

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic School

Windhill, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 2NQ

Inspection dates:	8 and 9 October 2024
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Deirdre McHugh. This school is part of the St Francis of Assisi Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Andrew Celano, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Father Peter Harris.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Mary's Catholic School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged its predecessor school, St Mary's Catholic School, to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in October 2012. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mary's is a very special community to be part of. The school provides an environment that enables its pupils to flourish in a caring, safe and inclusive setting. Pupils and staff alike describe the school community as feeling 'like a family'. Pupils are confident that they can talk to adults about their worries and know that they will be taken seriously.

The school's expectations of pupils are consistently high. Pupils rise to this challenge. As a result, pupils are welcoming to visitors. They speak respectfully to one another and adults. Equally, adults model the behaviours they expect of pupils. Pupils feel included and celebrate difference. They can learn in a school that encourages them to be kind and well-mannered.

Students in the sixth form enjoy their education. They feel their experience is broad and they have opportunities to extend and consolidate their knowledge. They very much feel part of the 'St Mary's family'.

Educational trips form a fundamental part of the school experience. For example, pupils have the opportunity to visit Bletchley Park, New York and CERN. They also enjoy the chance to participate in activities and events that help to develop resilience and work as part of a team. These contribute to pupils building their confidence.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The quality of education pupils receive is exceptional. The curriculum is well-designed and commonly understood. Teachers have the expertise to deliver subject content highly effectively. As a result, pupils achieve consistently highly in public examinations. Teachers create an environment which focuses on pupils by providing appropriate resources and encouragement. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to recall and practise their knowledge. Sixth-form students benefit from challenging subject content. Students enjoy the learning activities teachers provide. These enable students to actively engage with staff and their topics. Typically, students' knowledge is checked frequently to ensure that gaps or misconceptions about their understanding are identified and addressed.

The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are met effectively, and consistently enable them to achieve highly. As a result, pupils with SEND learn well and produce high-quality work. Increasingly, the needs of students with SEND in the sixth form are being met more forensically.

Reading is prioritised across the school. There is a thoughtful approach to engaging pupils in their reading. Pupils who struggle to read are identified quickly. Appropriate support is provided to these pupils by well-trained staff. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often. This results in pupils becoming confident and fluent readers.

The culture of positive behaviour at St Mary's is remarkable. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. During lessons, pupils engage fully in their learning. They respond confidently to questions, work hard and produce written work that is of a high quality. During

unstructured times, the school is a calm environment. Pupils are universally polite, considerate and welcoming. Pupils attend school regularly because they enjoy, and benefit from, the high-quality education they receive. Sixth-form students act as positive role models to younger pupils. This is a position they take seriously. They comment that they have greater independence and that they are well prepared for future study and/or employment.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. In the sixth form, students benefit from a weekly enrichment session, which includes activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and extended project qualification. Careers provision for all key stages is a strength of the school. Pupils and students benefit from individualised advice, work experience and opportunities to engage with employers and local businesses. Pupils study a broad personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum that supports further their wider personal development. However, some pupils do not have sufficient knowledge in some areas, leaving gaps in their understanding.

The energy, determination and tenacity of school leaders and the trust are bringing about effective and sustained improvements for pupils. Opportunities for staff to engage in professional development activities are supporting this vision of excellence. The opportunities for parents to engage in the life of the school are increasingly frequent.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not delivered some aspects of the PSHE curriculum as strongly or effectively as many others. As a result, some pupils' knowledge of some areas of PSHE is less secure. The school should continue to review and evaluate the effectiveness of its new PSHE curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148499
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10295132
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,153
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	160
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Father Peter Harris
CEO of the trust	Andrew Celano
Headteacher	Deirdre McHugh
Website	www.stmarys.net
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The headteacher has been in post since March 2024.
- The school has a religious character and was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in 2017. The next inspection under section 48 is due in the autumn term 2024.
- The school is part of the St Francis of Assisi Trust.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, CEO, directors and governors.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in English, physical education, science, design technology, modern foreign languages and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents through responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors gathered the views of pupils and staff through Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys, as well as interviews and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Jonathan Rockey, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Donna Young	Ofsted Inspector
Diana Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
David Piercy	Ofsted Inspector
Sharon Pritchard	Ofsted Inspector

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