

St Mary Magdalene Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134314
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	348696
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	770
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The proprietor Canon Lucy Winkett
Headteacher	Paul Hollingum
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Liverpool Road Islington London
Telephone number	020 76970123
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 26 teachers teaching 25 part lessons. Meetings were held with a range of staff, the chair of the governing body, groups of pupils and sixth form students and parents. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of policies including community cohesion, equal opportunities, special educational needs, child protection, inclusion, race equality and assessment. In addition, they analysed 106 questionnaires from parents, as well as the survey responses from pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress of pupils in each key stage, in particular those with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented
- the extent to which assessment information is used to drive improvement
- the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting the needs of all groups of pupils
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in establishing the vision for improvement and their capacity to sustain change.

Information about the school

St Mary Magdalene Academy is a Christian community school, which opened in 2007. The intake is fully comprehensive. The academy is heavily over-subscribed and draws students from the immediate community. The academy is still growing and is smaller than an average sized secondary school. Since opening, a new year group enters the academy at the start of each academic year. When full to capacity, it expects to cater for 1350 students. The first cohort in the new sixth form joined in September 2009.

Of its current students, half are from White British background with the rest from a diverse range of minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is very high, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups but few are at the early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The academy has specialisms in Humanities and Global Citizenship. There is high stability among the staff and pupils. The academy provides extended services and has gained a number of awards including The Education Business Award and the International School Award.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. The personal message from one parent summarises the views of the majority of those who responded to the questionnaire or spoke to the inspection team. 'I have a very bright child ...who is being nurtured and developed in exactly the way I want. I am very happy with the school, my child enjoys it. The academy is a safe environment, the pastoral care is great and I think the senior leadership team is ...extremely effective'. This view is accurate. St Mary Magdalene is indeed an inclusive school where pupils, parents or carers and staff want to be. The academy really ensures that the needs of individuals and groups of pupils are met.

Pupils are proud of the academy and recognise that the quality of care provided is exceptional. They have a very high regard for the family guardian system, which contributes to pupils from different backgrounds mixing and supporting each other very well. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons are rarely less than good with much that is outstanding. The majority of pupils are highly motivated. The specialisms and innovative curriculum with its global dimension inspire pupils to achieve their best. This accords very well with the sponsor's philosophy, 'Reaching beyond yourself'.

From the Reception through to the sixth form, pupils derive many benefits from a highly committed staff who ensure that they receive some very memorable learning experiences. This is possible because teaching is good in the primary and secondary sections and overall, and provision is outstanding in the sixth form. Assessment data is used well to drive improvement but the academy recognises that there is still more to do to ensure that the information is easy to access. Additionally, targets are not always clearly communicated to parents and marking does not always inform pupils how well they are doing or what they should do to improve.

Academic achievement is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The academy is successful in helping pupils to reach and often exceed their targets because of the strong emphasis placed on developing good basic skills. The Principal, who is very well supported by the senior team, drives the culture of high expectations. Together, senior leaders have created a strong team spirit among staff who understand the academy's mission and aspirations for its pupils. Leaders and managers at all levels are inspired to embrace change for the benefit of the pupils. Consultation, internally and externally, therefore underpins the academy's work, and staff and pupils, have a voice in determining decisions. For example, the school parliament and pupil learning consultants meet regularly with members of the governing body to review provision critically. A high priority is given to professional development so that staff can acquire the best skills to accelerate pupils' progress.

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Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy's work. Development planning and monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and impact statements are used well to identify the areas of weakness and determine the next steps. With an incisive and demanding governing body, the Principal, senior and middle managers ensure that accountability is a strength and the academy's work is constantly kept under review. As a result, the capacity to improve further is good because senior leaders, including the governing body are reflective and analytical in their ambitious drive to make the academy even better for the pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to accelerate pupils' progress further the academy needs to develop practice in assessment by ensuring that:
 - the data is more accessible in identifying groups of pupils to support their learning
 - targets are clearly written and communicated to parents to help them understand the difference between long term and current achievement
 - marking is consistent and detailed and provides pupils with clear guidelines on how to improve their work

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage begin the academy with below expected skills, especially in communication language and literacy. While this varies from year to year, attainment on entry to other key stages is broadly average; although generally literacy skills are lower. Nevertheless, high aspirations and expectations of work and behaviour result in pupils attaining above average standards by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in the primary section and in Year 8 in the secondary sector. Progress is good throughout the academy in all lessons and for groups of pupils, as shown by the tracking records and results in the national tests. Pupils with special educational needs, and children looked after by the local authority make consistently good progress from a low base. Additionally, those who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups make similar progress to their peers.

In the majority of lessons observed, pupils learning and progress was good or better. Pupils enter lessons ready to begin learning and in anticipation, they are rarely disappointed because the classroom environment, when combined with their good and often exemplary behaviour, support teaching and learning very well. Although the vast majority of pupils enjoy attending, attendance is average rather than good. Despite the stringent actions to sustain above average attendance, a small minority of pupils have severe medical needs and are often absent. Additionally, the flu epidemic and wintry weather in spring 2010, affected the overall rates of attendance.

