



St Mary's Catholic High School

Our Wonderful School Community and Sustained High Performance

June 2021

St Mary's has been on an incredible journey over the last 12 years, since it was judged 'Outstanding' in May 2009. It has continued to go from strength to strength, maintaining outstanding standards and continuing to further develop all areas of the school, sustaining high performance in all areas from 2009 to date. Since 2007 our academic progress has been significantly above national standards and our average Progress 8 score over the last five years is over 0.5, meaning that on average, every student leaves St Mary's with at least half a grade more in every subject than similar students do nationally. This includes outstanding progress for our disadvantaged students and students with SEND. This outstanding progress for all students in the school regularly places us in the top 10% of schools in the UK and the top 5% of schools, of the 150 secondary schools, in the North-east. Due to this sustained high performance, St Mary's plays a leading role within the Bishop Bewick Education Trust, leading significant school to school support within the Trust and more widely.

We are very proud of the truly inclusive nature of our school and we are blessed to have students from a range of socio-economic, faith, national and cultural backgrounds. We are delighted to have students from more than 40 countries, speaking over 50 different languages at St Mary's. We are also very proud of our Catholic distinctiveness and we believe that each child, whatever their Faith background, is unique, with a unique set of God-given gifts and talents which we aim to nurture and develop fully. Whilst just over half of our students are Catholic, we welcome equally, students of other Faiths or none and aim for all students to live and learn together harmoniously, in a community inspired by, and imbued with, Gospel values of love God and love your neighbour. We are blessed to have many different faiths represented in our school, including students from other Christian faiths and students from Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Buddhist faiths. Our wonderfully diverse student body makes St Mary's quite unique in the North-east of England.

St Mary's is the only mixed, 11-18 Catholic secondary school in Newcastle and we are exceptionally proud of our close-knit, friendly and welcoming school community. We provide an outstanding, all-round education, in a Catholic/Christian context, aiming to live out the values of the Gospel in every aspect of school life, following the example of Christ. Many of these values are universal and this explains why children from all backgrounds thrive in all that they do and thoroughly enjoy each day at school. We believe that St Mary's is an exciting place to learn.

All leaders and governors at St Mary's have contributed to maintaining and developing further an outstanding quality of education for all students. This has been achieved against a backdrop of the growth in student numbers (961 students in 2011 compared with 1451 in 2021) requiring leaders to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of many aspects of school life like pastoral basics and curriculum design. In order to accommodate such an increase, we have managed an extensive building programme involving an extension and a Sixth Form refurbishment and we are currently considering plans to extend the dining facilities and add more classrooms whilst continuing to lead a safe and outstanding education for students.

We are committed to working closely with our Family of Primary Schools. Every year we admit students from nine feeder primary schools, however, our intake comes from students from a wide range of schools across Newcastle. This year, we are expecting students from forty-two different primary schools. The Family of Schools work very closely with each other with many projects and activities offered to students from Year 4 to ease the transition to secondary school. For example, Year 4 students come to St Mary's for Science sessions and Year 5 attend a topical conference exploring themes such as Climate Change, Fairtrade and Respect, as well as a day of high school lessons. In the summer term, all Year 6 children who will be starting St Mary's in September attend the school for two full days during which they have a taste of what high school life will be like. We are clear about the social disadvantage that some of our students have experienced and the vastly differing life experiences across the cohort and we strongly believe that an outstanding quality of education will support us in addressing any social disadvantages affecting our students. We work closely with Year 6 teachers in order to understand the Key Stage 2 curriculum and the pastoral experiences of the students. It is crucial that we understand the local contextual factors for our students and how varied it is across the Newcastle region and how we can best build on the knowledge and skills that our students need in order to ensure a smooth transition between the two Key Stages.

