

St Mary's Catholic College

Wallasey Village, Wallasey, Merseyside, CH45 3LN

Inspection dates 30 September–1 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Leaders, managers and governors have not improved teaching quickly enough since the last inspection, so not all students are achieving the standards they are capable of.
- Too few students make good progress because teachers are not always clear about the standards students should be working towards and so activities are too easy, too hard, are explained too quickly or explained in insufficient detail.
- Not all teachers mark work in a way that enables students know what they have done well, or know what they need to practise in order to move quickly on to the next stage in their learning.
- Leaders and managers make sure teachers find out about the teaching approaches that help students make rapid progress. However, teachers do not always use these approaches in their own teaching so students' progress is not improving as quickly as it could.
- In some lessons, students have little confidence in their ability to complete the work and teaching does not hold their attention. They lose interest, chat to other students in the classroom and their progress slows. As a result, behaviour requires improvement.
- Most teachers draw students' attention to technical words in different subjects but not all teachers insist that these are used, or support students to use the words in discussion or in written work.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to use the same mathematical processes in different subjects so they can acquire secure understanding of not only the mathematical process itself, but the different situations it can be applied to.
- There have been many staffing changes, and newer subject leaders have only recently begun to see the impact of their plans to improve achievement in their areas of responsibility.

The school has the following strengths

- As a result of good leadership and teaching, the standards students reach, and the progress students make in the sixth form, have improved and are now good.
- Leaders ensure that the school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe.
- The school supports students with individual difficulties well so the majority make good progress.
- Students following courses away from the school site are very well supported and the vast majority improve their learning and attendance significantly.
- Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural understanding is strong.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors saw 49 teaching sessions or parts of sessions delivered by 50 teachers. Four teaching observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and three senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at samples of students' work in a range of subjects, records of their progress, the standards they had attained, and records of their attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors talked to students in class, to groups formally and informally around school, and in the hair and beauty salon. An inspector considered two telephone calls received from parents during the inspection and took into account the 104 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors took into account 71 questionnaires completed by staff expressing their views about the school.
- Inspectors also held discussions with the headteacher, a number of senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and three governors, the school's local authority improvement partner, a group of middle leaders and a number of teachers.
- Inspectors also looked carefully at a number of documents relating to school leaders' evaluation of the school's work, their plans for the future, how leaders work to keep pupils safe and how leaders are working to improve teaching and students' progress.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Geraldine McCauley	Additional Inspector
Fiona Dixon	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It has specialisms in performing arts and applied learning.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged and therefore eligible for the pupil premium is high and is almost twice the proportion found nationally. The pupil premium funding is additional funding for those pupils eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported by school action is well above average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- A small minority of students follow vocational courses at Wirral Metropolitan College as part of their school curriculum. A small minority follow English, mathematics, vocational or work-based courses away from the school site at the Shaftesbury Youth Club, The Vocational College, Cornerstone Construction, Utopia, Everton Free School, CST Motor Vehicle, Liverpool Studio Trial, Beechwood Community Trust and Rocket Training (Motor Vehicle Maintenance).
- The school meets the government's floor standard, which is the minimum level expected for students' attainment and progress.
- There have been considerable changes in staffing since the previous inspection. A number of teachers, senior and subject leaders have been recently appointed.
- The school is working in close partnership with St John Plessington Catholic College.
- The school's Artsmark and Sportsmark awards have been renewed and the school is a strategic partner in the Leading Schools Alliance.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eradicate the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in the school so that teaching is at least good and students achieve well by:
 - ensuring teachers provide activities and tasks for students to practise using the key technical vocabulary taught in lessons so they can use the correct technical terms more confidently in their writing and discussions
 - making sure all teachers apply the school's marking policy so that they mark students' written work regularly, recognise what students have achieved, note what can be improved and what students need to practise so they can improve further
 - ensuring teachers use information about students' skills and abilities to select tasks and activities, including reading materials, that are not too easy or too hard so students can reach the next stage in their learning
 - making sure teaching is engaging and well planned so students are interested, attentive, concentrate and behave well.
- Improve the leadership and management of teaching by making sure leaders check that:
 - teachers adopt a common approach when they use mathematical processes in their subject, such as graphs and bar charts, so students can apply these mathematical skills in different subjects
 - teachers incorporate the examples of teaching now being shared among the staff, into their own teaching, so more teaching leads to faster student progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because steps taken to improve teaching since the last inspection have not eradicated the inconsistencies in teaching quality. Students' rates of progress and attainment have not improved consistently across the majority of subjects or for the majority of students.
- Training for teachers so they can improve their teaching has taken place but not enough teachers have incorporated more effective teaching approaches into their teaching. The training has not always been fully coordinated and this has meant some teachers have benefited more than others. High levels of staff change since the last inspection have also hampered efforts to bring about consistently good teaching and in turn have impacted on students' learning. As a result, although some teaching is good or outstanding, this is inconsistent within subjects and across the school.
- Leaders and managers have improved the way in which assessment information is collected and analysed so they can see more quickly which students are falling behind. They have arranged extra catch-up and revision sessions, paid for by pupil premium funding, so students can recover lost ground. However, the monitoring of exactly how much students are catching up as a result of the extra teaching and support has only recently been rigorous enough to make sure that the funding is spent on the right support.
- The arrangements for managing the performance of teachers have also changed. Governors and leaders are now clear about linking rewards and recognition of students' performance, and the updated process of reviewing performance is taking place.
- Many leaders and teachers feel optimistic about the future direction of the school.
- Some subject leaders, including leaders for English, mathematics and science, have been appointed since the last inspection. They know that the consistency of teaching needs to improve rapidly and are beginning to use the school's information more effectively to ensure clear and coordinated information is provided to teachers, parents and students. This includes making sure all teachers in their subject are using the school's assessment information so they know first, the standards students in their classes are working towards, and second, where students are on that journey.
- The curriculum opportunities offered for students in Key Stage 4 are extensive and students following vocational courses in particular, benefit from additional opportunities at Wirral Metropolitan College.
- Reports on students' progress to parents are detailed and present a clear picture of where the school judges each student is in his/her learning.
- The local authority provides good support for the school and has worked closely with the leaders of mathematics and science. They understand clearly what support the school will need in the future.
- The school is working in close partnership with St John Plessington Catholic College, a nearby outstanding school, and within a looser partnership with three other similar schools, Bebington High Sports College, Hilbre High School Humanities College and The Mosslands School and Technology College.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are now asking for measures to make sure additional funding is being spent on the right support for students so standards and achievement can improve. Governors have taken, and are continuing to take, steps to access up-to-date training and gain first-hand information about data that indicate how well students are progressing, so they can challenge school leaders directly to improve teaching and students' progress. They have worked closely with the headteacher and senior leaders to review and revise the systems for managing staff performance in the school to improve accountability. They recognise that this process has been one of several changes and are keen to ensure that the revised systems have a positive impact on both staff and students' progress. Governors have not in the past been clear about the strengths and weaknesses overall in teaching, though they have known the steps leaders and managers have taken to reduce inconsistency. Following training, and recruitment of new governors, they are clear about the challenge needed to now increase the pace and focus of improvement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although students behave well generally around school, and many behave well in lessons, a minority of students talk while the teacher is talking, have conversations with students across the classroom and generally are inattentive because teaching is not

