

St Mark's Church of England Academy

Acacia Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 1SF

Inspection dates

7–8 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The strong and ambitious leadership of the principal, supported by senior leaders and governors, has resulted in rapid improvement in the behaviour and outcomes of pupils at the school.
- Many teachers have strong subject knowledge, which they use to plan challenging lessons. They use a variety of teaching strategies successfully. This helps most pupils to make progress which is above the national average.
- The school's assessment systems are well designed and implemented consistently. This helps teachers to plan effective lessons and support individual pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly. Pupils behave well in lessons because they respect their teachers and each other. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The school's provision for the personal development and welfare of pupils is outstanding. It is highly enriching and supportive and focuses on 'values in action'. Pupils are confident, thoughtful and articulate.
- The breadth and challenge of the school's curriculum are improving. It provides pupils with a greater range of choice and is increasingly demanding.
- Governors understand their role well and carefully scrutinise the information available to them. They bring a wide range of skills to the school, which they use to support improvement.
- The 16 to 19 curriculum provides students with opportunities to study academic and vocational subjects. Students' progress in vocational subjects is stronger than in academic courses.
- The improvement in progress of some groups of pupils, for example the most able pupils, and in some subjects, is not as strong.
- Leaders have ensured that a range of performance information is available to support their drive for improvement. At times, however, their evaluation of the school's performance does not take sufficient account of all this information. This leads to inconsistencies in the evaluations they make.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the curriculum and quality of teaching and learning challenge the most able pupils so that they reach their potential and achieve the highest standards.
- Extend recent significant improvements in pupils' progress by ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently strong in all subjects, so that all pupils are engaged and make progress.
- Ensure that leaders' and governors' self-evaluation of the school's performance considers all available information, so that strategic review and planning consistently demonstrate a deep and accurate understanding of the school's performance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal is ambitious in her drive to improve outcomes for pupils at St Mark's Church of England Academy. Her strong leadership has recently borne fruit with significant improvements in GCSE results in 2017. Her resolute leadership has led to other improvements in key aspects of the school's provision, for example in the marked improvement in the behaviour and attendance of pupils.
- Senior leaders are increasingly effective in their roles and bring a range of skills to support the work of the principal. They promote a culture of high expectation, which is understood by all. A recent revision of senior leaders' roles has ensured that they are focusing on improvement strategies that are having demonstrable impact.
- Middle leaders have also contributed to recent developments in the quality of provision. They ensure that the school's improving systems and policies are implemented consistently. As a result, teachers have up-to-date records of how well their pupils are doing, and the quality of teaching and learning in the school is strong.
- The school has a well-planned professional development programme for teachers, which identifies strengths and areas for development relating to the quality of teaching. The principal prioritises being available to hear teachers' views. Teachers at the beginning of their careers and experienced teachers feel well supported.
- Teachers and pupils reported that pupils' behaviour in the school has improved significantly in recent years. This enables teachers and pupils to focus on learning.
- Leaders' work to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils is well developed. Pupils are tolerant and value the education they receive. They are thoughtful, well prepared and ambitious for their futures. They value the diversity in the school and are proud to be part of the school. Pupils have access to a wide range of enrichment activities, such as trips and events, which complement the taught curriculum well and support their wider learning.
- Leaders ensure that pupil premium funding and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding are used effectively to support improved progress for pupils for whom it is received. As a result, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved and they now achieve as well as other pupils nationally.
- Leaders have improved the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. As a result, teachers increasingly meet the learning needs of these pupils in lessons. This work needs more time to embed to ensure consistently strong progress for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leaders ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported well. As a result, these pupils acquire language skills well.
- Leaders are introducing an increasingly aspirational and challenging curriculum, which provides choice and a range of academic and vocational subjects for pupils. Leaders are focusing on ensuring that the curriculum will stretch and challenge the most able pupils. The full impact of this is yet to be felt.

- Leaders' and governors' evaluations of the school's performance do not consistently utilise the wide range of information, documents and reviews available. At times, this hinders leaders and governors from demonstrating their accurate reflection of the school's performance over time.