At St Mary's we believe that all children are unique, with their own God-given gifts and talents. Our curriculum is broad, balanced and ambitious for all students. Throughout Key Stage 3 all students study a broad range of subjects which include the following:

Art	Health & Social Care (optional in Year 9)
Business (optional in Year 9)	History
Computer Science (optional in Year 9)	Mathematics
Design and Technology	Music
Drama	Physical Education
English	Religious Education
French	Science
Geography	Spanish

This suite of subjects ensures that we promote intellectual, creative and physical development in all students. We know that different children have different strengths and, for this reason, the children are placed into mixed-ability form groups and then set according to their ability in each subject when they start St Mary's in Year 7. In over 50% of the lessons during the first year, the students are taught in their mixed-ability form classes, just as they were in Year 6. In subjects such as Maths, English, Science, and Modern Foreign Languages, the setting will be done according to ability. Increasing use is made of grouping by ability as students move through Key Stage 3. Students are also taught in slightly smaller mixed ability groups for Technology in order to ensure that all children are safe in the practical classroom. We firmly believe that this system is the fairest for all students and ensures that children are happy and achieve their best. This system has led to record levels of achievement at each Key Stage over the last five years.

We believe that all students can benefit from studying a rigorous academic curriculum and have designed our Key Stage 4 curriculum around these principles. We offer a robust suite of GCSE and vocational subjects that are appropriate for our students and all students study the following subjects:

Religious Education	Physics
English Language	Chemistry
English Literature	Biology
Mathematics	Physical Education

In addition, students can choose up to three options with guidance from the following courses:

Art	Health & Social Care
Business	History
Computer Science	ICT
Drama	Music
Design & Technology	Physical Education
French	Spanish
Geography	Sports Studies

Since 2017 we have increased our entry to the EBacc subjects for all students from 46% to 81% (on average across the last three years (2018 – 2021)). This is significantly higher than the Local Authority Average and the average for England which were both approximately 40%. Achievement in the EBacc was also significantly higher with St Mary's average point score of 5.1 comparing with the Local Authority Average of 3.76 and the average for England of 4.07. This ambitious curriculum is irrespective of a student's background and is offered regardless of SEND or any disadvantage. At St Mary's the proportion of disadvantaged students entered for the Ebacc is much higher than the national average for all students. In 2018/19 this was 70% for St Mary's disadvantaged students compared with 45% nationally. High-quality support is provided for students with SEND by our Learning Support Team and students engage readily with the extra help provided for them. As such, our SEND students make good progress and are supported to access the full curriculum offer at all Key Stages. We are uncompromising in our ambition for our SEND students who are fully involved in all aspects of school life and are offered a full curriculum at every stage.

Evidence of the impact of the progress that St Mary's continues to make to sustain high performance can be seen in our outcomes for students. Our average Progress 8 score over the last five years (since 2017) is over 0.5, meaning that

on average, every student leaves St Mary's with at least half a grade more in every subject than similar students do nationally. Disadvantaged students also continue to outperform this group nationally with our Progress 8 score for this group higher than the national average. We continue to be among the very highest in the region for raw attainment. For example, the 2019 English & Maths grade 5+ was 65% and this was the 4th highest in the Northeast, with 80% grade 4+ and this was 7th in the Northeast (out of around 150 schools). Such results continue to be significantly above both the local authority average (39%) and the national average (43%). Over the last five years, an average of over 80% of our GCSE students have obtained the A*-C (now grades 9-4) benchmark in the core subjects of English and maths. A notable feature of our outstanding results is the exceptional performance of our upper ability students. For the past five years, over 30% of all GCSE grades have been A*- A (now grades 9-7), despite the increased rigour of the newly reformed GCSEs. This is way above the national average and reflects the excellent teaching and stretching of our most able. The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 successfully provides our students with a rich knowledge base from which they can progress to the next stages of their education either here at St Mary's, or onto other work or education provider.

One distinctive aspect of our curriculum is the Pastoral Programme, which focusses on the holistic development of students and includes the following themes: Spiritual Development, Relationship Development, Social Development, Cultural Development and Learning Development. We want our students to leave St Mary's as educated young adults who have developed the essential knowledge required for future success and we believe that the Pastoral Programme is one aspect of our commitment to developing 'knowledge and cultural capital' in our students.