Pupils understand how to keep safe and insist that they are 'very secure' in the academy. The guardianship system and the highly visible presence of staff around the

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academy and outside at the end of the day ensure that the safety of pupils is paramount. The academy's commitment to the specialisms is a strength and has led to pupils developing exceptionally good insight into humanity. Pupils' contribution to the local, national and international communities is extensive and the motto is pertinent as, it encapsulates their reach across cultures, age groups and countries. For example, while global work immerses pupils in other cultures in the Middle East, and beyond, the 'inter-generational' project provides excellent opportunities for them to support the elderly in the community. These provisions have a lasting impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, all of which are outstanding. There is a strong sense of moral obligation and neighbourliness towards others. A pupil said, 'We are all connected'. This comment captures the harmonious relations that defy racist behaviour and stereotyping. Pupils understanding of keeping healthy have impacted very well on their life style. A few parents have noted that their children 'lecture' them on preparing nutritious meals. Very good links with universities, the business community as well as opportunities to develop good basic and decision making skills, provide pupils with a solid foundation for the next stage of their life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers use their very good subject expertise very well to plan lessons that increase pupils' desire to learn. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good because teachers set high expectations that pupils will work diligently, participate in activities and apply themselves to their work. Stimulating resources and the interactive white boards are used to engage pupils and explain specific points for learning. Pupils in discussion indicated that 'teachers know their preferred style of learning and have a good knowledge of their classes'. This insightful comment is well supported by inspection evidence. Practical and collaborative work is therefore used very well to stimulate pupils' thinking. This is supported by clear and often in-depth questioning to challenge them and increase their communication skills. In the outstanding lessons observed, excitingly fast pace, and superb energy from class teachers and pupils ensured that the challenge to deepen understanding and master or consolidate skills was exceptionally good. That said; the academy recognises that there are relative weaknesses in teaching. It is therefore taking robust action to tackle issues around, teachers occasionally talking too much; the pace of lessons not being quick enough and ensuring that work is consistently well matched to the needs of individuals and groups of pupils.

Effective assessment procedures provide teachers with detailed information about the rate of pupils' progress over time. Teachers use the data very well to identify individuals and groups of pupils who are at risk of not reaching their potential. Regular assessments, including review days, peer and self-evaluation, encourage pupils to reach or exceed the demanding targets set for them. Nevertheless, marking does not always highlight how pupils can improve their work.

An innovative curriculum with an international dimension, offers pupils a wide range of courses and opportunities to develop their personal skills and talents as well as the ability to empathise with others. The specialisms are used exceptionally well to organise the curriculum and develop basic and social skills. For example, the homebased model, which involves intensive focus on literacy and humanities, contribute to very good transition across phases. This prepares pupils well with the right skills to begin formal GCSE courses in Year 9.

Highly effective programmes are used very well to support pupils from vulnerable circumstances who are at risk of exclusion. Early intervention and teams around pupils, such as the rapid response group, provide outstanding support. External partnership work with agencies and the well-organised internal support systems are used strategically to meet pupils' needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1
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How effective are leadership and management?

The Principal provides an exceptional lead in communicating the vision for high achievement. This vision has been communicated clearly to all staff; therefore, nothing but the very best provision is expected. Changes in staffing and delivery are made quickly when their work does not meet the exacting standard to accelerate pupils' progress. The drive to help pupils achieve the very best is seen in the detailed development plan, the extensive consultation, both internally and externally to critically evaluate the academy's effectiveness and the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. Planning is reviewed and adjusted accordingly so that there is clarity about change and development. The commitment to deliver better outcomes is kept under scrutiny by the governing body that is exceptionally good at fulfilling its duties. They are meticulous in querying the academy's work and hold staff to account through for example, reviews, meetings, observations and the specialist group with responsibility for scrutinising attainment. They are passionate about the academy's success and ensure that the vision is not blurred by external demands.

The academy does much to develop its partnership work with external providers. The links are used very well to support pupils to achieve their best, and prepare them for living and contributing to a diverse and global community. As such, the work on community cohesion is well promoted; it is also carefully audited, and analysed, and linked to the academy's work on equal opportunities. The academy is robust in tackling all issues around equality. It ensures that all pupils have equal access to achieve well and to experience other faiths and heritages. Parents say they like the emphasis on diversity and inclusion; their personal testimonies record the impact this has had on their children's lives. Parents value the good communication and partnership work with the academy and find that staff are accessible and supportive of their children's achievement. Leaders, including the governing body have developed good safeguarding systems, training, and induction for all staff. Resources, including finance are well ordered and deployed so that pupil outcomes improve year on year, to provide good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Reception class enjoy their lessons and activities; they have a good start in the academy and make good progress. Children's behaviour is consistently good and their personal development is a particular strength. They play and work well together in pairs and small groups, helping each other, sharing ideas and creating role-play games, for example, in making postcards and posting them at a post office. They have excellent relationships with adults.

