

St Mary's RC High School

Lugwardine, Hereford, Herefordshire HR1 4DR

Inspection dates

29–30 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Outcomes for pupils are impressive. Pupils throughout the school make strong progress in all subjects. Over time, attainment at the end of key stage 4 has been above the national average.
- Pupils from all ability groups, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make strong progress from their starting points.
- Teaching is very effective across the curriculum and in different year groups.
- The curriculum is well planned, has an ambitious intent and provides pupils with worthwhile qualifications and rich experiences.
- Many pupils take advantage of a range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits.
- Leaders have high expectations of teachers and regularly visit lessons to check how pupils are progressing in their studies.
- The challenge and support provided by the governing body contributes positively to school improvement.
- The headteacher and senior leaders are a visible presence around school and their work is highly regarded by pupils, parents and colleagues.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their education or employment after leaving the school
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and many express gratitude that their children attend St Mary's.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The caring culture at the school helps them to thrive.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school site is exemplary. Pupils support one another as a matter of course.
- Pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and are proud to be part of the school community.
- Safeguarding is extremely effective. There is a consistently caring culture at the school.
- Leaders' review and evaluation of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils is not as effective as it might be. In 2018, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was low. However, current disadvantaged pupils are making good progress.
- Careers information advice and guidance is not comprehensive enough for pupils in key stage 3.
- Assessment information does not always clearly inform parents and pupils about current progress in key stage 3.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to strengthen the work to support disadvantaged pupils by carefully and systematically reviewing and evaluating the strategies employed to assess their effectiveness.
- Refine the assessment procedures in key stage 3 to ensure that pupils and parents know how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Develop the careers programme in key stage 3 to provide worthwhile advice and guidance for pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher has had a clear impact in his first two terms in post at the school. He has taken a sensitive and measured approach to securing further improvement to an already very good school. He is ably supported by a highly experienced and skilled senior leadership team. Together they have fine-tuned the positive work that was already in place. Their desire to make the school a safe, caring environment with a family atmosphere is clearly working.
- Leaders and staff in all roles are collectively committed to the welfare of each individual pupil. This approach is led with energy by the headteacher and other senior leaders, whose presence is clearly visible around the school. They regularly visit lessons and get to know pupils as individuals, as well as how they are achieving.
- Parents are highly supportive of school leaders, with the overwhelming majority feeling that the school is well led. This view is shared by those staff and pupils who responded to the Ofsted surveys carried out as part of the inspection.
- One parent reflected the views of many others when writing: 'This is a fantastic school with proactive values-based leadership and it provides a wonderfully strong education. I cannot recommend the school highly enough.'
- Teachers feel well supported by school leaders and are very proud to work at the school. They are provided with effective training to help them to further develop their teaching. This has helped lead to outstanding outcomes over time and also for current pupils.
- Leaders provide constructive feedback on teaching and learning. This advice is given in a sympathetic and sensitive manner but does not shy away from pointing out those aspects that still need to improve.
- Pupils are extremely well prepared for a future productive and happy life in modern Britain. They get along well together, and are typically extremely polite and courteous to each other, as well as to adults working at the school. The promotion of equality is central to the school's culture.
- School leaders have prioritised helping pupils to become articulate and encouraging them to listen to each other. The impact of this work is apparent both in lessons and in social interactions during break and lunchtime.
- The curriculum has an ambitious intent and is academically rigorous. All pupils are entered for a range of GCSE courses and are supported extremely well to achieve outcomes that are much higher than is typical nationally. The curriculum remains broad and balanced for all pupils throughout the school. Creative subjects are championed alongside those that comprise the English Baccalaureate. Where necessary, adjustments are made to help pupils achieve the best outcomes. For example, half of pupils take double science, whereas the other half take three separate science subjects.
- Pupils are given the opportunity to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The large majority regularly take part in extensive options that include sport, music and drama. In addition, there are a number of school trips that are highly valued by pupils. The popular house competition ensures that all have the opportunity to take

part in activities outside of the formal taught curriculum. This culminates in an eisteddfod that involves all pupils in the summer term.

