

St Mark's Church of England School

Baytree Road, Bath, BA1 6ND

Inspection dates 13–14 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school is well run. The headteacher provides caring and effective leadership based on a commitment to provide the best possible range of opportunities for all students. He is supported strongly by all staff with leadership roles.
- Teaching is good. Teachers plan interesting activities so that students enjoy their lessons and want to do well.
- Standards are rising. The proportion of students who gain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is increasing and is now equal to the national average.
- Students of all abilities are making good progress in English and mathematics.
- Students' behaviour is good. They treat staff and each other with respect, and show positive attitudes to their learning.
- Students feel safe in the school and understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. This ensures that students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Governors are effective. They are extremely supportive of the school, hold leaders to account and are actively involved in school improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- In a small number of lessons work is too easy or too difficult for some students, which means they do not then learn as well as they could.
- Sometimes teachers do not ensure that all students understand fully what they are learning before moving on to new work.
- Teachers' feedback to students does not always give them enough information on how to improve their work.
- Written work in subjects other than English is sometimes inaccurate because it is not corrected consistently.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 14 lessons. Three observations were made jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also visited several tutor groups.
- Inspectors looked at students' work in their lessons and carried out a detailed scrutiny of their written work in several subjects.
- Inspectors held meetings with two groups of students to hear their views on learning and behaviour in the school. They also spoke informally with students during their breaks and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and several other staff with leadership responsibilities. The lead inspector met with eight members of the governing body, and representatives of the local authority and the Church of England diocese to consider their impact on the school's achievements.
- Inspectors examined a variety of school documents. These included records of current students' progress, self-evaluation reports and improvement plans, and behaviour and attendance logs. Inspectors also examined a sample of minutes of the governing body, and other records relating to safeguarding and the management of staff performance.
- Inspectors took account of questionnaires completed by 46 members of staff and 58 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. The lead inspector met with a parent or carer to hear her views about the school.

Inspection team

Sean Thornton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Susan Derrick

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mark's Church of England School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The current headteacher joined the school in September 2014.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is above average. These students are supported by the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of students who join or leave the school during the year is well above average.
- Eight students attend joint sixth form provision that opened in September 2013 and is based on the site of St Gregory's Catholic College.
- Five students attend alternative provision at Bath City College.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding is above average. This funding is for students who did not reach the expected standards in reading or mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement by ensuring that all teachers consistently:
 - set work that is pitched at the right level of difficulty for all groups of students
 - provide detailed feedback on how students can improve their work and ensure that they act upon comments made
 - use questioning skilfully to check that students understand fully what they are learning
 - provide opportunities and support for students so that they develop the quality of their written work across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides caring and effective leadership based on a commitment to provide the best possible range of opportunities for all groups of students. He is supported strongly by all staff with leadership roles. Together they ensure that the school is well run. Parents, carers and students agree that the school has improved in all respects since the appointment of the current headteacher.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Senior and subject leaders check the quality of teaching frequently and share an understanding of what constitutes high-quality teaching and learning. A well-planned programme of training is leading to further improvements in teaching and students' achievement.
- Leaders ensure that students' behaviour is good by insisting that all staff share high expectations and by providing support for staff when this is needed.
- The school is highly inclusive. Leaders promote equality of opportunity, welcome students from all backgrounds and abilities and ensure that no one is discriminated against. Each student's talent and contribution is valued. The headteacher and the governing body ensure that the school rejects all forms of discrimination and fosters good relationships. As a result, all members of the school community are respected.
- The school uses a wide range of evidence, including the detailed tracking of students' progress, to identify areas for further improvement. For example, following the GCSE results in 2014, it has taken prompt action to improve the progress of less-able students in mathematics and these initiatives have been effective. Improvement plans are clear and focus on raising achievement by improving the quality of teaching.
- Subject leaders are involved fully in checking the effectiveness of their areas of responsibility. Their own performance is monitored and they are set challenging targets for students' progress. This system is leading to improvements in teaching and students' achievement.
- The range of subjects in the school's curriculum is broad, flexible and responds to the interests and ambitions of all students. Time allocations for subjects have been reviewed and more time is being devoted to mathematics in order to raise standards and respond to the increased demands of the new National Curriculum. Disabled students and those with special educational needs benefit from a curriculum which is modified to meet their individual needs. Students value the many opportunities they have to extend their learning beyond the school day by taking part in sports, music and drama.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strong feature of the school. Through well-planned assemblies and tutor times, students are given many opportunities to discuss and reflect on sensitive issues. For example, during the inspection a group of students were encouraged to see how the Ten Commandments could be applied appropriately to modern life. Students develop their leadership skills in many ways, for example by taking part in the very effective school council. Students develop a strong social conscience and support many charities, both in this country and abroad. They learn to respect those with different faiths and beliefs and develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. The British values of free speech and democracy are actively promoted so that students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Students benefit from good impartial careers advice to plan a personal route through education, training and employment. This begins in Year 8 and continues throughout the school.
- Since 2013, the school has increased its focus on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students. The additional funding is used well to provide additional small teaching groups in English and mathematics, and individual support and guidance for some students. The funding is also used to ensure that all students are able to benefit equally from the school's range of extra-curricular activities.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory requirements and are effective in keeping students safe. Procedures are rigorous, with regular training for staff and others, such as on safer recruitment for governors.
- The quality of all off-site provision is checked systematically to ensure that these students' progress, attendance and behaviour are good.
- The local authority has made a strong contribution to the school's improvements. Consultants have carried out shared lesson observations with school leaders to develop the accuracy of their judgements. They also monitor students' progress and provide advice on raising achievement. Equally, the Church of England diocese also supports the school effectively, particularly in the areas of governance and strategic direction.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. Governors monitor improvement in the school carefully, receiving regular reports from senior staff on key development initiatives, teaching quality and students' achievement.

