



**ST. MARY'S R.C.
HIGH SCHOOL**

**Position Statement
March 2024**

Position Statement Paper for St Mary's RC High School

Context & Background:

St Mary's RC High School, is an oversubscribed Voluntary Aided 7-11 Roman Catholic High School in Hereford within the Archdiocese of Cardiff.

At St Mary's we have the highest expectations, ambitions and aspirations for all of our pupils. We are committed to ensuring they receive the best possible academic education coupled with opportunities to develop the key skills which will support our young people in being life-long learners and prepare them for the world of employment and adult life.

St Mary's is a Catholic school and Christ is at the centre of all that we do. Spirituality is an integral part of our school community and it is what binds us together. We work and worship alongside each other and endeavour each day to 'live out' the Gospel Values, something so central to our Mission and ethos.

Currently we have a PAN of 150 pupils per year group and we remain a very popular school within the locality of Herefordshire. There is no defined catchment as such, and pupils travel significant distances from surrounding towns such as Ledbury, Bromyard, Leominster, Malvern and Ross-on-Wye to be educated with us. There are 3 Catholic Primary Schools in the county, with the vast majority of their Y6 children making the transition to St Mary's (currently approximately 50% of our NOR are baptised Catholics), but we also draw from primary schools across the entire county and into Wales. In each admission cycle we have an extensive waiting list and a number of unsuccessful applicants who use the appeal process in order to try to secure a place at our school.

Staffing & Subject Specialists:

The staff body at St Mary's are a strength of the school. Whilst recruitment is a national challenge, St Mary's largely retains a stable staff, many of whom have been at the school a number of years. Specialist teachers, teaching their subject to a high standard, is a characteristic of St Mary's. In almost all departments, almost all teachers are specialists and this reflects in the progress pupils make whilst with us and the outcomes they achieve at the end of their time at St Mary's.

We also offer excellent support and development opportunities to our ECTs and benefit from working in partnership with Hereford Sixth Form to lead secondary teacher training in Herefordshire (*The Hereteach Alliance*). Our existing staff constantly update their CPD with a number of middle and senior leaders currently enrolled on various NPQ programmes. The whole staff have access to the National College's comprehensive range of certificated modules in all aspects of school provision and leadership. Many of our current practitioners are also accredited examiners and/or course moderators, helping to ensure that our pupils benefit from latest exam board criteria etc.

Curriculum at St Mary's:

At St Mary's we run a full 3-year KS3 following the National Curriculum and seek to maximise this time not only to teach a broad curriculum, but to enable sufficient time for pupils to develop such key skills and knowledge and apply them in a range of learning contexts. KS3 is not merely seen as a pre-cursor to KS4 and GCSE exams at St Mary's, but a time for our learners to acquire a range

of core knowledge, insight and critical skills. We want our pupils to be inquisitive learners, but equally to know how and where this knowledge fits and to be confident in applying what they have learnt. In Year 9, pupils do get exposure to GCSE style questions, projects and assignments and this is largely so that they get to experience the next natural steps and a sense of the required standards and criteria for the KS4 courses that they will progress to.

In the spring term of Year 9, our pupils are given extensive support, information and guidance when choosing those courses they wish to take for their GCSEs. This includes independent advice and exposure to educators and employers from other providers and business organisations. All pupils at St Mary's take RE at GCSE and therefore have 3 further choices in addition to their core offer. Following continuous assessment throughout KS3, the Science Department determine whether pupils will take separate sciences (triple) or the Combined Science qualification.

With the exception of a very small minority who may require additional intervention time, the whole cohort will study for and complete the full range of core and additional GCSE qualifications through to examination at the end of the course. Currently, we only have a very small number of pupils accessing any form of alternative provision and there is no form of off-rolling at St Mary's.

We believe we are ambitious for all of our pupils at St Mary's and this is reflected in the growing number of pupils taking the EBacc suite of subjects – we also are one of a diminishing number of schools who offer a choice of 3 languages (French/Spanish/German all taught by specialists). The proportion of pupils taking the EBacc has steadily risen in recent years with approximately two thirds of the current Y9 cohort sitting their exams in 2024-25 taking this qualification. At St Mary's we believe in ensuring that pupils follow courses that are right for them and which will enable them to develop their skills and showcase their talents. As a result, a small number of pupils follow courses such as Health & Social Care with a more modular and ongoing approach to assessment. Pupils with SEND are supported in such a way that their specific needs are catered for in the classroom environment, yet intervention provision is tailored to ensure that they can access the curriculum and achieve their potential.

