

# St Marks Church of England Academy

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	134003
<b>Local Authority</b>	NA
<b>Inspection number</b>	334443
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Kennedy HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	819
Sixth form	88
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	The Venerable Christopher Skilton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Esther Holland (Associate HT)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Academy address</b>	Acacia Road Mitcham Surrey CR4 1SF
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8648 6627
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8640 8305

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Marks Church of England Academy opened in September 2006 in the same accommodation as its predecessor school. The academy is slightly smaller than an average-sized school and it has a small sixth form, which is in its second year. It is located in an area with high levels of socio-economic need. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Over three quarters of the students come from minority ethnic heritages and most of these are from Black African or Caribbean backgrounds. Four tenths of the students speak English as an additional language, which is higher than average, and about 70 students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, although the number with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The highest proportion of these students have social, emotional and behavioural needs. The proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school other than at the expected times, which has been much higher than in most schools nationally, has greatly reduced this year. The academy is led by an executive principal and an associate headteacher, both appointed in 2008 on fixed-term contracts. The proportion of staff on temporary contracts has reduced significantly and almost all posts have been filled from September 2009. The CfBT Education Trust and the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education are the academy's sponsors. The academy holds the Sportsmark and Artsmark Silver awards. In September 2008 the academy changed its specialisms from science, technology and enterprise to science and the performing arts.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the academy

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school also requires significant improvement in relation to its sixth form. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards, achievement, leadership and management of the sixth form and the care, guidance and support provided for sixth form students.

St Marks provides an acceptable standard of education for its students. It is an improving academy, with satisfactory capacity and momentum to continue this trend. The associate headteacher and executive principal lead the academy well and have worked determinedly to bring about a step change in provision and outcomes for students. The academy has come a long way in the past twelve months. The quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum have improved and both are satisfactory. However, there is much ground to make up and the teaching and curriculum are not yet good enough to accelerate the progress that students are capable of. The views of many of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire can be summed up by one who wrote, 'I fully appreciate the fact that the school still has a long way to go but - speaking as a local resident for 20 years - it has already come a long way since becoming an academy.' Students start at the academy, including the sixth form, with exceptionally low attainment. Results in 2008 were slightly better than the previous year, although they were still exceptionally low. This improving trend is continuing. However, a significant minority of students are not making sufficient progress in relation to their starting points and there remains too much variability in the performance of particular groups. The students' progress has not improved as quickly as other aspects of the academy's work and is inadequate.

Most of the teaching and learning is not yet good enough to raise standards quickly. Too many lessons are satisfactory and are of insufficient quality to capture students' interest. Some students have under-developed learning habits and come to lessons poorly prepared. The low attendance of some students also contributes to poorer rates of progress. The academy helps students make satisfactory progress in their personal development. Some parents expressed dissatisfaction about behaviour. The inspection found that this problem concerns a small minority of students and that the academy is taking the necessary steps to tackle it. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Better use is being made of assessment data which are more effectively linked with targeted intervention and support. This is having a tangible impact on targeted students. There are strong senior leaders and managers but the quality of middle managers is variable. Key appointments have been made to strengthen and further build capacity from September 2009. Governors have a clear understanding of what needs to be done strategically and have strengthened their ability to support and hold the academy to account. However, in focusing on the key priorities for improvement in relation to provision and outcomes for students, governors have failed to ensure that all the required policies are up to date, ratified and made accessible to parents. They are now taking urgent steps to address this.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 4

Inspectors agree with the academy's evaluation that there is room for significant improvement in the sixth form, particularly in its leadership and management, the quality of the guidance and support that students receive and the impact that provision has on students' achievement. The pass rate for students sitting AS examinations in the summer of 2008 was exceptionally low. There was underachievement in most subjects. Current standards indicate that progress is largely in line with targets. However, underachievement remains in some subjects. Teaching and learning are no longer inadequate, but the improvement has not yet had sufficient impact on students' progress. In the limited number of lessons observed in Year 12, students were making satisfactory progress overall. Students spoke well of the positive rapport they have with teachers and inspectors observed this in lessons. Teachers are more skilled in adapting their teaching styles to meet the needs of these older students. There were some good opportunities for students to work independently and to develop reflective and collaborative working skills. In less effective lessons, teachers were too dominant, independent learning skills were not given sufficient attention, and students were not given enough time to reflect and contribute.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students are articulate, mature and thoughtful. Art and music students contribute well to academy life, for example by leading the samba band at community events and by teaching younger students. Some students said their voice is not having a sufficiently strong impact at the highest level of leadership in the academy. The poor attendance and lack of punctuality of some students has a negative impact on their learning. Last year, too many students were placed on courses which did not match their abilities. There has been a significant reduction in the number of A levels being offered. The current curriculum, which is satisfactory, is meeting the needs of the sixth formers. Students reported that the pastoral system could be improved and this has been recognised by the academy. Systems for ensuring consistent and high-quality guidance and support are not securely in place. The academy has taken clear steps to address this, through the interim arrangements in place since January and, more specifically, through the appointment of a new 'head of house' from September, who will take on the strategic management of the sixth form.