always sufficiently engaging or well matched to their learning needs. Students, staff and parents express some concerns about students' inattention which sometimes prevents others from learning.

- Around school, students are polite, respect and help others, and take care with their work. However, too many chew gum when they are walking around school and when they enter classrooms. As a result, gum is embedded into some carpets in communal areas and stuck under desks in classrooms.
- The vast majority of students indicate that bullying is uncommon, any incidents are dealt with well and that they can go to staff for help if needed. However, a small minority do not agree. The school's leader with responsibility for managing behaviour is already taking steps to improve the analysis of incidents and making sure that students are clear that prompt action will be taken should any incident arise.
- The vast majority of students understand clearly the impact on others of using derogatory language and name-calling and only minimal instances were seen, or have been recorded, of homophobic language or comments about sexual orientation.
- Students with additional individual needs are well supported to improve as a result of the support from the school's support and inclusion centres.
- Attendance is improving and the number of students who are persistently absent is reducing; both are now very close to average. The number of students excluded from school on a fixed-term basis is slightly above average but, as a result of more targeted support, is also reducing.
- Students develop a strong spiritual, social, moral and cultural understanding, largely through religious education lessons and the school's Catholic ethos. This is inclusive, values the individual and expects relationships to be characterised by tolerance and understanding. It permeates all aspects of school life with many opportunities to reflect on the big questions in life such as 'Why we are here and what makes us special?' Students have many opportunities to develop their understanding through form-time discussions on current events, through sports and a rich and varied programme of visiting speakers and special events.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe and say they are very well supervised around school, particularly around the toilets.
- They are well informed about how to keep themselves safe and know how online social networks can be misused; they know not to give personal information on these sites and that messages may not be from the person they appear to be from.
- Parents and staff express few concerns about safety and feel students are well cared for.
- Students who follow courses away from the school site are well supported in keeping themselves safe and their attendance improves as they begin to attend alternative placements, sometimes dramatically.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because not enough teaching enables students to reach high standards and this has been the case since the last inspection. Teaching is inconsistent across the school, including in mathematics and so too few students, including the most able and disadvantaged students, make good progress as a result.
- Too often, all students complete the same work, so for some students it is too easy and does not help them make good progress, and for others, the explanations cover too many examples, they become confused and do not get a clear understanding of the process or a strong grasp of the facts. Even when students are given a different version of a task, it is the basic task with a harder version, not closely linked to the range of ability. Teachers do not always use assessments to match the level of the task to the ability of the group.
- The quality of marking is variable. Some work is marked systematically, recognising what the student has done well, and gives an example to explain where they might have gone wrong or a question to practise what they are learning. As a result, students understand very clearly how well they are doing, want to do better and respond well to teachers' suggestions about what to practise. Not all teachers apply the school's marking policy. Marking by some teachers is cursory and uses simple statements. In some cases, the student cannot read the teacher's handwriting.
- Most teachers make sure students are aware of key words in subjects and explain them well. However, students are not always given the chance to practise them so they are confident in using them in discussion or in their writing. When they are supported to do so they rise to the challenge. In a hair and beauty session, students with special educational needs worked at a high level in relating the different treatments to the function and purpose of facial muscles. Careful guidance from the teacher helped them

to use specialist language confidently and with understanding.

