

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

Lieutenant Ellis Way, Cheshunt, Waltham Cross, EN7 5FB

Inspection dates

10 December 2014–26 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This is a rapidly improving academy.
- Students achieve well in a wide range of subjects including English and mathematics.
- Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- Teaching is good across both of these key stages.
- Students behave well and they develop positive attitudes to learning.
- The good leadership of the headteacher and her senior team is valued by students, staff and parents alike.
- Achievement is improving because academy leaders and governors effectively focus upon strengthening the quality of teaching.
- Students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teacher's expectations of presentation and the quality of marking are not sufficiently high, especially in science, design and technology and art where students' progress is not as good as it is in other subjects.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Leaders do not check students' progress in sufficient depth. Teachers do not ensure that the work in students' files is well-organised.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection of 10-11 December 2014 was extended by one day. Two inspectors visited the academy on Monday 26 January 2015 and a series of visits to lessons were made by the team, accompanied by senior members of staff. Meetings were held with staff and a range of documentation reviewed.
- During the visit on 10-11 December, inspectors observed parts of 34 lessons, some of which were joint observations with the headteacher or other senior staff.
- Inspectors looked at students' work.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior and subject leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students. They talked informally with students at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Account was taken of the 52 responses from parents to the online survey, Parent View. Inspectors also took account of the findings of a recent academy survey of the views of parents. The responses to the 54 questionnaires completed by staff were considered.
- Inspectors looked at several documents including: the academy's evaluation of its own performance; plans for improvement; policies; and records of students' behaviour and attendance. Safeguarding documents were reviewed.

Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector
Catherine Robinson-Slater	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Seconded Inspector
Tim Bristow	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's Church of England High School converted to become an academy on 1 July 2012. When its predecessor school, St Mary's VA High School, was last inspected, it was judged to be good overall.
- St Mary's Church of England High School is an average-sized secondary school.
- Almost half of the students are White British. One third of students are from Black backgrounds. Around 10% are from other mixed ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above that found nationally.
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is below average.
- There is no alternative provision used by the academy.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and accelerate students' progress, especially in science, design and technology and art at Key Stage 4 by:
 - ensuring the high quality presentation of all students' work
 - improving written feedback on students' work so it provides better guidance about how they can make improvements.
- Ensure that achievement in the sixth form improves so that it is at least good by:
 - monitoring students' progress more effectively and providing extra support when underachievement is identified
 - ensuring that all students' work is thorough and well-organised at all times.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The purposeful and dedicated leadership of the headteacher and her senior team has ensured that this is a rapidly improving academy. The strength of leadership is recognised consistently by students, staff and parents alike.
- Self-evaluation at the academy is perceptive. Leaders have an accurate understanding of what the academy does well and what needs to be improved further. The academy's thorough development plans demonstrate a focused approach to improving outcomes for students.
- Academy leaders know where teaching is strongest and where support needs to be put in place to strengthen it further. This ensures that the quality of teaching continues to improve.
- Leaders have established a constructive academy ethos. Students are clear about the high expectations for their behaviour and the consequences of poor behaviour.
- Subject and other middle leaders are well supported by senior leaders. Support is intensified for new subject leaders and where it is needed to help remove the remaining inconsistencies in teaching and achievement.
- Academy leaders have used pupil premium funding effectively to reduce the gap between the performance of disadvantaged students and other students nationally.
- The curriculum places appropriate focus on English, mathematics and science, and it enables students to study a suitable range of other subjects. A good range of after-school activities is available to students. These are popular and welcomed by students. Subjects offer additional opportunities to support students who need to catch up because they have fallen behind in their learning.
- The academy provides appropriate careers information and guidance to help students make the right choices for the future and to enable them to develop the skills they will need to progress successfully into employment or further education. Students are well supported in completing application forms and in writing application letters.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted regularly through the academy's day-to-day activities, assemblies and through planned work in tutorial time and lessons. Religious education contributes well to students' understanding of traditional British values. This strengthens the academy's positive work to promote equality and tackle discrimination.
- In recent years academy leaders have successfully provided focused challenge and support to improve achievement in most subject departments. However, this has not yet had sufficient impact on Key Stage 4 outcomes in science, design and technology or art, or in the sixth form.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors understand how to interpret data about students' achievement. They understand the key strengths and weaknesses of the academy. They have ensured that actions needed to raise standards have been implemented effectively.
 - Governors ask challenging questions of the academy's leadership to investigate whether targets are being met. They effectively monitor the performance of the different groups of students. They know how the pupil premium is spent and they understand the impact it has on eligible students' achievement.
 - The governors have a good understanding of teaching, how targets are set for teachers and how these relate to staff pay rises and promotion. Teachers' pay rises are dependent on students making good progress, and governors have clear procedures to monitor this process.
 - The governing body makes sure the academy fulfils its responsibilities regarding safeguarding. Consequently, the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. All staff have

