

St Mary's CofE High School

Downage, Hendon, London, NW4 1AB

Inspection dates 11–12 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement is variable. Boys, students supported through school action plus and lower ability students do not do as well as their peers.
- Teaching is of variable quality within, and across, subjects. Not all lessons provide work and resources matched to students' specific needs and abilities.
- Some students work is not marked regularly. As a result, these students do not understand what to improve or how. Very few students respond to teachers' comments and it makes little difference to their work.
- Standards of literacy across the school require more rapid improvement. The impact of the new literacy strategy is starting to emerge, but not all lessons provide enough development of literacy skills for lower ability students.
- Behaviour in lessons is not good enough. When teaching is weak, students are too passive and not sufficiently engaged in all lessons.
- Some students do not attend regularly enough to make the most of their lessons.
- Leaders are improving teaching by setting higher expectations of teachers and leading intensive and effective training sessions. This has not yet been sufficiently successful in tackling inconsistencies.
- Governors are beginning to ask more challenging questions about teaching and the school's performance, but are not rigorous enough in using data to understand the progress of all students.

The school has the following strengths

- Most students achieve well in mathematics and modern foreign languages.
- The sixth form is good and has improved well.
- Students feel well cared for.
- Pastoral care is excellent. Leaders use effective links with external agencies to support students living in challenging circumstances, and those who are vulnerable and at risk of exclusion.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons taught by 34 teachers, of which 10 were jointly observed with a senior or middle leader.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, a representative of the London Diocesan Board for Schools, groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team observed the school's work, reviewed action plans, minutes of governing body meetings, records about performance management, attendance and behaviour, and scrutinised data about students' achievement.
- Inspectors were not able to take account of the on-line Parent View survey because too few responses were received during the inspection. Inspectors reviewed the school's own parental surveys.
- Inspectors took account of views expressed in the seven staff questionnaires received during the inspection.