We encourage all students at St Mary's to get involved in the wider curriculum, as there is so much more to gain from school life besides exam success. We want all our students to develop into confident, happy, responsible, well-rounded individuals, armed with a wealth of experience to help them achieve and enjoy success in life. As such, at St Mary's, there are many opportunities for participating in extracurricular activities. The PE department runs a variety of lunchtime and afterschool sporting activities, such as table tennis, trampolining, basketball, badminton, netball and cricket, which are open to all students irrespective of ability. In addition, we have a number of well-established clubs, offering a wide range of enriching activities, including drama, dance, chess, music, art, science, foreign languages, and computing. The chaplaincy at St Mary's is very active too, offering many opportunities for students to develop their spirituality and contribute fully to the Catholic ethos of the school. We have biannual music concerts, one in winter and one in summer, in which students have the chance to demonstrate their musical gifts and talents. Moreover, there is an annual school musical production, which always brings together staff and students from all parts of our school community. At St Mary's, we recognize the value of having a broad and diverse wider curriculum. Fully aware of the enormous benefits to holistic development of extracurricular participation, we want all our students to take full advantage of the fantastic opportunities on offer here at the school.

We want our students to learn about an extensive range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural topics. As such, students take part in school drama, dance and music shows, attend stimulating visits, and benefit from interesting and thought-provoking assemblies and well thought-out topics. A good example of our commitment to this is the retention of Drama in Key Stage 3 despite its removal, as a compulsory subject, from the National Curriculum. Drama stimulates the imagination and allows students to explore issues and experiences in a safe and supportive environment. Our Pastoral Programme attempts to create an awareness in students of the interdependence of individuals, groups and nations by looking at the social, economic and political dimensions of life. We also explore themes which celebrate and acknowledge the rich cultural diversity we have in our world, country and school. Religious Education at St Mary's also affords students a deep understanding of their own faith as well as awareness of the faith and traditions of other religious communities as a basis for understanding and respecting them. As a result, our students are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The school is proud of the work it does in what we call faith in action, through our support for many good causes throughout the year. We are always so impressed by the generosity of our students in their charitable giving and by the care and concern which they show towards those less fortunate than themselves, at home and abroad. In recent years, we have collected hampers for the region's homeless and raised money to send Sixth Form students to Zambia to support a school for children.

Embracing Remote Learning has been an inevitable consequence of the pandemic. At St Mary's we have worked tirelessly over the last two years to improve our offer in this aspect and you can read more about our development over time by clicking [here](#). Using Teams has ensured that we have been able to continue to deliver the full curriculum to students throughout the last two years.

We pride ourselves on being a caring school. We have high expectations of student' behaviour and conduct. Rules are simple, sensible and consistently applied so that students feel safe and secure and know what is expected of them. We praise students for their efforts and celebrate their achievements in many different ways. We believe that such a positive climate promotes learning and inspires students to fulfil their potential. We are always looking at ways in which we can improve in our use of praise and next year we will focus on trying to use technology to improve our collection of positive achievements and its subsequent communication with parents. Regular reminders of routines and expectations are shared with students by both their Head of Year in assemblies and their form tutor during morning registration. Our pastoral system is a real strength and as such, our students feel well supported and cared for, and feel able to talk to pastoral leaders or tutors if they have any concerns. Students who find school more challenging are helped and supported to be successful.

More recently, evaluation of our pastoral routines has identified that we need to reassert our focus on raising attendance and improving punctuality. Heads of Year work tirelessly to understand the reasons behind persistent absenteeism and have implemented strategies such as identifying students with low attendance in the first few weeks of the school year in order to act swiftly and with meaningful early intervention, implementing a First Response system as well as conducting meetings with parents, carers and external agencies of students who had low attendance in the previous year. We have recently appointed an Attendance Officer who will work closely with targeted students and families in order to increase levels of attendance across the school and support further the progress made by Pastoral staff. Since 2016/17 when our persistent absenteeism was above the national average (St Mary's 14.7% versus National 13.5%) we have focussed on reducing this and in 17/18 and 18/19 we were consistently below the national average (17/18 11.5% versus 13.9% and in 18/19 13.2% versus 13.7%). This pattern was repeated for overall absence with our % in 16/17 exceeding the national % followed by 17/18 and 18/19 being below the national average. Clearly, the pandemic has caused significant disruption to attendance rates, however, our commitment to continuing this drive to improve attendance remains a key aspect of our work.

