

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Catholic High School

Royal Avenue, Leyland, Lancashire PR25 1BS

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 June 2025

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to be part of this inclusive school. They enjoy coming to school because they appreciate being part of a close-knit and friendly community. Staff foster strong relationships with pupils. Pupils feel safe when they are in school and know who to speak to if they are worried or upset.

Most pupils live up to the school's high expectations of behaviour. In lessons, pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and to each other. They move around the school between lessons calmly. Pupils dress smartly, maintaining the high standards of uniform required by the school.

The school is ambitious for its pupils. Staff are determined that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), gain the knowledge and skills that they need to thrive in their future lives. In many subjects, pupils achieve well.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of enrichment opportunities that develop their skills and self-confidence. Many pupils participate in a wide range of sporting activities. In addition, there are thriving music, art and drama groups and pupils enjoy opportunities to visit places of interest in this country and abroad.

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

The school's curriculum is broad and ambitious. In the planning and design of the curriculum, careful consideration has been given to the content which needs to be taught in order to prepare pupils for the next stage of their education. Over recent years, the number of pupils in the school has grown significantly. As a result, the school has been

able to increase the number of academic and vocational courses it offers to pupils at key stage 4. The school invests time to ensure that pupils select courses which are appropriate for their future aspirations. For example, recent changes to the teaching of modern foreign languages have led to a growth in the number of pupils taking the range of subjects which lead to an English Baccalaureate qualification.

Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects. They have benefited from useful training and development, which have introduced them to a wide range of strategies to use in the classroom. In most subjects, staff ensure that, over time, pupils build the detailed knowledge they need to complete work to a high standard. However, in a minority of subjects, the delivery of the curriculum is less effective. This is because some teachers do not choose the most suitable strategies to help pupils understand key knowledge. For example, in some lessons, teachers introduce new learning too quickly before checking carefully that pupils have understood what has been taught before. Consequently, pupils sometimes develop gaps in their knowledge and do not learn the curriculum as securely as they could.

The school identifies pupils with SEND accurately. It provides teachers with suitable information and training on how to support pupils with SEND effectively in the classroom. This helps pupils with SEND to progress through the same ambitious subject curriculums as their peers. The school provides adaptations to support pupils with SEND effectively through the school day. Its nurture club provides a haven during breaktimes and lunchtimes, should pupils wish to use it. Overall, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Ensuring that pupils are fluent readers is a priority. The school accurately identifies pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge and has effective systems in place to quickly rectify those gaps. In addition, pupils are encouraged to read frequently, for example in form time. As a result, most pupils become fluent and confident readers over time.

The school has also prioritised improving pupils' attendance. For most pupils, the school's strategies have been effective. Consequently, pupils' overall attendance rates have improved over the past two years. Pastoral leaders work closely with those pupils and their families who struggle to attend school regularly, engaging with other agencies if necessary.

The programme to support pupils' personal development is well designed. Lessons cover a wide range of themes, including finance, keeping safe, relationships and sex education. Many other learning opportunities are woven through assemblies and subject curriculums. Pupils from Year 7 onwards benefit from a high-quality careers programme which introduces them to the skills that they will need in the workplace.

Alongside senior leaders, governors have played a significant role in ensuring that the school has sustained its performance since the last inspection. They support school leaders, as well as holding them to account effectively. Governors and leaders at all levels are considerate of staff's workload and well-being when making policy decisions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, some teachers do not choose the most suitable strategies to help pupils, including some pupils who are disadvantaged, to understand key knowledge. As a result, these pupils have gaps in their knowledge. The school should ensure that teachers are fully equipped to deliver curriculum content consistently well so that all pupils know and remember important knowledge.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in June 2016.

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	119816
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10348215
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	813
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gill Donohoe
Headteacher	Phil Thompson
Website	www.lsmchs.com
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St. Mary's Catholic High School is a voluntary-aided faith school. It is part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in March 2024.
- The school uses two registered provisions and one unregistered 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

- 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, other senior leaders and members of staff.

- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during breaktimes and lunchtimes and spoke to pupils about their experiences at school.
- An inspector met with representatives of the governing body. They also spoke with representatives of the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the local authority.
- An inspector reviewed minutes of recent meetings of the governing body.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took into account 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.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Timothy Gartside, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Katy Robinson	Ofsted Inspector

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