Governance of the school

- Members of the local governing board share the principal's ambition for the school. They bring a wide range of relevant skills and expertise to their roles. Governors are astute about the school and ask probing questions in advance of meetings.
- The academy trust, of which the school is a member, supports and challenges the principal effectively through reviews and regular meetings. These analyse the quality of education accurately. However, the impact of these reviews on the school's overall evaluation of its effectiveness is not always clear.

Safeguarding

- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders demonstrate up-to-date knowledge of the most recent guidance on safeguarding practice and have put it into effect. As a result, there is a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Leaders accurately assess the risks that pupils may face, and are prompt in contacting outside agencies for support, if required. Pupils reported that they feel safe at school and know whom to go to if they need help.
- Staff are trained to detect signs that pupils may need support or may be at risk. They understand the need for vigilance and how to report any concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. They use their knowledge to plan well-structured lessons that stimulate and develop pupils' learning. As a result, most pupils make good progress in lessons. Pupils value the support that their teachers give them.
- Teachers demonstrate clear understanding of what helps pupils to learn and ask questions which develop pupils' understanding. They skilfully correct pupils' misunderstanding when it occurs and encourage pupils to learn from their mistakes. Teachers give clear feedback to pupils, which helps pupils to improve their understanding.
- Leaders know the strengths of teaching in the school and identify accurately when support is needed. Teachers value the support that they are given to improve. They reported that ongoing observation and feedback by leaders contribute to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.
- The school's reading policy encourages pupils to read widely, and sixth-form reading mentors support younger pupils in their reading. Pupils are motivated to read at home, and their reading progress is tracked. Teachers consistently apply the school's literacy policy, for example, through correcting spelling errors in written work.

- Leaders have implemented the school's assessment systems well. Assessment is regular and helps to ensure that teachers have accurate information relating to pupils' progress. These systems also provide continuity at transition points between key stage 3 and key stage 4.
- Leaders have identified that the most able pupils in the school do not always make the progress they could in all subjects. The school's own information confirms that the most able pupils in Years 9 and 10 are not making sufficient progress. In some lessons, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Leaders are prioritising strategies to promote the high achievement of all pupils, including the most able, so that all pupils meet their potential.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders and teachers strongly advocate the school's core values of love, hope and trust. These values permeate the school. The promotion of pupils' understanding of 'values in action' and 'values in Britain' is embedded in daily coaching time. Pupils respect different views and said that they value their education and appreciate what teachers do for them. Pupils are proud of the inclusive nature of the school.
- Leaders and teachers ensure that pupils receive high-quality, appropriate and relevant guidance on personal and social development. This is delivered through well-planned coaching time, assemblies, extra-curricular activities, trips and 'drop-down days'. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and teachers plan engaging and thought-provoking experiences for pupils. For example, during an assembly on remembrance, pupils heard personal reflections and considered the difference between right and wrong. Consequently, pupils show a high degree of respect and understanding of moral viewpoints.
- Careers guidance throughout the school is excellent, and pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their lives, both educationally and socially. For example, employability skills are developed from Year 7 and continue throughout pupils' time at the school. Pupils and students reported that there is a lot of support available, including impartial careers advice.
- Pupils feel safe at school and know whom to go to if they need support. They reported that counselling is available if needed, which is helpful. They said that bullying is rare and that teachers deal with it effectively, when it occurs. Pupils reported that they know how to keep safe online.
- The school receives regular updates on the attendance and progress of pupils in off-site provision.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- Leaders and teachers promote high standards of behaviour in lessons, which are clearly understood by pupils. Older pupils reported that behaviour has improved dramatically in recent years. The school environment is orderly, and this helps pupils to learn.
- Attendance has improved and is now in line with national averages. Leaders have introduced several strategies, which they credit with this improvement. For example, they have improved monitoring, increased communication with parents and have introduced a reward system for good attendance. Staff follow up any absence rigorously. The use of exclusions is reducing.
- Most pupils behave very well in lessons. This is because teachers apply the school's behaviour strategies consistently and develop good relationships with pupils. However, occasionally some pupils' attention wanes, and this is not always noticed by teachers.
- The behaviour of a small minority of pupils when they are not being supervised by adults does not always match the high standards of behaviour in lessons. A few pupils are not punctual to lessons at the end of lunchtime, and inspectors witnessed occasional instances of poor language.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils have improved dramatically in the last academic year, compared to recent years when pupils' progress was significantly below national averages. In 2017, pupils made above-average progress at GCSE across a range of subjects and from different starting points. Data provided by the school suggests that progress of most pupils currently in the school is good and improving.
- Leaders have improved the quality of teaching and learning in lessons, which has improved progress in many areas. The progress of disadvantaged pupils now matches that of other pupils nationally. This is a significant improvement. Leaders have taken effective action to address the previous underperformance of this group of pupils by ensuring a clear focus on their academic achievement.
- In general, pupils make good progress in lessons because teachers have good subject knowledge and know how to communicate this to their pupils. Teachers are ambitious for their pupils and relate well to pupils in the classroom. Pupils said that they enjoy learning and are enthusiastic about their school.
- Leaders have accurately identified that the progress of the most able, children looked after, White British pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities needs to improve further. Leaders are proactive in targeting intervention strategies to meet the needs of these pupils. The full impact of these is yet to be seen for some groups of pupils.
- The school has also identified a few subjects in which the progress of students does not match that of other subjects, for example the humanities subjects. Leaders are aware of where support is needed for these subjects. They are acting to implement improvement strategies.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The school's sixth form provides a good standard of education for students. Students who study vocational courses do particularly well. Their progress improved in 2017 and