- Teachers who train at the school and those who begin their careers at St Mary's are supported extremely well. When an inspector spoke to a group of new teachers, they were effusive in their praise of the school.
- Leaders responded swiftly and positively to the target, set at the short inspection in January 2018, to improve attendance. As a result of their actions, attendance has risen for all groups of pupils and persistent absence has fallen.
- Leaders are determined that pupils should not, wherever possible, be excluded from the school. The number of exclusions has fallen dramatically in the past year.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is outstanding. Performance management arrangements for teachers are very thorough. Examination results are carefully analysed by leaders at different levels. The day-to-day work of academic departments is systematically reviewed during each academic year. This joined-up approach is contributing positively to school improvement.
- Funding to support pupils with SEND is used very well. The SEND coordinator in the school takes a proactive approach to supporting pupils and systematically tracks how well they are doing. As a result, these pupils make good progress.
- Pupils who need to catch up in Year 7 are supported very well. Additional funding is used wisely and these pupils make rapid progress.
- Additional funding to support current disadvantaged pupils is having a positive impact on the progress they are making. However, the school's published pupil premium strategy does not accurately record what actually takes place. As a result, school leaders and governors are not able to easily analyse the effectiveness of the various strategies they have implemented.
- Careers education is very well planned throughout key stage 4 and includes work experience for all pupils. In addition, pupils are given detailed guidance in making their GCSE options. This positive work means that nearly all pupils are able to progress to suitable destinations when leaving the school.
- Provision for careers education in key stage 3 is not well planned and pupils are given limited opportunities to access independent advice and guidance in the lower years at the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school is extremely effective. Governors make a positive contribution to the work of the school and are passionate about what the school sets out to achieve.
- Governors support and challenge school leaders well and are determined to further improve this aspect of their work. They approach this with rigour and determination.
- Governors work very well as a team and have complementary skills. They play an active role in school life and visit regularly to ensure that they have a full understanding of current performance.
- The governing body meets all its statutory responsibilities. Governors are appropriately

trained in areas such as safer recruitment and the 'Prevent' duty, which ensures that they have the knowledge required to carry out their work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The culture of the school focuses on each individual and sets out to ensure that everyone is safe and thriving. All staff work diligently to support and care for all pupils.
- Appropriate checks are carried out on all adults working at the school to ensure that they are safe to work with children.
- Staff are highly trained and, as a result, are confident to make referrals to the designated safeguarding lead when they are concerned about any aspect of any pupil's welfare. These referrals are doggedly followed up and external agencies used when necessary.
- Pupils rightly feel safe. All respondents to Ofsted's staff survey confirmed that pupils are safe all of the time. This view was supported by responses to Parent View and to the pupil survey.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is very strong across different year groups and different curriculum subjects.
- Very positive relationships between teachers and pupils lead to a culture of mutual respect. All share the aspiration that every pupil should excel.
- Pupils respect each other's views. This leads to a productive working environment where all pupils feel confident to ask and answer questions in lessons.
- Lessons across the curriculum are taught by specialists with deep subject knowledge. This enables teachers to stretch and challenge pupils of all abilities.
- Teachers take the time during lessons to actively support pupils who need additional help. This prevents pupils from getting stuck and helps them make good progress.
- Teachers in all subjects have a keen understanding of the requirements of examinations. This enables them to teach pupils the skills they will require to achieve success at GCSE.
- Very good examples of pupils' written literacy and speaking skills were observed during the inspection. Many pupils are adept at using subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils are typically keen to contribute to class discussions and do so in an unselfconscious way. They speak clearly and confidently and value opportunities to discuss the work they are doing with their peers.
- Teachers use questioning very well to assess the level of understanding in lessons. They skilfully adjust the pace of work to help ensure that knowledge is secure before they move on.
- Homework is set regularly and this both consolidates and extends learning.
- Feedback is provided to pupils to help them to improve. Teachers follow the school's

assessment policy appropriately. Pupils therefore know what the best aspects of their submitted work are, as well as what else needs to be done to improve it further.

- Pupils take pride in their work in lessons, and in their books and files. The vast majority stick their worksheets in, underline titles and write neatly. This means they have useful records that they can use to review their learning.
- Parents and pupils are extremely positive about the quality of teaching pupils receive. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are taught well. Nearly all pupils feel that teachers help them to do their best in lessons.
- A small number of parents and pupils expressed concern about how best to use the assessment information they are given in key stage 3. Some felt this did not provide a useful and accurate measure of their progress. School leaders agree that they need to refine this aspect of their work.
- The school's monitoring of teaching indicates that in some lessons, some pupils do not make as good progress as they might because teachers do not adjust the activities to suit pupils' needs. This was observed in a small number of lessons during the inspection.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils, parents and staff all share this view.
- Pupils become successful learners due to the safe, caring and stimulating school environment.
- Leaders and teachers share the desire to create a family atmosphere where all pupils are valued, and everyone knows each other. Pupils get on well together.
- During form periods, pupils receive a valuable programme of personal, social and health education. This is planned carefully to ensure that all can gain the required knowledge to make healthy and safe decisions at school and at home.
- Pupils enjoy school, respect their teachers and feel well cared for. All those spoken to during the inspection were very positive about their experiences at St Mary's.
- Pupils feel safe. They are also knowledgeable about how to continue to stay safe. Pupils spoken to reported that there is no bullying at the school. School records indicate that bullying incidents are rare and when they do occur are dealt with promptly and effectively.
- The school has focused recently on developing mindfulness techniques with pupils to help them to become resilient learners. Inspectors observed numerous examples of pupils being resilient in lessons.
- Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps in education, employment and training. The vast majority successfully achieve places in local sixth form colleges. The small number who pursue apprenticeships are well supported in doing so.
- Pupils are proud of their school and would happily recommend the school to a friend