High quality relationships are at the heart of our ethos and explain, more than anything else, why we are such a successful school. Children are extremely well cared for at St Mary's. Staff value and nurture each student as a unique individual, blessed with God-given gifts and talents. We offer students wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth and development, to support them on their journey in this life and to prepare them for the life to come. We encourage our students to develop their gifts and talents to the full, for their own sake and in the service of others. At St Mary's we believe that every student should be respected for their personal worth and dignity and be supported and cared for appropriately. Each student will be encouraged to develop a caring attitude towards those around them and to respect and tolerate people of every background, race, religion and culture. All will be encouraged to develop self-discipline and to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. We want to continue to promote a school community where bullying is not tolerated and students feel safe to tell someone who can help them if they are being bullied. Our anti-bullying message is conveyed through all aspects of the curriculum and we encourage all members of the school to act with tolerance, care and consideration to others at all times.

At St Mary's, we believe that we have a strong culture of safeguarding. We ensure that the child protection and safeguarding policy reflect up-to-date statutory requirements and that staff receive regular safeguarding training so that they know their responsibilities. We are fully committed to the principles set out in the statutory guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' and we work regularly with all members of staff so that they understand child protection policies and are able to use them. For example, recent safeguarding training for staff has covered material including the 'Prevent' duty, "Peer on Peer Abuse" and how to refer concerns. Staff are confident to make referrals to the designated safeguarding leads when they are concerned about any aspect of any student's welfare. These referrals are doggedly followed up and external agencies used when necessary. Furthermore, we identify students who are at risk using a wealth of information gathered from different sources. Senior and Middle leaders within the pastoral system are then able to decide the best approach to manage any concerns about students. They provide bespoke interventions and effective support for individuals. Their attention to detail is meticulous.

If you visit St Mary's you will see a collective commitment to ensuring a positive, welcoming climate as all leaders, Middle and Senior, are a clear and visible presence around the school. We believe that St Mary's is a safe, caring environment with a family atmosphere and we are committed to the welfare of every individual, student or staff member. Excellent behaviour plays a major part in our continued success. Students mix really well together and there is a positive and happy atmosphere here. Our students are extremely smart and wear their uniform with pride. During the Pastoral Programme which is taught in form classes, students receive a valuable programme of personal, social

and health education. This is planned carefully to ensure that all can gain the required knowledge to make healthy and safe decisions at school and at home.

We are highly considerate of students' well-being and we seek to provide a wide range of opportunities across the curriculum to promote students' mental health, emotional well-being and safety. In subjects such as the Pastoral Programme, students learn how to recognise and avoid risks and to keep safe, particularly when working online. We believe that our pastoral teams are a real strength of the school and that students are clear at St Mary's about how to seek help to resolve their concerns.

We strive for excellence in all that we do, whether supporting our students towards excellent academic achievement, or providing high quality opportunities for their all-round development. We are blessed at St Mary's with an outstanding team of Governors who know the school very well. They visit the school regularly, attending many of our extra-curricular events and are excited about playing an active role in our school. Our Governors see no limit to the further success of St Mary's and they robustly challenge us to continue the school's improvement journey. They rightly believe that the school can continuously develop, and their expectations continue to rise.

