school does enough to encourage healthy lifestyles and there is some concern about the price of food from the school canteen, inspectors found that, nonetheless, students have developed good attitudes to healthy living, with a majority taking part in weekly sporting activities and showing a good awareness of the need to eat healthily.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspectors did not agree with the majority of parents who said that they thought children are making good progress, or that teaching is good. Evidence from examination results, and from work seen in lessons, shows emphatically that this is not the case.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St. Mary's Church of England High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 98 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 663 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	37	54	61	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	34	56	63	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	40	44	49	5	6	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	33	52	58	4	4	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	25	28	53	60	6	7	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	21	55	62	9	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	24	49	55	14	16	2	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	30	34	50	56	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	26	56	63	5	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	25	45	51	13	15	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	18	55	62	6	7	6	7
The school is led and managed effectively	24	27	52	58	6	7	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	47	42	47	3	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 October 2009

Dear Students,

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England High School, EN8 9ED

I am writing to thank you for the help that you gave us when we inspected St. Mary's recently. You will find a copy of the full inspection report attached to this letter, for your parents. This includes a section about the sixth form, which I encourage those students to read in the full report. This letter is about Years 7 to 11.

I would like to start by congratulating you for the improvements in attendance that took place last year, and have been sustained this year. Good attendance is a key factor for success at work, and you and your parents are doing the right thing by making sure you miss school only when it is absolutely necessary. Well done, too, for the contributions that many of you make to your community, and for the healthy lifestyle choices that many of you make. We also noted that many of you behave well in school. However, because there is a small number who need reminding about good behaviour from time to time, we have judged your behaviour as satisfactory.

While adults at the school work hard to take good care of you, there are other aspects of your work that have not improved. Your examination results are low compared to those achieved across the country, as is the standard of work that we saw in your books. We think that the school needs to set a much higher level of challenge in lessons, and that your teachers could be much more ambitious about what you can achieve. We have therefore asked the governors, senior leaders, and all teachers to ensure that every effort is made to improve the quality of your lessons and the standard of examination results. In particular, we would like to see lessons featuring a greater range of activities that challenge you to do your very best, whatever your ability. We believe that this improvement needs to be made rapidly, so we have issued the school with a formal notice to improve. This means that the school has a year to make the improvements, after which we will return for another inspection. There will be extra help given to the school during this time, and you must play your part too by continuing your good attendance, give your best attention in class, and rising to the greater challenges that your teachers will be setting you.

I wish you well, and look forward to hearing about your progress in the coming year.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.