is now well above the national average. Students who resit their English and mathematics GCSEs are taught effectively and do well.

- The progress of A-level students did not show similar improvement in 2017, and their progress remained below the national average. However, the school's current information suggests that there is improvement in the outcomes of students in the school who are taking A levels.
- The quality of teaching and learning for 16 to 19 study programmes is good. Teachers challenge students to deepen their understanding through a range of focused activities. As a result, most students participate well in lessons and develop their ideas.
- Leaders ensure strong provision for the personal development and welfare of students in the sixth form. Students are articulate and support younger pupils through mentoring programmes. Students value enrichment days and feel supported by the school.
- Leaders are ambitious for students and prepare them well for the next stage of their education or employment. Students receive independent careers advice, which helps them prepare for adult life. Work experience placements also prepare them well for employment, and strengthen their economic and financial understanding. Currently, all pupils who leave the sixth form progress to education, employment or training destinations. Increasing numbers of students progress to higher education.
- Some of the most able students in the sixth form do not achieve the grades of which they are capable. Some lessons lack the challenge necessary to enable the most able students to reach their potential. Leaders have identified improving their outcomes as a priority. Students' progress in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects. Leaders have also identified the need to improve results in this subject.

School details

Unique reference number	134003
Local authority	Merton
Inspection number	10037696

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	813
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	120
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	James Toop
Principal	Lisa Peterkin
Telephone number	020 864 86627
Website	www.stmarksacademy.com
Email address	school@stmarksacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 October 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is a member of the CfBT academy trust. CfBT is responsible for: setting, agreeing and challenging trust-wide strategies; legal responsibility for all CfBT Schools Trust schools; and ensuring that money is well spent.

- CfBT delegates some leadership and management functions to the local governing body and to the principal of the school.
- Responsibilities delegated by CfBT to the local governing body are to: recommend vision, ethos and strategic direction for their school within the overall trust strategy and local context; hold the headteacher to account for the educational and financial performance of the school; and ensure that money is well spent.
- Responsibilities delegated by CfBT to the principal are to: lead, manage, drive and deliver the implementation of trust and in-school strategies in their school; make strategic decisions at school level; lead on the educational and financial performance of the school; and ensure that money is well spent.
- The school uses two alternative providers, the SMART Centre and Jus'T'Learn.
- The school receives support from CfBT's director of secondary academies in the form of regular on-site meetings with the principal and reviews.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 43 lessons, most of which were visited jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors visited coaching time sessions and observed an assembly.
- Inspectors met with the governors, the principal, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers, including newly qualified and experienced teachers, and a representative of the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books in lessons with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and students and observed behaviour at lunchtime and at the start and end of the school day.
- Inspectors scrutinised 22 responses to Parent View and minutes of meetings with groups of parents. There were no responses to the pupils' questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's website, assessment information, policies, governors' minutes, self-evaluation and strategic planning documents, external reviews commissioned by the school, records on attendance and incident records relating to behaviour and exclusions.

Inspection team

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Duncan Kamyra	Ofsted Inspector

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