When the class is working together, children are keen to answer questions and have the confidence to go to the front and write words on the board. For example, during one-session, children spontaneously clapped when one classmate tried to write part of a text for a postcard. Independent activities are used well to encourage them to make their own decisions. For example, when deciding what photographs to take with their digital cameras. Most are happy to persevere with a task or activity and this helps to consolidate the skills they are developing.

All children are included and encouraged to take an active part in lessons and a broad range of activities usually related to the main topic of study. Activities allow children to work specifically with an adult to develop particular skills such as a basic understanding of counting, adding and subtraction or writing. There is good access to outside areas where children can extend their learning. Adults mostly work effectively with small groups and individuals. While children are engaged with their independent tasks and activities, but there are missed opportunities to provide support, encourage and guide children in order to maximise the potential of the resources and opportunities available.

Procedures to safeguard children are good. Detailed records show children's achievements, enabling teachers to check progress and provide targeted support where appropriate. There is a clear view about the strengths and weaknesses of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which has led this year to a specific focus on developing children's literacy skills, previously an area of weaker performance and a key focus for the whole academy. There are good relationships with parents and external agencies, which provide specialist support for children from the most vulnerable circumstances.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

The new sixth form has made an excellent start to challenging students to meet the demands of the International Baccalaureate Diploma. While examinations have not yet been taken, observations of teaching and learning, discussions with students and scrutiny of their work confirm that the quality of provision is outstanding. Highly effective and inspirational provision contributes to students making good progress. Sixth form teachers use a range of activities that are sharply and accurately focused on meeting individual student's needs. For example, in learning Mandarin, students take part in an exchange scheme with a school in China. Similarly, they have very good opportunities to contribute to the academy's work and wider community.

Leaders are ambitious and expectations are high. These are reflected in a range of excellent initiatives which are shared and welcomed by staff, students and parents. There is a powerful thrust to deliver the very best for students. Consequently, training for staff is rigorous as is the approach to monitoring and reviewing student performance, self-evaluation and planning for high results. Forward planning is used very well to begin preparing students for entry to university. For example, motivational speakers, partnership work with external providers and excellent engagement with parents have successfully contributed to outstanding transition arrangements. There is rapid implementation of changes to develop the provision. As a result, the senior leaders, including the sixth form director, are reflective when considering the provision and consult widely to meet students' needs.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

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

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The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire are very supportive of the academy's approach to keeping their child safe, informing them about their child's progress, providing a wealth of learning opportunities to help them have an enjoyable experience in preparation for life beyond school. Nevertheless, a very small minority of parents have expressed concerns that the academy does: not meet their child's needs; deal effectively with behaviour or take account of their suggestions. Additionally, they also disagreed that the academy is well led. The inspection evidence does not endorse these views. Rather, the clear vision of the senior leaders has helped the academy to achieve much within a short time. The high quality care and personalised curriculum are particular strengths, which fully meet the needs of individuals and groups. Although all pupils do not always move around the academy quietly, behaviour is good and often outstanding. The academy has highly effective systems to support pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties; these have been used very well to prevent exclusions. Consultation and communication are strong features and underpin the academy's work. For example, at least one-third of the governing body is made up of parents, ensuring that the parental voice is strongly represented. Furthermore, there are opportunities for parents/carers to meet regularly with members of the governing body, as required.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary Magdalene Academy 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 106 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 770 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	52	49	43	41	5	5	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	61	58	39	37	4	4	2	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	57	54	39	37	5	5	4	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	49	43	41	9	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	47	44	47	44	7	7	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	38	51	48	8	8	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	50	47	45	42	8	8	1	1
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)	39	37	49	46	3	3	4	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	43	41	43	41	11	10	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	33	46	43	14	13	9	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	25	47	44	19	18	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	39	37	46	43	10	9	6	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	58	55	34	32	10	9	2	2

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



18 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Magdalene Academy, London, N7 8PG

Thank you for taking part in the inspection and for the welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your academy recently. We enjoyed talking with you about your work and were particularly impressed by the way, you talked to us about the provision. It is clear that you are very proud to be a part of the academy.

St Mary Magdalene provides you with a good education. You behave very well in lessons and this contributes to you reaching good standards and making good progress. This is possible because the quality of teaching is good. There is very good attention to equipping you with basic and wider skills so that you have a strong foundation to develop your learning and future prospects. Teachers use an innovative curriculum, ICT and well selected resources to motivate you to achieve well. The academy offers you a wide range of enrichment opportunities. These help you to develop new skills and to empathise with different faiths and cultures in the community and around the world. For example, like your parents, you told us that learning Mandarin is amazing.

The academy is committed to helping you to achieve the very best academically through superb quality of care, guidance and support... The Principal, staff and governing body are passionate about your education and want to make it even better. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and have plans to make further improvements. The inspection team have seen these plans and endorse the areas that need further development. We have highlighted assessment as an area for improvement and have asked the leaders of the academy to ensure that:

- assessment data are presented clearly to help you and your parents understand your targets
- the information on your progress and performance is accessible and readily available for analysis when required
- marking is consistent with comments that will help you to improve further.

We are confident that this target will be achieved. You can support the drive by attending regularly and showing your commitment to achieving even better results.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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