- Some teachers have particularly high expectations and demonstrate this regularly to the students in their teaching. In a Year 8 French lesson, students matched sports to a sentence and then were given a challenge task which they were eager to complete. Students' written work indicated this was a regular occurrence. The teacher expected correct spelling and pronunciation of the French language and students responded by trying hard to repeat new words accurately.
- Students' written work and observations of teaching indicate that homework is given regularly and those teachers who mark classwork regularly also mark homework carefully.
- Students with lower literacy levels are beginning to make better progress as a result of the newly introduced reading programme for Year 7, funded by the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.
- Students who follow courses away from the school site respond well to teaching that is linked closely to topics that engage their interest.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement in Key Stage 3 and 4. Students are not reaching the standards they are capable of in mathematics and science. In Year 11 in 2014, the standards reached and the progress made in mathematics was lower than in 2013 and below the 2013 national average. Students, especially disadvantaged students supported by pupil premium funding, make slower progress in mathematics because the quality of teaching in the subject is inconsistent.
- Students enter the school working at standards below the national average and most students, and particularly those supported by pupil premium funding, do not close the gap between their achievement and the achievement of students nationally while they are in the school. This is because teaching is not consistently good enough to enable students to make rapid progress to the higher levels.
- On average, in 2013, disadvantaged students attained almost a full grade lower in English, and just over a grade lower in mathematics, than other students in the school. They gained higher standards in English compared with disadvantaged students nationally, but lower standards in mathematics than disadvantaged students nationally.
- Work seen in students' books indicated good progress for some and slower progress for others. Some books contained well-executed and extended pieces of work, completed regularly. Other books showed only a small amount completed, with frequent errors and some untidy crossings out. Written work, when compared with the students' assessments, indicated the written work of some students was below their assessed level, suggesting the work given was overall too easy. As a result, progress is inconsistent and so the school is not fully promoting equality of opportunity.
- In 2013, the majority of the most able students made the progress expected of them in English but fewer did so in mathematics and a below average proportion reached the higher standards in most subjects. In 2014, fewer most able students made the progress expected of them in mathematics than in 2013.
- Achievement in Key Stage 3 requires improvement. Based on the school's assessments in English, over two thirds of Year 9 students made the progress expected of them by the end of Year 8. Less than two thirds of Year 9 students made the progress expected of them in mathematics by the end of Year 8.
- Year 7 students are targeted to make more than expected progress by the end of the school year. At this early point in the school year, progress seen in their books, and effective teaching, indicates they are working purposefully towards their raised target.
- Very few students are entered before the end of Year 11 for examinations. The very few who do take examinations early are able to pursue higher grades later in Key Stage 4.
- Students attending courses away from the school site make good progress and many are working towards Level 2 qualifications, including in English and in mathematics.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Provision in the sixth form is good because the consistent monitoring of teaching and performance has led to improved achievement. External sixth form data confirm standards have risen and are good.
- Sixth form leaders have reviewed the curriculum and most students are taking courses that are suited to their needs. However, there is still a small minority of students who are not following courses that enable them to make suitable career choices after Year 13. This is why the curriculum review is continuing into a second stage. Steps are underway to improve choices for 2015.
- Students' attitudes to learning are positive and they are well motivated to achieve. The majority of

students feel well supported in making choices on entry to the sixth form, although a small number following vocational subjects felt that, in the past, they were not guided well into the right courses.

- Students say they feel safe and speak highly of the quality of relationships and how these have been used to support and challenge them to do their best. Students say the support they receive in the form of study booklets and additional time to go through work is a strength. Behaviour that is less than good is dealt with swiftly, and the sixth form is 'strict on bullying'.
- Students are encouraged to be aspirational and aim for high standards, and are given the support needed to realise their ambitions. Students attend as well as, or better than, students in the main school.
- Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural understanding is good. They are well supported in religious education to explore key topics related to current affairs and to take part in community projects and charitable fund-raising. They act as 'guardian angels' to mentor Year 7 students.
- The teaching of English and mathematics at this early stage in the year for Year 12 students working towards Level 2 qualifications has not yet enabled them to make good progress. Sixth form leadership is quickly taking action to ensure students are on track to achieve higher grades than in Year 11. The quality of teaching for all other students is good.
- Actions taken by sixth form leaders have improved the accuracy of assessment and increased the regularity of checks on student progress. Attainment has improved as a result. The number of students attaining at A2 at the higher levels has increased, and more students who have begun courses are continuing their studies into Year 13.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105110
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	442327

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,550
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr David Long
Headteacher	Anthony Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2012
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