

St Mark's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102543
Local Authority	Hounslow
Inspection number	323654
Inspection dates	28 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing (HMI)

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	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1198
Sixth form	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Kerry Sullivan
Headteacher	Mr Paul Enright
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	106 Bath Road Hounslow TW3 3EJ
Telephone number	020 8577 3600
Fax number	020 8577 0559

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the progress and attainment of pupils who are at an early stage of English language acquisition and of those from minority ethnic backgrounds
- the school's contribution to community cohesion
- the school's work as a technology specialist school.

They gathered evidence from:

- documentation provided by the school, including performance data
- lesson observations and looking at pupils' work
- talking to pupils, staff and the Chair of Governors.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation were not justified, and these have been included, where appropriate, in the report.

Description of the school

St Mark's is a voluntary-aided Roman Catholic comprehensive school for pupils aged 11-18. All pupils join the school in Year 7 as practising Catholics. The school draws its intake from a large number of feeder schools across a wide area including Hounslow, Hillingdon, Ealing, Richmond and Surrey. In the past, the attainment of pupils starting at the school has been well above average. The attainment of recent cohorts has been closer to the national average following a change to the admission criteria. About half the pupils are from minority ethnic groups. These include significant numbers of Polish and British Indian pupils in addition to smaller numbers of Black British pupils. Over one third of pupils speak English as an additional language and many of these arrive at the school at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low. Around fifty pupils have learning difficulties, including a group with speech and language difficulties and another with moderate and specific learning difficulties.

At sixth form level, the school is part of a Catholic consortium with two other Catholic schools in Hounslow.

The school gained Technology College specialist status in 2000.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mark's is an outstanding school. The school has achieved a near perfect balance of ensuring that pupils make great progress and attain high standards but at the same time develop into well-rounded, independent, caring, courteous and upright citizens.

There is a delightful atmosphere in the school. This is a place where the individual is valued, individual strengths are celebrated and where pupils are proud to do well. One pupil explained that knowing your own values and being true to them is very important at this school. The school has a strong Catholic ethos and sense of community, but it is not exclusive. The school successfully contributes to and works within the wider community as well.

Great emphasis is placed on parents as co-educators of their children. Parents themselves are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They comment that their children are happy and that they thoroughly enjoy school. One parent echoed the words of pupils when writing to the inspectors, 'I feel that my child is privileged to be at St Mark's with its strong Catholic ethos and excellent teaching.'

The outstanding teaching is one of the factors enabling pupils to make excellent progress. Pupils attain very high standards both at the end of Year 11 and at the end of Year 13. At GCSE, three quarters of pupils achieve five A* to C grades, including in English and mathematics, while almost 90% achieve five A* to C grades. Standards and achievement in design and technology are particularly high. Pupils with learning difficulties do very well. The school tracks the progress that individuals are making and intervenes with guidance and support if a pupil is not on track to reach their challenging targets. One pupil commented, referring to staff, 'They don't give up on you, they give you lots of help'. The school has adjusted its curriculum and approach to reflect the changing needs of pupils, enabling them to make even better progress and attain yet higher standards.

Pupils know what grades they are aiming for and are able to explain what extra work they will have to do to attain them. Teachers are very good at giving feedback to individuals to help them improve their work. They plan carefully to ensure that the needs of individuals are met and that learning is broken down into manageable steps. Lessons are characterised by lively activities that allow pupils to engage actively with ideas and knowledge. Pupils enjoy learning.

The school's specialism in technology has made a significant impact in all areas of the school and particularly in providing a range of enrichment activities and resources. Information and communication technology is very well used across all subjects but especially contributes to learning in science and music.

Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds work alongside each other very happily. Leaders carefully analyse the progress and participation of different groups, looking to see if any group needs additional help. Their records indicate that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as others in the school and participate fully in the extra-curricular life of the school. Pupils assured inspectors that there is very little racism or bullying and that teachers deal with any occurrence swiftly and effectively.

Even those newly arrived who have not yet learned a great deal of English feel very well included in the life of the school. They are given excellent support to learn English and opportunities are given to help them adjust and integrate into a new culture. Polish pupils, for example, appreciate the after school Polish club as an opportunity to share their common culture and to help each other, as one put it, 'acclimatise to a new society'.