### What the academy should do to improve further

- Accelerate all students' progress by increasing the proportion of good or better teaching:
  - by reducing the variability between subjects
  - by inspiring and challenging students more consistently
  - by providing them with activities and opportunities which engage them
  - by helping them develop positive attitudes to learning.
- Ensure effective leadership and management of the sixth form in order to raise standards and improve the quality of provision, particularly the guidance and support that students receive.
- Ensure that, by the first day of the autumn term 2009, the governing body has reviewed and updated all its relevant policies and procedures and has arrangements in place to review their effectiveness.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 4

Recent Year 9 tests reflect an improving picture, especially in English. Despite this, standards in Key Stage 3 remain too low, particularly in mathematics and science. GCSE results in 2008 for most key measures were exceptionally low. Only 22% of students achieved five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics. The standards attained by students in their eight best subjects were also exceptionally low. This was due in large part to the policy of not entering certain students for examinations, a practice which has been eradicated this year. There were some successes, for example, the proportion of those gaining higher grades in science and art was above the national average. Results reflected satisfactory progress in English and mathematics, but the overall progress that students made, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, was inadequate. Students are on track to improve on the 2008 results, for instance in the academy's specialisms and in the proportion of higher grades which include English and mathematics. Positive signs are also evident in students' achievement in vocational subjects, with accreditation already gained this year. However, there remains too much variability between the students' progress in different subjects or key stages. For example, White British students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making better progress in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 than in science, where too many students are not making enough progress. In Year 10, students of average or lower ability are not making sufficient progress in mathematics.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. Students say they feel safe and there are clear systems in place for reporting concerns to staff or the school-based police officer. There are few recorded incidents of racism. Students have a satisfactory awareness of and commitment to healthy and safe living. The 'Heroes' programme is effective in helping students to develop positive lifestyle choices and to deal with risk. Attendance is satisfactory but, for some students, it is too low. Inspectors observed satisfactory behaviour in lessons and around the academy. They also observed some lessons where the behaviour and attitudes to learning of a few students were poor. Students make a positive contribution to the wider community, for instance through their charity work. Peer mentoring and the academy council are at a relatively early stage in their development and their potential has not yet been maximised. Initiatives such as the BBC School Report Project, which provides a chance for students in schools to make their own live broadcasts, have been successful in giving students who speak English as an additional language the opportunity to develop work-related skills. Year 10 students value the opportunities they are given for work experience and Year 11 students have achieved well in gaining accreditation in adult literacy and numeracy. However, standards in English and mathematics, and the poor punctuality and attendance and poor attitudes of some students to learning, mean that they are not as prepared as they could be for their futures.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Teaching and learning have improved significantly since the monitoring visit in September 2008, when Her Majesty's Inspectors judged them to be inadequate. There are pockets of good teaching, but the majority of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are a number of strong features in more effective lessons. Teachers' planning is well structured and activities, resources and pace are used well to engage and hold students' interest and attention. Lessons are underpinned by the positive interaction between teachers and students and are characterised by a purposeful work ethos where students are focused and eager to learn. In these lessons, teachers give students good opportunities for 'thinking time' and, through effective questioning, help them to explain their views and reasoning. Additional support is used effectively so much so that it is sometimes hard to distinguish who is leading the teaching. Written and oral feedback is used well to help students know what levels they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

In less effective lessons, teaching is not strong enough to enable students to increase the pace of learning, fill in gaps in their knowledge and understanding and make faster progress than they have done in the past. The work is at times lacklustre and lacking in challenge. Explanations are not always crystal clear and, consequently, the students fall behind. At times, these lessons are too teacher dominated and there is insufficient time for students to explain their thoughts and reasoning. Marking is not always specific enough to help students improve their work, nor does it pick up basic errors such as spelling. Planning makes it clear how different needs will be met, but does not always show how additional support is being deployed or how activities are being used to meet the needs of different abilities. In some instances, the teaching is stronger than the learning. This is because too many students have not yet developed sufficiently mature attitudes towards learning and come to lessons late, lethargic and ill prepared for work. In a few instances, the behaviour of a minority prevents others from working.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced and is now more tailored to meet the particular needs and abilities of students. The academy has responded to the views of students in providing a range of vocational or alternative education pathways to better meet their interests and capabilities. The academy is well placed from its involvement in the local 14-19 partnership, to enable it to expand on the better range of options evident this year. Students value the work of additional tutors in helping to improve their progress in English and mathematics. This is having a positive impact, for instance in the completion of coursework. Nurture groups for some Year 7 and Year 8 students with language or learning needs, or low levels of numeracy and literacy, have had a positive impact on their progress and learning. The academy provides a range of enrichment opportunities, some linked to its specialisms, and participation rates are satisfactory. Students whose first language is not English are encouraged to gain qualifications in their home language and this year this involved over 40 students, with languages including Polish, German and Urdu. The impact of information and communication technology is improving and was evident in some of the lessons observed by inspectors.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