They give very effective challenge and support to school staff through regular meetings with them and visits to the school.

- All governors have undertaken a range of training. They have a good understanding of what performance information tells them about students' achievement and how their school compares with others nationally.
- Governors ensure that the school's finances are managed well and they have clear plans for the future. They check closely the use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium, and show a good knowledge of its impact.
- A group of governors is involved closely in the management of teachers' performance. They make sure that pay increases are awarded only to teachers who are effective in raising students' achievement. Governors are involved in all staff appointments and have supported the headteacher in dealing with weaker teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students move around the school responsibly, showing courtesy to each other and to all adults who work in the school. There is no sign of graffiti and very little litter.
- Students are ready to learn promptly when they arrive in lessons. They cooperate well with their teachers' instructions and heed their advice so that learning usually advances smoothly.
- During break and lunchtime, students mix well with each other and create a positive social atmosphere.
- Leaders ensure that all staff have high expectations of behaviour in lessons. Students reported that behaviour had improved during the previous academic year because they are clearer about the consequences of their actions.
- Historically, attendance has been below average because of a small number of students with high rates of persistent absence. The school is working closely with students' families on this issue and attendance has now risen to almost average.
- The frequency of fixed-term exclusions decreased markedly during the last year because of a more robust and effective system of behaviour management, with a good balance of sanctions and rewards.
- A small number of students have complex behavioural or emotional needs. The school works exceptionally well with a range of external agencies to support these students. As a result, many of these students succeed in improving their attitudes and gain success in the school.
- The behaviour and attendance of students who attend off-site provision, including the sixth form site, are checked regularly to ensure that they are good and that there are no concerns about their safety or welfare.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Staff are clear about their role in keeping students safe, and leaders ensure that staff are regularly and suitably trained about safeguarding.
- Students spoken with during the inspection said that they feel safe in all parts of the school. They reported that because of the small size of the school all staff know them really well and support them if there are any problems.
- Students are aware of the different types of bullying, including homophobic and cyber bullying. They say that it is very uncommon, but when it does occur staff deal with it quickly and effectively.
- The curriculum ensures that students develop a good understanding of safe and unsafe situations and this prepares them well for their futures. Students show a good understanding of e-safety, including how to avoid unsafe websites.
- Almost all parents and carers who responded to Parent View agreed that their children were happy and safe in school and that the school manages students' behaviour well.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- Teachers have high expectations of their students and want them to do well. They also want students to enjoy their learning and provide activities that interest and enthuse them. As a result, students show commitment to their own learning in almost all lessons.
- Senior and middle leaders check the quality of teaching rigorously by observing lessons, talking with students and examining their written work. Leaders have responded strongly to weak teaching so that the standard of teaching has improved.
- Teachers routinely check students' progress, including the progress of students attending off-site provision. When teachers identify students who are falling behind with their work they quickly organise extra interventions and support to help these students to catch up.
- Teaching in English is consistently strong and provides examples of good practice for other subjects. The teaching and leadership of mathematics has been strengthened so that all students now receive good teaching in this subject.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs benefit from teaching which is matched closely to their individual needs. This enables them to make good progress.
- In most lessons teachers use assessment information well to plan learning activities. In a few lessons, however, work is not always set at the appropriate level of challenge for all groups of students. In these lessons, the work can be too easy or too difficult for some members of the class so that they do not then make as much progress as they could.
- In most subjects, teachers extend learning well by asking students for explanations in detail, rather than accepting simple short answers. This skilful questioning ensures that students understand fully what they are learning. In a minority of lessons, where this is not the case, teachers do not check students' learning sufficiently.
- There are good examples of written feedback in students' books and in some classes students respond well to their teachers' comments. In a minority of classes, this good practice is not apparent so that students then do not benefit from detailed written feedback on how to improve their work.
- Relationships between staff and students are good so that students can ask questions in confidence and are not afraid of making mistakes when learning new ideas.
- Students' reading skills are developed well in all subjects and the school's records show that many younger students make rapid progress. Consistent practice in promoting writing is less well developed so that sometimes inaccurate or careless written work is not corrected. During the inspection, a revised policy on correcting written work was being introduced.

