

# Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Catholic High School

Woburn Road, Croydon, Surrey CR9 2EE

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Inspection dates:

3 and 4 November 2021

## Outcome

St Mary's Catholic High School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

St Mary's Catholic High School is a deeply caring community. Its pupils and staff live up to their core values of being welcoming, serving others and working hard.

Pupils like coming to school and enjoy learning. They feel safe here and know that staff go the extra mile to check their whereabouts and well-being.

Leaders expect all pupils to achieve highly, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and speakers of other languages who are beginning to learn English. Pupils respond well to clear and consistent guidelines about their behaviour. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and positive. This encourages and motivates pupils, helping them to enjoy their lessons.

Pupils learn to respect each other and value their differences. They know they have a voice in the school, and they appreciate opportunities to develop leadership, for example as elected head pupils and house captains. Pupils say bullying and derogatory remarks are not tolerated, and when they happen, staff deal with them effectively. Pupils, including those with SEND, join in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including cricket, baking and art.

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

The school offers a broad, balanced curriculum. Leaders ensure that all pupils gain the knowledge and skills they need to be effective citizens. Individual subject plans have been reviewed. Leaders have made sure the order in which pupils learn provides a good framework for building their knowledge. They are finding ways to make learning meaningful and interesting. In English, for example, they have chosen literature that the pupils find relevant and exciting.

Most teachers' subject knowledge is strong. This is a small school, so teacher recruitment can be difficult. Teacher shortages in some subjects and the effect of the COVID-19

pandemic mean that some are teaching outside their subject specialisms. On occasion, this leads to misconceptions or gaps in understanding. Support is provided where necessary.

Since the last inspection, the school has widened the curriculum that pupils follow. Leaders have introduced new approaches to learning subjects such as history and geography. They have changed the order in which topics are taught. They are also linking these to relevant current issues. This has helped increase the numbers of pupils studying these subjects at GCSE.

The school's revised approach to assessment encourages teachers to check for understanding during lessons. Most teachers use written assessments well to check knowledge and inform teaching, but some miss opportunities for less formal approaches. This means they do not always discover what learning pupils have missed.

Leaders are prioritising reading and literacy. Teachers read aloud in tutor periods and encourage pupils to read independently. Pupils enjoy reading out loud in class, especially taking on different roles when reading plays and novels. They are very enthusiastic about their set texts. Appropriate reading materials are available for pupils who are beginning to learn English. Leaders expect teachers to help develop pupils' vocabulary and to use questioning to help them remember new words. At times, when new ideas and terminology are introduced, teachers do not check that pupils fully understand them.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. They take pride in their work. They behave well. Low-level disruption is not tolerated.

Over time, pupils' attendance has been significantly below average. Leaders are working with external support to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. Better systems are now in place to check absences and to encourage pupils to come to school. Staff accept that this is everyone's responsibility.

Pupils learn about healthy relationships, how to respect others, to value democracy and the rule of law, and to stand up against discrimination. Pupils of all ages learn about careers and the world of work, which helps them to prepare for the next stage in their lives.

Leaders are sensitive towards staff well-being and workload, and governors regularly review this. Leaders rigorously document the destinations of all pupils who are legitimately taken off roll.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors keep a close check on all safeguarding matters. Staff are trained to identify children who need extra help at an early stage. They provide support in order to prevent concerns from escalating. This includes where pupils show early signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, such as gangs and organised crime.

Comprehensive policies and procedures are followed. Pupils' well-being is carefully monitored. Younger pupils, especially, appreciate the way they are taught to keep themselves safe. The safety of pupils placed with alternative providers is closely monitored.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Teachers do not always check pupils' understanding or recall of subject-specific terms during lessons. This means that sometimes gaps in learning are not addressed. Leaders should ensure that teachers use questioning in lessons to check that all pupils have grasped the words and ideas they need to learn.
- Some teachers are not so confident with their subject-specific knowledge. As a result, in some subjects, pupils do not gain strong foundations on which to build their learning. Leaders should provide ongoing support for those teaching outside their subjects so that they know enough to properly excite and inform pupils' learning.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good.

## **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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

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

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	101814
<b>Local authority</b>	Croydon
<b>Inspection number</b>	10211350
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	562
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Croydon
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Mr Bernard Tomkins
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Patrick Shields
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stmaryscroydon.co.uk">www.stmaryscroydon.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	1 and 2 February 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- This is a small secondary school, located in central Croydon, serving a very diverse community.
- A larger than average proportion of pupils do not speak English as their first language.
- A very high percentage of pupils are entitled to the support of pupil premium funding.
- Some pupils attend provision off site. The three providers currently used are Saffron Valley, Rise Mitcham, and Academy 21.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID 19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers, and the chair of governors, and spoke to staff at the alternative provisions.
- Inspectors also met the special educational needs coordinator and the coordinator of

English as an additional language.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors looked at plans and visited lessons in other subjects, including geography and history.
- Inspectors met with several groups of pupils. They also talked with staff and pupils around the school.
- The inspection team reviewed the staff's survey responses and responses to Parent View, including written comments.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders and reviewed documentation, including the single central record of vetting checks. Inspectors spoke to staff about their work to keep pupils safe, and about the training they had received. The inspection team also spoke to pupils of all ages to find out their views, including how they are taught to keep themselves safe.

### **Inspection team**

Anne Hudson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jonathan Newby

Ofsted Inspector

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