

St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104259
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	355546
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1494
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Dalton
Headteacher	Sean Flynn
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2007
School address	Darlaston Lane, Willenhall West Midlands WV14 7BL
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They visited 50 lessons, saw 50 teachers and held meetings with staff, students, parents, carers and governors. They observed the school's work, interrogated the school's assessment records and looked at the minutes of the meetings of the governing body, aspects of community work, the minutes of meetings with the School Improvement Partner, subject evaluations and school action plans and evaluations. They also scrutinised 450 parent and carer questionnaires, 84 staff questionnaires and 155 student questionnaires

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent that data on attainment and progress are understood by leaders at all levels and how they are used to inform the school's self-evaluation.
- How well leaders, at all levels, use their evaluations of the quality of learning to inform developments.
- How effective the school has been in raising standards in mathematics and science identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection.
- How students are identified as requiring additional support and how this support is monitored and evaluated.

Information about the school

St Thomas More is a larger-than-average Catholic comprehensive school with a large sixth form. It has held specialist status in business and enterprise since 2003. A greater proportion of students than average is known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with special education needs and/or disabilities is average. There is a higher-than-average proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, with those from an Indian background making up the largest of these groups. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below average.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Thomas More provides a satisfactory standard of education. The pastoral care and very welcoming and supportive ethos are real strengths. Students show excellent mutual respect and tolerance so that different groups harmonise well and incidents of bullying or intolerance are very rare. This means that many outcomes are good, with some outstanding. However, attainment, including that in science and mathematics, while improving, is average and the rate of progress made by students is satisfactory. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good because of the effective additional support they receive.

Many improvements have been made, although as yet some have not become firmly established. The school was recently congratulated by the Minister for Schools for the improvement to the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. There is a well-established and shared ambition to continue this momentum. The senior leadership team has a realistic overview of standards within the school and of the quality of teaching and learning, and is using this appraisal to target support in specific departments. Effective action plans are formulated to ensure suitable challenge and support are put in place. At times weaknesses are identified when staff do not follow whole-school policies and procedures, and these are not always challenged by leaders across the differing levels. Assessment information is being used to identify any underachievement and also where students are not making sufficient progress. The sixth form has also shown clear improvements and the good leadership has ensured good provision, which is now having a positive impact upon the quality of learning and the progress students make. All of these factors demonstrate a good capacity to improve.

The quality of teaching has improved and is judged satisfactory because too often students do not make good progress with their learning. Good lessons are active and engaging but at other times there is too much teacher input and students do not get down to work quickly enough, hence they are not always sufficiently challenged and the pace of learning is slower. When learning objectives are used effectively in lessons they help students make better progress; however, at times these are not sufficiently focused upon the intended learning outcomes. The need to improve examination results has meant many lessons are concerned about students acquiring subject knowledge; however, they do not always understand the concepts behind the work or gain the skills needed to use the knowledge in different applications. A highlight of lessons and of the work of the school is the good relationships between staff and students. Staff know their charges very well and offer excellent care and support. As a result, students respond well in lessons and their behaviour is good. They enjoy school and show mature attitudes. Good use is made of the school's specialism to support students in developing a good understanding of the commercial world. This, along with high attendance, good information, communication

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and technology (ICT) skills and functional literacy and numeracy skills, ensures that students are well prepared for their futures.