At St Mary's we routinely evaluate the strengths of the school and as such, we believe that we coordinate an excellent professional development programme for staff. In recent years, our work in professional development has extended via both Teaching Schools and the Trust. As part of Leadership for the North East we have supported the development of leadership potential in the local area by facilitating the delivery of the NPQSL and NPQML. We want to also ensure that classroom teachers are able to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence and as such we deliver the "Every Lesson Outstanding" to colleagues from the North East, on an annual basis. We are committed to sharing our experiences and expertise with other schools and we have offered bespoke support at Senior Leadership level to a range of local schools through secondments and ongoing support packages.

Our Middle leaders are an outstanding team who we use to great effect to support the school in developing further. Senior and Middle leaders work closely together through our link system, meeting very regularly in order to support with, and evaluate, curriculum and pastoral areas and as a consequence, work to improve their areas of responsibility is highly successful. The Teaching & Learning team have led the way in providing high quality support and training for teaching and learning needs across the school via coaching, support work and whole school CPD training. More recently, we have focussed this work more acutely on curriculum areas which need more support with student achievement. Alongside this, we have run voluntary coaching for those teachers keen to continue developing. We have continued to promote CPD opportunities and T&L activities in person and through the use of Teams, ensuring that this important aspect of our work continued during the pandemic. We write a regular T&L newsletter for all staff and have developed a well-established and well-attended Teaching & Learning Strategies group. A continuing focus for the Teaching & Learning team has been to develop the use of educational theory and as such we have now established a 'spinoff' Teaching & Learning Book Group. This year, we have focussed on '*Teach like No-One is Watching*' by Mark Enser. This book has promoted lots of discussion and reflection between members and following each session, teachers are implementing new strategies before feeding back to the wider team. Consequently, we believe that students are consistently receiving outstanding teaching and learning experiences.

Senior and Middle Leaders at St Mary's evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses with great acuity, helping to establish clearly thought through improvement plans on a yearly basis. We are proud of our ability to take clear and effective action when required in order to improve our already excellent quality of education. A good example of this can be observed in our recent programme focussing on improving the curriculum planning in Key Stage Three (We began this work in November 2019 and you can read more about our work by clicking [here](#)). Senior and Middle leaders worked together to redesign every subject to ensure that the curriculum is well-planned and aspirational and built on the prior knowledge of our students from the feeder primary schools as well as developing skills incrementally over time. We ensured that all students, including disadvantaged and those with SEND, were given the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed at each stage of the curriculum, including the knowledge needed to prepare them for their future lives in further learning and/or employment. Whilst the pandemic disrupted some of our work on this aspect of the curriculum, we will focus on concluding this programme in 2021 – 22 as well as adapting our curriculum planning to account for gaps in learning that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

We are blessed at St Mary's to have an outstanding body of teaching and support staff. Teachers are nearly all subject specialists and are able to use their expert subject knowledge to inspire and motivate students. In the rare instances where this is not the case, the Teaching and Learning Team and Middle Leaders are available to support and mentor teachers to ensure that students are not disadvantaged. We have also sought additional support from within the trust

if needed. A good example of this is in Computing where we have enrolled two members of staff on training for non-specialists via the NCCE Computing Hub. Senior leaders have identified, through ongoing evaluation of Teaching & Learning, that we need to continue to focus on *developing understanding not memory in students* and *effectively using assessment*, and these key aspects will form a significant part of our foci for development in 2021 – 22. We firmly believe that developing all of our teachers will ensure that our students continue to make exceptional progress across all areas of the curriculum.

We are passionate about staff well-being. Staff members have a dedicated social space which is appealing and comfortable as well as a quiet work space. Clear policies and procedures are well communicated to all staff and we adopt the same processes and expectations regardless of position or role in the school. Our culture and catholic ethos encourages open communication, particularly when it comes to talking about concerns. We communicate clearly with staff, particularly around any changes that might be taking place at school, and where possible, consult with staff about changes. We aim to always model good working practices and self-care to encourage a work/life balance and we encourage taking regular breaks, finishing on time, regular meetings with line managers, not taking work home and asking for help and support when needed. Senior Leaders at St Mary's model such practices and we are keen to also feedback on the positives and things that are going well. We believe that St Mary's staff feel valued and listened to, and staff retention is high.