The achievement of pupils**is good**

- Many students join the school with attainment that is below that expected for their age. Attainment at GCSE is average in most subjects and is increasing. In 2014 the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was slightly below average. However, the school's detailed information on the progress of current Year 11 students indicates that their attainment will be at least equal to the most recent national average. The school's records also indicate that this improvement is continuing with current Year 10 students.
- In 2014 the progress made by most groups of students in English and mathematics was in line with national expectations. The school has given extra attention to improving the progress of less-able students in mathematics and current data show that this has been successful.
- The school's records show also that all groups of students are now making consistently good progress across Key Stage 3. This includes students who join the school during the key stage.
- The small size of the school's cohorts means that the performance of one or two students has a very large impact on published percentage figures. For example, in 2014 the Year 11 group contained only seven students with lower-than-expected prior attainment at the end of Year 6.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress because teachers know their students well and understand their complex individual needs.
- The school has a low proportion of the most able students. Their progress has varied from year to year but is now in line with similar students' nationally. Some of these students have completed AS examinations by the end of Year 11. The school has put strategies in place to increase the proportion of students gaining grades A* and A at GCSE and these are succeeding.
- In 2014 the attainment of disadvantaged students in English was about half a grade below that of other students in the school and two thirds of a grade below that of other students nationally. In mathematics

the attainment of these students was one a half grades below that of other students in the school and other students nationally. The slower progress of disadvantaged students in mathematics has been addressed by restructuring the mathematics department. Initiatives introduced since 2013 are now showing increased impact and disadvantaged students currently on roll are making more rapid progress so that attainment gaps are reducing.

- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively. In particular, these students make rapid progress in reading which helps them to succeed across the curriculum.
- The school no longer enters any student early for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics.
- Students who study at the new shared sixth form provision have not yet completed any examination courses. However, the school's tracking shows that they are making good progress from their starting points.
- The small number of students who attend alternative provision make good progress, including in English and mathematics, and acquire useful qualifications in work-related subjects.

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	109328
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	449988

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	210
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Coombe
Headteacher	Barnaby Ash
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 June 2013
Telephone number	01225 312661
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