Students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Students, through their questionnaires and when meeting with inspectors, say they feel extremely safe within the school and this is supported by the responses from parents and carers. Through the active school council they make a good contribution to the life of the school as well the local community. Students also have a good understanding and experience of life in multicultural Britain and across the world.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise attainment and increase the rate of progress by ensuring lessons:
 - focus on students developing understanding and the acquisition of skills as well as subject knowledge
 - are delivered with greater pace and challenge.
- Build upon the improvements to the quality of teaching so that by December 2011 learning is good or better in at least 75% of lessons by ensuring:
 - learning objectives are sharply focused on outcomes
 - initial expositions by teachers are short and ensure students are engaged in learning quickly
 - marking consistently informs students how to improve and then time is made available for students to respond to and act on the advice.
- Ensure that leaders at all levels, make sure staff consistently comply with school policies and procedures and so maintain a sharper focus on improving the quality of learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment in mathematics and English rose in 2010 and is broadly average. Students' attainment overall is average and improving and was confirmed by observation of students' work and analysis of the school's own tracking systems. The proportion of students achieving at least one GCSE is above the national average. The needs of more-able students are being addressed with increased rigour, the impact of which can be seen particularly in mathematics. Students join the school with broadly average standards and make satisfactory progress. Students make the best progress in lessons when they are actively involved in the development of their learning. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, students worked in groups to identify different aspects of a text and then helped each other to develop understanding by sharing their findings with the rest of the class. By increasing opportunities for all students to re-sit examinations if they have not achieved their potential the school is ensuring students achieve better. Students from different ethnic groups make similar progress, with no group doing less well than their peers. Students' excellent social skills ensure they get on well with each other. Many students take part in activities to help themselves keep fit and have a good understanding of how

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to keep healthy, although some are not aware of how to help reduce stress when taking public examinations. The school provides good support for students' well-being through a councillor, nurse and the chaplain for their spiritual needs. Students report that the very few incidents of bullying are dealt with immediately and effectively.

Students develop an excellent understanding of moral issues through their work in different subjects. They also deliver highly effective assemblies to the peers. Students have high expectations of themselves and of others, and demonstrate their mutual respect and trust by developing very good interpersonal and social skills. A strong spiritual element is prevalent around the school, which includes a highly developed understanding of the role of faith. While the major faith within the school is Catholicism, all faiths are respected and celebrated as well as different cultures. Very few students fail to go on to further education, employment or training when they leave school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Students are able to follow a wide variety of courses in Key Stage 4 and say that the curriculum meets their needs well. All students follow a life skills course in Key Stage 3 and many complete a public services course in Key Stage 4. Very good pastoral care ensures students feel very well supported, although academic guidance is less well established. The introduction of reduced time in Key Stage 3 and increased time and emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 4 means that the

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school is well placed to improve standards. Effective use is made of intervention strategies to improve the progress of students who are identified as underachieving.

The curriculum is enhanced through a variety of additional education experiences. Students enjoy a good range of extra-curricular activities that include sport and creative and performing arts. Enterprise days provide students with a breadth of experience, contributing effectively to their personal development. A good range of visits and visitors develops a better understanding of relevant local and national issues; for example, all students were able to recount the assembly by the local police officer on the dangers of social network sites, while others must be congratulated for cycling from Bilbao, over the Pyrenees, to Lourdes.

The impact of recent and relevant training to enhance the quality of teaching and improve the quality of learning, by extending the repertoire of methods used in lessons, is starting to be evident. More lessons involve group or individual work. When teaching is satisfactory rather than good there is often too much teacher input and lower expectations, with students being passive and not sufficiently involved in their learning. Students know their targets and these are often referred to in lessons.

Students are well supported when they start at the school and when they transfer between key stages. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported, as are those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The effective headteacher and senior leaders give the school a strong steer and direction. Their vision and ambition for the school is well understood and shared by staff. The strong drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning, led by the assistant headteachers, has started to bring about improvements. They have an accurate overview of the quality of teaching and learning within the school and are able to ensure additional support and coaching is targeted at appropriate staff. Some managers have an accurate understanding of what constitutes good practice and a strong commitment to carry on improving. However, in a few areas the changes have not been fully implemented and leaders have not held staff to account for failing to follow agreed procedures within lessons.