who was moving to the area.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Disruption to learning is very rare.
- All staff who responded to the survey believe that behaviour is good and 97% of parents who responded to Parent View agree with this.
- Pupils are extremely smart and wear their uniform with pride.
- No litter was seen around the school site during the inspection.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary as they move around the site between lessons and during social times. For example, they walk sensibly in corridors and queue up maturely at break and lunchtime.
- The school's own records show that behaviour has improved from an already good level.
- The number of exclusions has fallen considerably in the last year.
- Pupils are very well organised. They efficiently get the materials they need from their lockers and ensure that they attend lessons punctually and are ready to learn. This means that no learning time is wasted.
- Many pupils are extremely polite. They hold doors open for each other and smile and speak kindly as they move around the school site.
- Lateness to school is very rare, despite some pupils travelling long distances from their homes.
- During the inspection, pupils showed the ability to self-regulate their behaviour without the need for teacher intervention.
- Attendance for all groups of pupils is higher than the national average and is rising. Persistent absence is falling. Pupils want to attend school to take advantage of the stimulating environment.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress during their time at school. For example, over an extended period of time, pupils have made excellent progress across the curriculum, including in English, mathematics, science and humanities.
- The progress made by pupils at the end of year 11 in 2018 was lower than that made by equivalent pupils in 2016 and 2017. Despite this, pupils at St Mary's still made progress in line with the top third of pupils nationally.
- Attainment has been very high over time. In 2018 pupils were in the top 20% nationally based on their attainment across their best eight subjects.
- Historically, disadvantaged pupils have made average progress from their starting points when compared to other pupils nationally. Inspection evidence suggests that current pupils are now making at least good progress.
- Pupils from all ability groups made positive progress in 2016, 2017 and 2018. This

continues to be the case for current pupils due to the outstanding teaching they receive over time.

- Pupils with SEND have made strong progress over time. Current pupils continue to do well.
- Progress is equally strong for current pupils in both key stage 3 and key stage 4.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in education or employment. Numbers successfully progressing to their destinations are higher than is typical nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who are entered for English Baccalaureate subjects at GCSE was below the national average in 2018. This is because of a low uptake for modern foreign languages in this cohort. Pupils do achieve highly across a range of subjects, including creative and arts subjects.
- Progress over time in modern foreign languages has been weaker than in other subject areas. During the inspection, effective teaching and good progress was observed in French, German and Spanish. This matches school leaders' own evaluation of improvements in these subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	116992
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10058506

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	747
Appropriate authority	Governing body
Chair	Pat Burbidge
Headteacher	Stuart Wetson
Telephone number	014328 50416
Website	www.st-maryshigh.hereford.sch.uk
Email address	admin@st-maryshigh.hereford.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 January 2018

Information about this school

- St Mary's RC High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- It is a Roman Catholic school and part of the Archdiocese of Cardiff.
- Pupils join the school in Year 7 from a wide geographical area and from a large number of feeder primary schools.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is similar to the national average.
- The current headteacher joined the school in April 2018.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its pupils.
- A section 48 inspection took place in March 2014.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the quality of teaching and learning in 48 lessons across all year groups and across all subjects. All teachers who were working during the two days of the inspection were observed. Approximately half of these lessons were observed jointly with the school’s senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders and class teachers.
- The lead inspector met four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the chairs of the three main governing body committees.
- Inspectors met pupils in all year groups, both in formal meetings and also informally as they gathered at breaks and lunchtimes, as well as during lessons.
- Pupils’ books and files were examined in lessons to evaluate the quality of learning over time.
- A large number of school documents were analysed, including: governing body minutes, performance information on current and past pupils, the school’s self-evaluation and development plan, department development plans and school policies.
- Inspectors carefully checked records relating to attendance, exclusions, behaviour and how pupils are kept safe.
- Inspectors considered the 143 responses to Parent View as well as the 139 free-text responses received from parents during the inspection. They also considered the 103 responses from pupils to Ofsted’s online survey and the 46 responses from staff.

Inspection team

Thomas Walton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Phil Lloyd	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Lois Kelly	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

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 and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019