The behaviour of pupils is a strength. Pupils comment that only on rare occasions does poor behaviour take place, usually when pupils first join the school and have not yet learned how to meet the school's expectations. Relationships are very good throughout the school. Pupils are aware that teachers and support staff work well together to facilitate good learning. They themselves have a strong voice through their school council and take on responsibility readily throughout the school.

The leadership and management of the school from the headteacher outwards and including the governing body, are outstanding. Everyone works together in seeking to achieve the school's stated aim of enabling pupils 'to fulfil their

God-given potential'. Senior leaders have worked to ensure that all staff know the school well and are able to identify how to achieve improvement. Despite having secured sustained improvement in the attainment and progress made by pupils and the fact that pupils reach very high standards, leaders are not complacent. Increasingly challenging targets are set and the school's planning identifies appropriate steps to enable these targets to be met. The governing body leads the school strategically. Governors contribute to the school improvement plan and use it effectively, through performance management targets, to promote improvement and review progress. They play an important part in supporting the school's equalities agenda and they challenge and influence the policies of the school.

The school community is strong and close-knit, and the work of the school to promote community cohesion is outstanding. It is an important part of the ethos of the school that diversity is valued and celebrated. At the pupils' suggestion, for example, the school is holding an 'International Evening' next month. The school seeks to build good relationships with other communities both in the local area and across the world. As a result, pupils have opportunities to work alongside people from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds. For example, several pupils spent two weeks at a local public school and many have participated in local competitions and community events and youth forums while others are involved in local charitable work. Sixth formers work with pupils with moderate learning difficulties whose school brings them to St Mark's to use the science facilities on a weekly basis. The school has international links with schools in India and South Africa and a great deal of work is done within the curriculum about rich and poor, justice, peace, human rights and equalities.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Pupils make excellent progress in the sixth form and attain high standards that enable them to pursue ambitious career paths. The teaching in the sixth form is outstanding and pupils are encouraged and helped to take increasing responsibility for their own learning. This helps them to prepare for the transition to higher and further education. Sixth form lessons, like those in the rest of the school, are characterised by an expectation that pupils will actively participate and support each other's learning. There is a sharp focus on examination technique and there is effective revision support.

Pupils take responsibilities within school and contribute well to school life and that of the surrounding community. They have a good range of opportunities for personal enrichment both within their A-level subject areas and beyond.

The leadership of the sixth form is excellent. There are strong systems in place to monitor the attendance of sixth formers (which is outstanding) and their progress against challenging targets. The work of pupils that takes place at other consortium schools is quality assured. Strategies are in place to help those at risk of underachieving. Form tutors give very good support and sixth formers feel that the range of careers advice is extremely helpful. They commented particularly that they felt that teachers go out of their way to give individually tailored advice and help them to achieve their goals.

What the school should do to improve further

■ The inspector agrees with the school that in order to build on its successes it should concentrate on implementing its current development plan.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

10 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Catholic School, Hounslow, TW3 3EJ

We were hugely impressed by your outstanding school when we visited recently. We agree with those of you and your parents who told us that you are privileged to attend St Mark's Catholic School. Thank you very much for welcoming us with such courtesy and warmth. In particular, I would like to thank the many of you that took the time to talk to us, to share your views about the school and to show us your work. Your headteacher told us that he was confident that you would be good ambassadors for the school and so it proved to be.

We found that your school helps you fulfil your potential. You are helped to develop into responsible, mature citizens who recognise the importance of personal values. Your behaviour around school, the interest you take in the world around you and the responsibilities that you readily hold are all indicative of your excellent personal development.

The school enables you all to make very good progress in your learning and attain high standards at GCSE and at A level. Many of you go on to university and other exciting things.

Teaching at your school is excellent. Lessons are interesting and you enjoy your learning. Your teachers make sure that everyone is on track to achieve challenging targets. You are well supported and the school has worked well to ensure that those with learning difficulties, or who are just beginning to learn the English language, are able to join in and make excellent progress too.

We were as impressed with the sixth form as with the rest of the school. Your teachers and support staff are working extremely effectively with you. The outstanding leadership of your headteacher, senior leadership team and governors help ensure that you are provided with an excellent education. Well done for the part you play in this. Keep up the good work and maintain the school's proud tradition of sharing your gifts with others.

Yours faithfully

Emma Ing
Her Majesty's Inspector