To further highlight the value and importance placed on KS3 at St Mary's, in 2022 we created an Assistant Headteacher post with responsibility for oversight of Years 7-9. This was to ensure that the depth and breadth of learning was consistent across the school for this stage of our pupils' learning, and also to look closely at how and when they are assessed. The post holder has also focused on the importance of Reading, and in particular on ways in which those whose reading skills are weak, can address these gaps and deficiencies and improve to become confident readers able to access the full range of texts.

The impact of our curriculum, and indeed how it is taught at St Mary's, can be seen in the sustained high levels of progress that pupils make whilst with us, but also in what they go on to do and achieve after they have left us.

We enjoy a very strong relationship with our local further education providers, particularly with Hereford Sixth Form College where the majority of our pupils go to continue their post-16 studies. Available Destinations Data highlights that many ex-St Mary's pupils are some of the most successful at HSFC in terms of their KS5 outcomes and also at securing places at Russell Group Universities and as successful Oxbridge applicants. Our pupils opting for more vocational courses are equally successful at Hereford & Ludlow College with courses such as Public Services, Hospitality & Catering, Construction, Carpentry etc and at Hereford College of Arts. We are also seeing an increasing number of our pupils go to Hartpury College in Gloucestershire to take up Equine or Agricultural Studies and also via sporting scholarships.

Pupils at St Mary's also receive curriculum time for their RSE studies which is largely taught through the CES accredited 'Ten Ten' Catholic RSE Programme. Lessons are mapped across the year within the 'Learning 4 Life' cycle, where pupils also learn about important topics such as keeping themselves safe (including online), drugs and alcohol, careers and citizenship and topics linked to British Values. Careers provision is a strength of the school and the curriculum time devoted to this is complemented by an extensive range of year group specific activities, visits and workshops.

Rather than an insistence on a prescribed style of Teaching & Learning at St Mary's, our approach is based on one of giving autonomy to the specialists in various departments, whilst rigorously monitoring that such methods and approaches are effective in enabling pupil progress. There is, however, a consistent expectation around creating a positive learning environment and where pupils' behaviour in classrooms supports rather than prevents learning. The comprehensive Department Review process at St Mary's, monitors and evaluates all aspects of teaching, learning, the curriculum and standards through an established schedule of learning walks, lesson observations, work scrutiny, pupil voice and review of key curriculum documents. This process is supported by Department Development Plans which are submitted 3 x a year by Heads of Department, covering key priorities, actions and monitoring methods in addition to data analysis, catch up plans and a cultural capital audit.

Enrichment

We aim to give our pupils the richest of experiences while they are with us at St Mary's and believe that this is reflected in our full and diverse extra-curricular and enrichment offer.

The annual Eisteddfod provides our pupils in all year groups the chance to immerse themselves in the Arts whilst competing for their respective Houses. Music, Dance and Performance Poetry categories are all opportunities for our pupils to take to the stage and participation rates are encouragingly high year on year.

Similarly, our Sports Day and Inter-House Games Day provide a balance of competitive sport coupled with opportunities for all to be involved. These annual events are complemented by a sporting fixtures/practices calendar which ensures that there is almost daily participation and representation after school hours, where on a given day over 100+ pupils can be involved from across the year groups. Sporting leadership opportunities are also encouraged where our pupils act as young leaders and ambassadors at hub events held within the county.

The musical life of the school is also a hugely important aspect of our offer at St Mary's with school productions a highlight, and a growing presence of pupils representing St Mary's in the County's annual Performing Arts Festival.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is emerging and developing at St Mary's and will no doubt prove to be another popular initiative for our pupils to be involved in.

As a Catholic school, it is not only a vast array of school trips that we offer from Morocco to the ski slopes of Austria, but also pilgrimages to such destinations as Lourdes and Rome. Such long-standing pilgrimages also help us to maintain links with local parishes and the wider Catholic community.

At St Mary's, we want all of our pupils to experience a whole range of different opportunities, countries and cultures. We think it is important that every child has the chance to be a part of a team or to compete for their House during their time with us. We hope that through doing so, they will leave us as fully rounded individuals, confident and inspired to make a positive contribution to society.

Documents available in support of the above:

- I. School Development Plan 2023-24
- II. Self-Evaluation Form 2024
- III. CSED (Catholic Self-Evaluation Document) 2024
- IV. Department Development Plans 2023-24
- V. Department Review Reports 2023-24
- VI. Progress & Attainment Data 2023 (& previous years)
- VII. Compass+ Report (External Careers Provision Audit)
- VIII. Destinations Data