Governance is good. The governing body is supportive of the school and has appropriate structures in place. It challenges the school and evaluates the impact of its policies. It has been rigorous in ensuring that good safeguarding procedures have been fully implemented. Governors have also been very active in ensuring the school gives good

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support to the local community. The school has a good overview of community cohesion and is very active within the local community. For example, the school has supported parents and students in appreciating literary works, including going to high quality theatre productions in London and Stratford-upon-Avon.

The analysis of examination data and the take-up of extra-curricular activities has enabled the school to secure good equality of opportunity. This analysis includes the performance of groups with differing social and educational needs and ensures that most remain on track to meet the challenging targets that the school sets for them, especially as they progress through their GCSE years. It also enables senior staff to quickly identify and support any who are falling behind. Given the satisfactory outcomes, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The leadership of the school has worked hard and effectively to improve the provision in the sixth form. This improvement is starting to impact upon standards and the rate of progress made by students. In 2010 the progress made by students completing AS examination was above average but was average for those completing A-level examinations. Sixth formers make a very positive contribution to the school and local communities. The Theatre in Education group has shown leadership in devising and performing a well-received play addressing issues of cyberbullying. Most students take the many opportunities to support younger students, and have a high profile in the school.

Students receive good advice and guidance which supports them well in making choices about the next steps in their education. Students feel safe and secure and they enjoy the challenges of sixth-form life. They respond well to some good, but mainly satisfactory, teaching. The quality of the curriculum has been diversified in recent years in response to

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students' preferences, and is timetabled flexibly so all can access the subjects they want to study.

Leaders have a clear view of the improvements needed to raise achievement further and have a well-focused development plan to bring these about. They can identify areas which are beginning to have an impact in improving outcomes for students, for example, personal tutoring, better communications and the effective use of potential grades.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A higher number of responses than average were received, indicating good links between school and home. Responses were more positive than those usually seen, with the vast majority saying that their children enjoy school and that the school keeps their children safe.

A small number of individual comments were received and these included how approachable staff were, and upon the school's response to incidents of bullying. Some said it was dealt with very well on the few occasions it happened but a minority of these said that this was not the case. Students said very occasional incidents of bullying were dealt with effectively by staff and they felt very safe.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 450 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1494 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	178	40	252	56	13	3	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	198	44	244	54	5	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	227	50	202	45	21	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	186	41	247	55	14	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	181	40	259	58	7	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	181	40	245	54	21	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	111	25	295	66	36	8	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	176	39	241	54	12	3	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	168	37	261	58	11	2	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	180	40	232	52	25	6	2	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	139	31	264	59	24	5	2	0
The school is led and managed effectively	184	41	251	56	6	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	219	49	216	48	10	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



20 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall WV14 7BL

Thank you for your time and comments when I visited your school recently with my colleagues. We met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with how well you behaved and with the way in which you get on so well with each other. You told us that you felt very safe in school and that staff care about you and are interested in your views.

You behave very well and make a good contribution to school and the local community. Results in your examinations are improving and standards are average, with most of you making satisfactory progress, although those of you who have extra help make good progress. Results in the sixth form are also improving. We have asked your school to carry on this improvement and have suggested that in order to do this lessons should concentrate on helping you understand your work and develop skills as well as learning facts. We also suggest that lessons should be more challenging and learning have more pace. We observed over half of your teachers' lessons and we judged that teaching is satisfactory overall. In order to carry on the improvements that the school has made we have asked them to make sure all lessons have a sharp focus, and that you are made to work harder than your teachers by reducing the time you spend listening at the start of lessons so that you can get down to work more quickly. We have also suggested that marking should always tell you how to improve. You can help yourselves improve by making sure you take advice from your teachers and always act upon the advice you are given.

Staff care for you very well, and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education as well as helping you to settle at the start of Year 7. You enjoy the social side of school. You have a very good understanding of your local area. Your headteacher and assistant headteachers have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and they are very determined that these improvements will be made. In order to bring this about more quickly we have asked the leaders, at all levels, to make sure all staff follow school policies in order to help bring about improvements to your learning.

We wish you well at this very supportive school.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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