been checked as required and are trained appropriately to keep students safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students consistently try hard to learn and they want to achieve as well as they can. Most arrive promptly to lessons with positive attitudes, the right equipment and ready to learn.
- The proportion of students excluded from the academy is falling as the academy works closely with them, and their parents, to improve behaviour.
- Students are proud of their academy and their academy environment. They take pride in looking smart in their uniform. They keep the classrooms tidy and generally keep the site free of litter.
- Behaviour about the academy is calm, sensible and orderly. Students' conduct is good. They are polite and courteous to each other and visitors.
- Students mix well with their fellow students. They like being in their tutor groups with students of the same age as they get to know each other well and have the opportunity to learn from each other.
- Older students coach and mentor younger students and help them with their reading skills. Some students take on additional roles such as school council representatives. This enables them to successfully develop their personal skills and thereby increase in self-confidence.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe and well cared for by their teachers. Parents have great confidence in the academy and confirm that they believe their children to be well cared for and safe.
- When asked, all students demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the different types of bullying, including racist, homophobic and other prejudice-based behaviours intent on hurting others. Students do not believe bullying is a problem as staff take it seriously and deal it with very quickly and effectively. The academy does not tolerate bullying.
- Students learn how to keep themselves safe through assemblies and in lessons. External visitors are regularly invited into the academy to promote and enhance the awareness of students on how to keep themselves safe, both in and out of school. Students are clearly aware of the dangers of using the internet.
- Students have adopted and embraced the British values promoted within and by the academy. Students know that they and their views are valued and respected by others. A culture of fairness, respect and tolerance is promoted and shared by all.
- Attendance is above the national average. This is because students feel safe and enjoy coming to the academy.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Effective teaching has a positive impact on learning in English, mathematics and across the wider curriculum and students make good progress as a result.
- Teachers create constructive learning environments in their classrooms. Positive relationships have been developed throughout the academy and as a result there is a purposeful and productive atmosphere in lessons.

- Teaching in English is particularly effective and, in these lessons, students typically learn well and make rapid progress. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to challenge students' thinking. Students in English respond positively to the high expectations of teachers and develop their oral and written responses well.
- Teaching in mathematics has improved. Attitudes to learning in mathematics have also improved and this is raising standards. Literacy, numeracy and communication skills are well supported across the curriculum and students read widely.
- Teachers usually have high expectations of what students can achieve. This means that in most subjects, students expect to receive tasks which stretch them.
- In subject areas where academy leaders are providing focused challenge and support the quality of teaching is improving notably. For example, rapid improvements to the teaching in science have enthused students with an interest in the subject. They report how much they enjoy the well-planned opportunities to experiment. Consequently, students in Key Stage 3 are far better prepared for Key Stage 4 science, both in attitude and in the development of their skills.
- Some teachers do not always ensure that students present their work effectively or organise their work so they have a thorough and clear written record of their learning. This is particularly true of the files of some sixth form students.
- Marking does not always provide advice that clearly tells students how to improve their work and teachers do not always ensure that students act on advice when it is given. This is particularly the case in science, design and technology and art at Key Stage 4.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with standards that are in line with those expected of their age. Students from all backgrounds make good progress and finish Key Stage 4 with standards of attainment which are above national averages overall.
- Effective teaching has a positive impact on learning in English, mathematics and across the wider curriculum and students make good progress as a result. The rate of progress students make across the academy overall is high when compared to other schools nationally.
- The proportion of students attaining five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, has risen in the last three years and now exceeds the national average. Results in English are significantly better than the national average for this subject.
- From their different starting points, students consistently make strong progress in English because of the effective actions taken to raise teaching and achievement. The proportion making expected or better progress in mathematics has exceeded national levels for the first time in 2014.
- Students make good progress in a range of other subject areas, including modern foreign languages and the humanities. Students' literacy, numeracy and communication skills are regularly reinforced across other subject areas.
- Gaps in attainment of disadvantaged students compared to other students are closing. They are closing more rapidly in relation to other students nationally than they are to other students within the academy. In 2014, at the end of Year 11, disadvantaged students attained nearly one grade below their peers in English and almost one and a half grades below in mathematics. When compared to other students nationally, disadvantaged students in the academy were one third of a grade behind in English and one grade behind in mathematics. School data for this academic year shows that these gaps are continuing to close rapidly.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Teachers use the available data to target the support they provide for these students effectively. Teaching assistants work well with students in class and in small groups, ensuring that students think for themselves.
- The most able students make good progress. Where the academy has identified that early GCSE entry, for example in chemistry and English literature, has limited the achievement of the most able, these strategies have been ended.
- Not all subject departments achieve as well as the most effective. Achievement at Key Stage 4 in science, design and technology and art has remained below that in other subject areas over the last two years.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Achievement in the sixth form has improved. However, overall levels of progress and standards of attainment have not yet reached the national average.
- Students in the sixth form do not routinely organise the written work in their files so it provides a thorough record of their learning. Teachers do not check students' files are checked sufficiently.
- The leadership of the sixth form has been restructured since the end of a previous consortium arrangement in 2013, and the new structure allows leaders to be clearly focused on improving outcomes for students. However, leaders do not always monitor individual student progress rigorously enough to quickly identify where individuals are falling behind. Consequently, extra support or guidance is not always provided in the most timely manner.
- Leaders in the sixth form understand its strengths and weaknesses and have focused effectively on improving the quality of teaching. This improvement, however, has not yet had time to have sufficient impact on outcomes.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. Students enjoy good working relationships with all staff. They feel safe and enjoy their time at the academy. This is clearly seen in the confident and positive way they meet, greet and interact with each other.
- The information and guidance offered to students when entering the sixth form is comprehensive and effective.
- Students contribute to the learning of others. Many coach and support younger students to improve their literacy skills. Sixth form students are good role models for other students.
- The sixth form curriculum has an appropriate balance of academic and vocational courses which allows a range of learners of different abilities to achieve. Individual study programmes help students develop effective personal and employability skills which ensure they are well-prepared with these skills for the next stage in their education or employment.

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	138360
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	449404

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1027
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maureen Bruce
Headteacher	Stephanie Benbow
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01992 629124
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