Inspection team

Joanna Beckford-Hall, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Street	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Lower	Additional Inspector
Helen Bailey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's Church of England School is a smaller than average secondary school, with a small sixth form. A high proportion of students joins the school throughout the academic year.
- Most students are from minority ethnic groups and over 65% of students speak English as an additional language. This is higher than found nationally.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for students eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families, is well above the national average.
- A number of students study courses at Barnet and Southgate College and some students receive additional support in school and at external sessions with Skill Force, the Southover Partnership and 1st Rung.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- From September 2013, the school will be based at one site, at Downage. The school has been notified of closure and will close in July 2016. As a result, there is no Year 7 in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of boys, lower ability students and students supported through school action plus so that, by the end of Year 11, their attainment and progress is comparable to the very best achievement of other students in the school.
- Improve attendance to be at least in line with that found nationally.
- Develop a higher proportion of consistently good and outstanding teaching by:
 - helping all teachers plan lessons which include tasks and resources tightly matched to the needs of every student
 - making sure that all lessons provide high levels of challenge to stretch all students, particularly the most talented, and, with appropriate support, less-able students
 - adjusting the pace and quality of learning in lessons to push more-able students on to harder work more quickly
 - eradicating low-level disruption and student lack of engagement in lessons
 - providing much more regular and high quality marking and feedback to students
 - strengthening the teaching of literacy in all subjects across the school
 - encouraging teachers to be more imaginative and creative in their teaching to deepen students' subject knowledge.
- Develop leaders' and governors' ability to develop to be more strategic in using achievement data and information about the quality of teaching over time, so that development plans include tighter timescales and success criteria linked to the achievement of different groups of students in all subjects.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Most students join the school with starting points that are well below average. By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is just below that found nationally.
- In 2012, a little more than half of the students attained five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, dipping slightly from a three-year high in 2011. In modern foreign languages and mathematics the percentage attaining A* and A grades exceeded that found nationally.
- In some subjects, modern foreign languages, English literature and religious education, students achieve well and their grades meet or exceed national averages at GCSE grade C or above. In other subjects, teaching does not equip students well enough to achieve these higher grades. Students perform less well in geography, music, history and science. The school's data and inspection evidence show that students' attainment in these subjects is on track to rise this year.
- Most students make good progress in mathematics, exceeding national averages for the past two years. The proportion of students making expected progress in English also exceeded the national average, although there was a slight dip in 2012. Rates of progress in other subjects fluctuate because the quality of teaching is variable.
- Gaps in the achievement of boys compared to girls remain. Girls continue to make better progress than girls nationally in English and mathematics. Lower ability students do not achieve as well as other students in the school.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is variable. Students supported through school action often make much better progress in English and mathematics than their peers nationally, but students supported through school action plus do less well compared to their peers. In some lessons, teachers and support staff do not focus well enough on the progress of these students.
- In-school gaps between students of different ethnicities are starting to close. However, not all Black Caribbean and students of mixed White and Black heritage achieve as well as their peers. Students who speak English as an additional language do better than their peers.
- In 2011, students supported by pupil premium funding achieved similar rates of progress to their peers, but this declined in 2012. In 2012, progress made by students eligible for free school meals was over 20 percentage points lower than other students. Students eligible for free school meals gained GCSE results in mathematics and English in 2012 that were just over a grade below other students at the school. This gap is on track to reduce this year because there is better support for these students.
- Students who attend the local college study levels 1 and 2 courses in hair and beauty, catering and confectionery, childcare and motor vehicle studies, they achieve well in these subjects. Students are supported by tutors from St Mary's who monitor their progress and attendance. Progress towards their targets is good. Attendance improves because they enjoy the chance to combine study at St Mary's with studying at college.
- The school carefully selects those entered early for GCSE examinations and, in some instances, this has helped students improve their grades.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress because the concerted effort to address weaker teaching has been successful. Leaders use achievement information more strategically to identify any underperformance and to reduce significant variations in subjects. This has reversed a previous trend of poor achievement in the sixth form.
- Teachers are beginning to plan more opportunity for students to develop their reading, writing and speaking skills in subjects other than English. However, the new literacy strategy is not embedded well enough in all departments, and not all lower ability students are given sufficient help to improve their literacy. The school has not devised a whole-school numeracy strategy.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching is improving, but not enough is routinely good or outstanding. Teaching is variable in quality within departments and across the school.
- Inspectors observed some inadequate teaching and achievement in lessons because students were all doing the same thing, working at the same pace and using the same resources. Work was not planned to meet the needs of each student in the class. Some teaching was not effective in meeting students' needs at the stage of the lesson; preconceived ideas of what inspectors might want to see was not helpful to students who wanted time to complete high quality work without stop-start peer assessments and plenaries that were not deepening their understanding. Students say that some lessons 'seem longer than they actually are' because teachers do not move the lesson on quickly enough. A few students told inspectors that they would like harder work.
- In some Key Stages 3 and 4 lessons, teachers miss opportunities to deepen students' thinking. They do not use probing questions to test out students' ideas and understanding of concepts and topics. Teachers' questioning is much better in the sixth form because the teachers draw out scholastic knowledge and push students to analyse, interpret and evaluate in class debates and in their written work.
- In some subjects, there is not enough challenge for the talented students, and less-able students struggle to understand the work or keep up with others in their class. This shows in students' books; less-able students sometimes do not finish work and more-able students complete work quickly and are not given tasks to promote further learning.
- Teaching assistants are deployed to work with students who have specific learning difficulties, but their role in leading learning and in joint planning with teachers is under developed.
- Where teaching is good, and occasionally outstanding, students are challenged to do better and they enjoy their learning. Students say the mix of independent and group activities and balance of theory and practical work help to move learning on quickly, and work captures their interest. When teaching is good, students have a very positive rapport with teachers and each other. Enjoyment fuels the pace, and learning moves on quickly. Outstanding work was seen in a very well planned Year 12 history lesson, where students used good prior knowledge to debate decisions and promises made to the Jewish and Arabic communities in the First World War, and reflected on its relevance to contemporary conflicts.
- Poor quality, inconsistent marking and lack of follow up by students to teachers' comments are not helping students deepen their learning. Praise encourages, but often there are no next steps to require students to develop their work. Occasionally, students with weak literacy skills do not understand teachers' written comments. Where marking is of a good quality, students take pride in their work and make time to improve it.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Students feel safe in school and when walking between the two school sites. Most students move between sites in an orderly manner. Some students are late to lessons and need to be encouraged by teachers to get to classes quickly.
- Students say that leaders take effective action if bullying occurs. If friendships breakdown, students use 'restorative justice' to help each other understand how to resolve tension. The school is an inclusive community and incidents of racist bullying are rare. Students are less confident in dealing with the occasional use of homophobic language.
- Students appreciate the small and inclusive community of the school. Discrimination is not tolerated and good relations between students from different backgrounds are promoted effectively. Students show respect for different ethnicities and faiths. Students who join the school during the academic year feel well supported. The buddy system is effective in helping them meet other students, settle into school life quickly and find their way around.

- The mixed picture of students' attitudes to learning means that their progress is good in some lessons and not in others. When teaching is motivating, students are attentive and work hard.
- Students say that over time behaviour in some subjects has improved, but there remains some low-level disruption, such as in some geography and English lessons. A very small minority of students waste time and show little interest in their learning.
- Behaviour is not good in lessons that are lack lustre, because students are not given work that is well matched to their ability. Some teachers push students to try harder work. Consequently, they behave well and want to learn. This is not commonplace in lessons.
- Students understand how to stay safe using the internet. They receive clear guidance about how to report issues with social networking sites and are confident that teachers respond appropriately to their concerns.
- The number of students who receive temporary exclusions has reduced significantly over the last year. Fewer students are excluded because leaders work hard with form tutors, teaching teams and welfare support staff to help them resolve behavioural issues and study courses that motivate them.
- Leaders work hard to help students improve their attendance. The use of alternative courses and training sessions in school and at college helps to re-engage some students and improve their attendance. However, overall attendance rates are not good enough.
- Parents responding to the school's own survey expressed mixed views about the quality of behaviour and this is what inspectors found.
- Students receive effective personal development sessions to help them sharpen their moral awareness. Students like the 'theme of the week', such as the conscience topic. A Year 10 assembly guided students to listen to their inner voice and learn how to make right choices. Assemblies promote students' spiritual development and an increasing range of musical, sporting and charity events suitably develop their social and cultural awareness.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The headteacher and other leaders are passionate about the quality of education they want St Mary's to provide. They set high aspirations for students and staff. Since the previous inspection the headteacher has led staff in improving the curriculum and teaching. As a result, more students make good progress, attainment has risen over the last four years, fewer students are temporarily excluded and the sixth form is good. These improvements demonstrate capacity of leaders to continue to improve the school.
- The impact of systems to monitor and improve teaching is not securing consistently good teaching throughout the school. Some groups do less well than others, and low attendance remains a barrier to learning for some students.
- Senior leaders work well with subject leaders to develop their skills in observing lessons, giving feedback to staff and examining the quality of students' work. The impact of training is just emerging in subject leaders' confidence to tackle weak teaching. Some leaders are not demanding enough in holding their subject teams to account for high quality lesson planning and marking. Not all subject leaders can analyse the impact of the pupil premium funding for students in their departments.
- The school's self-assessment is generous because the school is not yet good. The school and department action plans are too generic. They lack specificity in setting targets for the achievement of student groups and goals for improving teaching. They are not precise enough in identifying regular time-bound targets to test how well teaching teams are closing in-school gaps in students' achievement.
- Teachers' work is audited through a good performance management system and use of the Teachers' Standards. Salary progression is measured against students' achievement. Teachers are set targets through annual performance management, informed by regular observations of lessons. Those who need support are coached to improve their work and most understand that

mediocre performance is not good enough. Despite this, some do not mark students' work regularly nor plan lessons well enough. Leaders are under no illusion that their work must exemplify why they should retain their leadership salary. Recently, leaders and governors have made tough decisions to decline progression up the salary scale because of weaker performance.

- Leaders and teachers value the training they receive. Recent whole-school literacy training was cited by several leaders and teachers as having a positive impact in helping them develop students' good literacy skills. Senior leaders welcome external support in checking the accuracy of their lesson observations. Even so, inspectors judged that there is generosity in the proportion of teaching judged as good over time. Senior leaders are increasingly aware that lesson scrutiny needs to take a more in-depth look at the progress of all students in a lesson, as well as students' books, to test the quality and impact of teaching over time.
- The pathways available to students in Key Stages 4 and 5 are reviewed regularly to make sure students can overcome any academic or personal barriers that may affect their learning. Partnerships with local providers both on and off site provide good opportunities for students to study functional skills courses in English and mathematics, as well as levels 1 and 2 vocationally-based courses at college. Leaders give excellent guidance to the most vulnerable students and these students achieve much success in progressing to employment or further education.
- The local authority has an accurate assessment of the school's performance and has been providing light touch monitoring and support.
- All statutory safeguarding requirements are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is not yet demonstrating good or better governance. Governors demonstrate the capacity to improve their work because they are beginning to ask more demanding questions of leaders about key groups such as boys and lower ability students. However, they are not carrying out more detailed scrutiny on the achievement of different student groups compared with similar groups nationally. Governors are starting to ask more demanding questions about teachers' performance. However, they have not been sufficiently well trained in analysing the impact of teaching over time and how it influences the learning of all students, and how data inform targets in the school development plans. Governors have limited understanding of the allocation and impact of pupil premium funding. They are not robust enough in monitoring the progress these students make. Governors make regular visits to the school and jointly observe lessons with senior leaders and interview middle leaders. These visits have a pre-determined focus, but the analysis of what emerges from visits is not drawn together regularly enough to help governors scrutinise the effectiveness of the school. The governing body action plan is too brief. It does not include specific targets to develop governors' work and enable governors to measure and evaluate how well their work supports school improvement. Governors are providing good support to staff and students in managing the transition to the school's closure by 2016.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	101360
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	400470

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	12–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	527
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia French
Headteacher	Kate Roskell
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2009
Telephone number	020 82032827
Fax number	020 82025510
Email address	admin@st-maryshigh.barnet.sch.uk

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