The academy provides satisfactory care, guidance and support for its students. The provision to meet the needs of students with English as an additional language and support for the most vulnerable, such as students who are in care, are stronger. A pupil panel meets regularly to discuss vulnerable students and multi-agency support is agreed where appropriate. The academy benefits from a range of support from agencies such as the police and Connexions, the advice and guidance service. The English as an additional language department, under new leadership this year, has been successful in supporting individual students and ensuring that they are placed in teaching groups that reflect their ability. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and the vetting of staff and adults meets current government regulations. Systems to promote good attendance and response to absence have tightened and the attendance officer is tenacious in following up absence. Effective and valued support is in place to help students make the transition from primary school. Since September, better use has been made of data to track academic progress, identify students who are at risk of underachievement and target effective support. However, this has yet to be fully embedded across the academy. Despite some inconsistencies in written feedback, students have a better understanding of how well they are doing. Improvements have been made in the strategic management of behaviour. 'Time out' provision is being reviewed to evaluate its effectiveness and plans are underway to develop an inclusion centre. Many of the changes planned for pastoral care will not have any measurable impact until the next academic year when the new structures are in place.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

In the past year, the associate headteacher and the executive principal have brought much needed competent leadership and management to the academy. Consequently, there is a clear drive and commitment to raising achievement, underpinned by short-term and longer-term strategic planning. Robust performance management is now in place. Decisive action is being taken in response to identified areas of weakness. Teaching is more consistent and the impact of training, coaching, support and challenge for teachers is having a positive impact on their practice. Senior leadership is strong but there is variability among middle leaders and they are not yet fully involved in leading their departments and being accountable for their outcomes. The academy has rightly identified the need for the wholesale restructuring of the sixth form. Challenging targets are set for raising standards. In most instances these are now being met in relation to students' starting points. The academy's focus on improving equality of opportunity and promoting community cohesion can be seen in the improved provision for students whose home language is not English and in the audit they have undertaken to inform their community cohesion strategy. The academy has made effective use of external support and this has contributed to improvements, for example in the English, mathematics and science departments. Governance has improved greatly since the last monitoring visit and this is reflected in the quality of governors' support and the steps they take to hold the leaders to account. However, some of the academy's policies, including those on their website, have yet to be ratified or are in need of review. The academy improvement group, established in 2008 and whose membership includes the academy, governors, sponsors and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, provides an effective vehicle for evaluating progress against key priorities. Although



improvement is now evident across much of the academy's work, the context of inadequate student achievement means that it does not yet provide satisfactory value for money, despite its capacity to improve.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	4	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	4	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	4

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Marks Church of England Academy, Surrey, CR4 1SF

Thank you for the welcome and help you gave us when we carried out the first inspection of your academy recently. If you are interested in reading the full report, you will find it on the Ofsted website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Standards and student progress at the academy are not good enough, so the academy has been given a 'notice to improve'. This means that we are asking the academy to make some specific improvements over the next year.

These are some of the things which have improved in the past year.

- The headteacher, executive principal, other senior leaders and staff at the academy are now making a big difference and helping the academy to improve.
- Teaching is better than it was and, as a result, more of you are making better progress.
- Students who need it are offered extra support to help them do better in exams. This is because the staff are now keeping a closer eye on how well you are doing.
- The curriculum is providing an increasing range of courses that interest you and give you a better chance of being successful.

However, there is a need to speed up some of these changes so that you can do better more quickly. We have therefore asked the academy to:

- improve the quality of lessons by ensuring teachers provide you with activities and opportunities which make your learning more interesting and help you develop good learning habits and attitudes
- improve the quality of the sixth form
- make sure that governors have up-to-date policies in place so that everyone can be clear about what they should be doing and the governing body can keep an eye on what sort of difference these make to the success of the academy.

You can play your part in helping the school to achieve these aims by always behaving well, improving your attendance and working hard in lessons. The inspection team wishes you success for the future.

Yours faithfully

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector