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Ms Vicky Linsley
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Linsley

Short inspection of St Mary Magdalene Academy

Following my visit with Kanwaljit Singh OBE, Ofsted Inspector, to the school on 10 January 2017 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in June 2013.

This is an all-through academy school, with primary and secondary schools on the same site. The primary and secondary schools each have their own head.

This school continues to be good.

Senior leaders are very purposeful; they lead the school successfully and with great tenacity. You and all leaders provide clear direction while listening carefully to staff, pupils, parents and others in the community. Parents generally like the school and appreciate the staff's good communications with them. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Improvement plans are well written and effective. Staff morale is very high. Teachers and other staff feel very well supported and challenged in their work. They can give of their best for the pupils.

The primary and secondary schools both serve their pupils well. You and other leaders have developed and embedded provision in the secondary school slightly further than has yet been possible in the primary school. There have been several recent primary staff changes. The new primary headteacher, with her new deputy, has made a very positive start in moving the primary school still further forward. Joint working between the schools is growing helpfully.

The previous inspection report recommended improving consistency within teaching and, in doing so, improving the progress of pupils. It also asked the school to improve pupils' attendance. Staff have addressed both issues successfully. Pupils experience teaching of a much more consistent quality. Attendance has risen to an average level; when compared to national averages it is slightly better in the secondary phase than in the primary phase.

Safeguarding is effective.

Procedures for keeping pupils safe are well organised and effective. Policies in this area are thorough. They apply equally to the primary and secondary schools. The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. All staff are carefully and regularly trained in child protection. Pupils who become particularly vulnerable for some reason are cared for and protected well. Parents spoke of staff 'going the extra mile'. The site is kept secure, safe and welcoming. Pupils feel safe and know, as needed, how to keep themselves safe, including when online. The school assesses risk appropriately and makes proper checks on the adults who work with the pupils. Governors oversee and review the safeguarding arrangements correctly and carefully.

Inspection findings

- In the secondary school, pupils do well across all years and subjects. They achieve well at GCSE and especially well in the sixth form. If any subjects 'dip', this is acted on swiftly.
- The primary school also serves its pupils well. By the end of Year 6, pupils reach above-average standards in English and do particularly well in mathematics.
- However, pupils' progress in the primary school is not even. Older pupils do better than the younger ones. Outcomes for pupils in the early years, Year 1 phonics and the Year 2 national assessments are average or, in some cases, a little below average. The pupils who read to inspectors did so at a good standard, except that some primary pupils were unsure of some letter combinations and sounds. To try to address this, staff have reviewed the phonics teaching.
- Primary school pupils enjoy a broad curriculum. They, and their parents, comment positively on the Mandarin lessons and the enquiry-based topics. Sports funding is well spent. The primary school, however, cannot say clearly how well pupils are doing in the subjects beyond English and mathematics. Wisely, the staff are considering a programme of work to refresh the curriculum across all subjects and how they assess the pupils' learning in them.
- The secondary curriculum is well organised. You keep it under constant review, so it is relevant and right for the pupils' needs. Pupils can choose from a wide range of GCSE qualifications to meet their aptitudes and interests. The school is usefully considering making this offer more flexible, to give pupils more options.
- Pupils of all ages enjoy an eclectic range of beneficial activities inside and outside of school hours. These include productions, sports and language learning. Music and the arts have a high and valuable profile throughout the primary and secondary schools. All pupils learn an instrument.
- Throughout the primary and secondary phases, pupils behave safely and very well without needing excessive supervision. They are friendly, thoughtful and considerate to each other. They are happy to talk about their learning, and recognise that the school is doing its very best to help them do well. They wear their uniforms smartly. Bullying and other serious misbehaviour is rare. Parents

like the way that older pupils look after younger ones.

- The sixth form is very well run, with high aspirations. Post-16 learners make very high levels of progress. They achieve good qualifications in a wide range of academic subjects and most progress to university. Learners receive good guidance from school staff about options and courses, whether or not they intend to join the school's own sixth form. They appreciate this.
- Teaching is well organised and effective. It is at its very best in the upper primary and secondary phases. Teachers explain things clearly, question pupils in a thought-provoking way, and make sure that work set is well suited to the pupils' needs.
- All groups of pupils achieve well. However, at every level from early years to post-16, girls generally make faster progress and, on average, get even better results than the boys. This is a clear pattern.
- Disadvantaged pupils, entitled to the support of pupil premium funding, generally achieve highly across the school. For example, in key stage 2 in 2016, disadvantaged pupils did better than all pupils nationally. The school manages pupil premium funding sensibly. The secondary school achieves a wider range of positive outcomes using the pupil premium than does the primary school, which focuses it mainly on English and mathematics.
- The governing body supports and challenges the school well. Just occasionally, its members offer excessive praise, which dilutes the impact of their generally well-considered and accurate evaluations.
- The school's inclusive Christian foundation valuably provides staff and pupils from all backgrounds with a spiritual and moral framework in which to work. The Chaplain offers very helpful pastoral support. The London Diocese provides respected school improvement advice to senior staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in the primary phase, staff assess how well pupils perform across all subjects, and make certain that outcomes for the pupils rise in national assessments in the early years, Year 1 phonics and key stage 1
- across the whole school, the performance of boys rises further still to match that of the girls.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner, the Diocese of London, and the director of children's services for Islington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspectors agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection.

- What is the reason for the apparently lower ongoing achievement in the early years foundation stage and key stage 1, including in phonics?
- Is the sixth form as successful as recent results may indicate? What is its place in the local area and how inclusive is it?
- Within a positive Progress 8 score, the English Baccalaureate component appears to perform relatively weakly. What is behind this?
- Disadvantaged pupils appear to achieve well in many respects. Is this so, and if so why?
- Girls appear to achieve better than boys throughout all age groups. Is this so, and if so why?
- There is a sense that the secondary school may be more advanced or developed than the primary school. If true, why is this?
- Attendance historically appears to be below average. Is this still true?

Inspectors carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- visiting lessons in all year groups, and many subjects, in the primary and secondary schools, often jointly with senior leaders
- hearing pupils from Years 1, 4 and 7 read
- speaking with pupils formally and informally and looking at their work
- observing around the school, including at breaktimes and when pupils were moving between lessons
- meeting with the primary and secondary headteachers, other senior and middle leaders, members of staff, governors, and officers of the London Diocese
- evaluating documents, including school plans, self-evaluations, minutes of meetings and information about pupils' progress
- considering carefully the 26 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included written comments, along with confidential responses from sixth form learners and members of staff to Ofsted's questionnaire.