

# St Thomas More Catholic High School, A Specialist School for Maths & ICT

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111452
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire East
<b>Inspection number</b>	393803
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 April 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Leszek Iwaskow 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>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	623
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Brand
<b>Headteacher</b>	Edward McHugh
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 September 2007
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# Introduction

## Inspection team

Leszek Iwaskow	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alan Parkinson	Additional inspector
Rebecca Dutton	Additional inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 42 lessons taught by 38 teachers, of which ten were joint observations with members of the school's senior team. They also observed an assembly and two tutor group sessions. Inspectors held meetings with students, members of the governing body and staff. Telephone conversations were also held with a school improvement officer from the local authority and two parents. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, and considered feedback from 470 parental and carers' questionnaires. They also took account of the views of staff and students in questionnaires they returned. They observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents including students' books, the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan, safeguarding policy and single central record, behaviour records, minutes of governing body meetings as well as schemes of work and other subject documentation from several subject areas.

## Information about the school

This smaller than average secondary school serves a wide and diverse area. The number of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is low. Within recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of students from minority ethnic groups and currently the percentage of students for whom English is not their first language is above the national average. Most of these students are Polish. The school meets current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

**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

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key Findings

- This is a good school. Attainment is high across the whole range of subjects, but especially in English and mathematics. It is not yet outstanding because overall achievement is only good. Although most students make good, and at times, outstanding, progress in many of their lessons, there remain inconsistencies in a minority of classes and in some subjects where progress is less than good because monitoring information is not used effectively enough to support improvement.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding and some that is satisfactory. Pockets of weaker practice were identified across some subjects, and in some classes. Teachers exhibit good subject knowledge and the majority makes good use of learning time and keeps students challenged and engaged through a range of activities. Most students have very positive attitudes to their learning.
- Overall the school is a well-ordered and safe environment where everyone is part of a 'big family'. Behaviour in classes and around the site is exemplary and reflects the caring and respectful Catholic ethos that permeates the school. Relationships around the school are strong and the school is a harmonious place in which to learn. The spiritual, moral and social development of students is a strength of the school. Attendance is good and improving and students are well-supported by a pastoral system which is well-organised and effective.
- Leaders and managers across the school have a strong commitment to raising achievement and improving teaching and learning. Systems to monitor quality of provision better have been established. However, despite some very effective practice, monitoring and tracking information is not being used sharply and robustly enough by all senior and middle leaders to ensure consistently good teaching, marking and achievement across all subjects in the school.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good and outstanding by:
  - ensuring that all teachers, in all subjects, have high expectations so that all lessons are challenging, engaging and support student learning
  - ensuring that teachers' questioning engages all students, encourages their active participation in lessons and promotes discussion and thinking
  - providing students with consistently good written feedback so that they are clear about what they need to do to improve in all subjects
  - providing relevant and well-planned teaching programmes which ensure not only coverage but also develop depth in learning.
  
- Ensure that quality assurance processes and monitoring and tracking information are used sharply and robustly and are implemented consistently by both senior and middle leaders to secure:
  - an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school
  - a reduction in the variation in performance between different subjects and teachers
  - consistently good and better teaching and marking
  - sharing of best practice to promote further improvement.

## Main Report

### Achievement of pupils

Overall the attainment of students on entry is higher than the national average. Teachers ensure that students are very well-prepared for their examinations and they gain GCSE results which are well-above the average. Progress and outcomes are particularly strong in English and mathematics. However, although never less than satisfactory, progress is weaker in a number of subject areas, notably science, the humanities, art and design and modern foreign languages - particularly French. Although progress in the majority of lessons was good, inspectors also noted variations in lessons across classes and subjects. There is no significant difference in the achievement of students from different ethnic groups. The Polish students who make up the largest group get good support to overcome any language difficulties and make good progress in line with that of their peers. In general, girls tend to outperform the boys. Although very few in number, students with disabilities and those with special educational needs are fully integrated into school life and make progress generally in line with that of their peers because they are successfully supported.

The greater majority of students enjoys school, shows maturity and is keen to do well and succeed. They concentrate well in lessons, particularly where the work is interesting and well-planned. They particularly enjoy practical lessons where they can interact with each other. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, where students had to imagine they were castaways on a desert island, they experienced a varied range of practical activities which provided a rich stimulus for discussion and writing. Students' memorable learning moments are often linked to out-of-classroom experiences such as the retreat to Savio House, the geography field trip to study rivers or to their successes representing the school at sport. Students develop very good skills in reading, writing and numeracy which equip

them well for the next stage of their education as well as the world of work. Most of the parents and carers who completed inspection questionnaires accurately identified the 'high expectations' from the school, how students' 'abilities are nurtured and challenged' and agreed that their children achieve well.

## Quality of teaching

Teaching is good overall. Most parents and carers feel that their children are taught well and are very pleased with outcomes in examinations. Although some teaching is outstanding, there is also some which is only satisfactory. Most teachers are committed and have good subject knowledge. Students are very positive about the majority of their lessons but are also aware that a minority could be improved. As one student pointed out 'you need to get all the teachers to be as enthusiastic like the best ones'. There are clear strengths in teaching. The high quality of relationships ensures that students are engaged and motivated in the majority of lessons. The best quality teaching captures students' interest, is challenging and stimulates thinking in a variety of contexts. This was especially evident in practical lessons in drama and physical education (PE) as well as in English. In these lessons, the energetic response from students was clear evidence of their enjoyment. There were also numerous opportunities to engage in collaborative activities and open discussion which support students' moral and social development well. Positive questioning drew students into active discussion, provided time for reflection and enabled them to develop their ideas and thinking.

In the minority of lessons where teaching was satisfactory, teachers dominated and controlled the learning to the extent that students were guided to the correct solutions and answers. They became passive recipients of information and ideas rather than being enabled to think for themselves. Questioning was directed at individual volunteers and it was easy for a student to become distant and detached. These lessons were focussed on task completion, might include low level interpretation, copying or materials which lacked relevance or were dated. For example, in a history lesson, students spent too long watching a video and completing a factual comprehension exercise. This involved a simple transfer of information, with no opportunities to discuss or develop understanding before moving on to the next task. In a geography lesson, students were using dated materials linked to the Kobe earthquake, rather than more topical and relevant evidence. In such lessons, planning does not always stimulate good learning, but often focuses on coverage of content.

Students' work is generally marked regularly and constructively and there is also some very good practice, especially in English, where there is a good balance between praise and useful comment which clearly informs students how they are doing. However, in some cases, teachers' comments do not provide sufficient guidance on how work might be improved.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour is exemplary and is a strength of the school. As one parent explained 'the school teaches respect - respect for their local community and respect for their peers both inside and outside the school'. In classrooms, students are courteous and well behaved in line with the school's expectations and its Catholic ethos. Students are well-motivated and hard working. Students feel safe in a school which is 'warm and friendly and feels like a primary school'. It is an 'environment in which everyone knows everyone else'. This view is

supported by the overwhelming majority of parents and carers. Students showed a good understanding of the impact of bullying and were able to say with confidence that it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. All incidents are logged carefully and the number has reduced over time. School staff are very effective in working with outside agencies to provide support for vulnerable students. An example of this is the bespoke 'Respect' training developed in conjunction with the fire service for a group of Year 8 boys. The rewards system is very effective and has motivated students from all year groups to engage both as individuals and as members of a house.

Attendance is good and improving with persistent absence reducing. There are very good systems in place to alert staff and to contact parents and carers. This has been central to improving attendance. Punctuality is also very good at the start of the day and at lessons. Students attribute their enjoyment of school to the effective pastoral support they receive. They, and their parents and carers, praise the work of teachers and pastoral heads highly and consider this to be 'a caring school with a nurturing environment' which promotes their spiritual, moral and social development extremely well.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher's ambition and passion to ensure that all students are well cared for and achieve well in a supportive Catholic environment are shared by all staff. There is a clear vision and an ambition to become outstanding. Systems have been established to monitor and track students' progress and to monitor the quality of provision. However, there remain some inconsistencies in the rigorous application of these processes. Weaker practice may have been identified, but challenge has been more random. For example, in science and the humanities there is a less systematic and consistent approach to lesson observation, scrutiny of work and curriculum planning which results in weaker outcomes for students. Effective systems have been established to disseminate good practice in response to the previous inspection. Some excellent teaching practice has been shared, but has not always been applied across all subjects.

The curriculum is of good quality and offers students a very wide range of courses at Key Stage 4 that equip them with the skills, knowledge and qualifications to progress to their next stage in education or work. On leaving school, few students are not in education, employment or training. The school provides a reasonable range of extra-curricular opportunities, especially in sport. Participation levels are high. Links with the local community and similar schools in the local area are well-developed and mutually supportive. The school has not yet developed strong links with contrasting schools in localities both at home and abroad to support students' understanding that they are world citizens and that they live in a multi-cultural society better.

Care and equality are at the heart of much of the school's work. School policies and practice promote equality of opportunity. This supports the spiritual, moral and social development of students well. As one parent stated, 'It's a place where my child wants to be'. Particular care is taken to ensure the rapid integration of students who join the school, especially those whose first language may not be English. Links with parents and carers are much improved and the recent influx of Polish students has been welcomed and well-supported.

The governing body provides effective support and challenge. Safeguarding procedures, particularly required staff checks and child protection training, are very robust and fully

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meet requirements. Governors work well in partnership with school leaders. The school has improved several aspects of its work since the last inspection and there is a firm track record of good achievement. There is good capacity to improve. Parents and carers consider that this is possibly 'the best high school in the area without a doubt'.



## 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see ).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



23 April 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic High School, A Specialist School for Maths & ICT, Crewe, CW2 8AE**

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your experiences in lessons, what you enjoyed and how you were treated and looked after. You frequently asked us what we thought about your school. We judged that it is a good school and you have much that you can be proud of.

You, your parents and carers, are full of praise about the caring, Catholic 'family' ethos and sense of belonging which is helping you achieve well and attain excellent results in your public examinations, especially in English and mathematics. Teaching in most of your lessons is good, with some that is satisfactory and some that is outstanding. The very good relationships that you have with your teachers and with each other make the school a welcoming and safe place in which to learn. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent.

A very wide range of courses is available for you to choose from in Years 10 and 11. A large number of you also participate in sporting and other activities provided by the school and you are well-respected in your local community for your charitable work and the positive way you conduct yourselves. You are excellent ambassadors for your school.

We think the school is well-placed to become even better. In order to do so, we have asked the school leaders to improve monitoring of provision in classrooms so that best practice is shared and developed in order that all of your lessons are stimulating and challenging. We have asked teachers to improve questioning, increase your participation in lessons and mark your work more consistently and informatively. Your teachers are determined that they will continue to strive to improve your lessons and make them even more interesting and meaningful. With your help and co-operation I am sure the school will continue to provide you with a caring and supportive environment in which to learn. On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for your future lives and careers.

Yours sincerely  
Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector

