

St Thomas More Catholic School and Sixth Form College

Greenmoor Road, Nuneaton, CV10 7EX

Inspection dates 11–12 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The majority of students make good progress in both their academic and personal development.
- The school has a track record of high pass rates in examinations and of students making good progress.
- Teaching and learning are good in all areas of the school and some teaching is outstanding.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and display excellent subject knowledge, and students are interested and learn well as a result.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and develop excellent working relationships in the classroom.
- The sixth form is good. In its second year of operation teaching and learning are good and improving, and it offers a wide choice of subjects to its students who are making good progress.
- The students enjoy being at school and behave very well. They are safe and know how to stay safe. Incidents of bullying of any kind are very rare.
- Students respect one another and celebrate each others' successes. They respond well to the very strong atmosphere of respect and compassion.
- The new headteacher is supported by a strong team of leaders who work well together.
- Subject and year team leadership is also strong and, as a whole, the leaders have demonstrated the ability to improve teaching.
- Governors are totally committed to the success of the school and offer high levels of support to leaders, staff and students.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In some lessons, teachers do not give students work that is at exactly the right level for them, so progress slows.
- Some leaders and managers are not yet consistently effective in the way they review and improve teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 48 lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits to lessons as part of themed learning walks.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, representatives of the local authority and school staff, including middle and senior leaders.
- Inspectors analysed the 311 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection.
- They observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the monitoring of the quality of teaching, performance management documentation, minutes of governors’ meetings, records relating to attendance, behaviour and safety and bullying, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional inspector
Kim Bower	Additional inspector
Janet Harvey	Additional inspector
Richard Sutton	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The number of students on roll has been stable for a number of years but has now increased as a result of the recruitment of students to the new sixth form. The school is now average in size for a secondary school.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below average, as are the proportions supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The school accesses additional vocational education for some of its Year 10 and 11 students through North Warwickshire and Hinckley College.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The current headteacher, having previously been a deputy headteacher at the school, took up post one week before the beginning of the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013, ensure more consistently good and outstanding teaching improves students' achievement by:
 - ensuring teachers use assessment information to more closely match learning activities to students' needs
 - improving the quality of questioning to probe and challenge, and so deepen students' understanding
 - ensuring that steps to success in the school development plan are always focused sharply on students' achievement and fully evaluated.
- Improve the leadership and management of teaching and learning by ensuring that systematic and robust monitoring and tracking of performance are used consistently across the whole school.
- Improve the leadership and management of behaviour by ensuring that bullying incidents are analysed systematically.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the school with standards that are well above average. They make good progress in all year groups as a result of good teaching, high expectations and an ethos of achievement.
- Results at the end of Year 11 have been high for a number of years, including the last validated data in 2011. The proportions of students making and exceeding expected progress are above national figures.
- The school's own tracking of pupil progress, as well as evidence from observations of learning, confirms that all groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs and pupils supported by additional funding are currently achieving well.
- Regular collection and careful analysis of data ensure that the school is able to tackle any discrimination, so that gaps in achievement for vulnerable groups are closing.
- Students are given many opportunities to read and they read well. A number of students observed reading in Year 7 did so with great fluency and were keen to talk about their choice of book. Other students, who struggled a little more, were able to use their phonics learning to sound out words and made good progress.
- Achievement is not outstanding because teaching does not always challenge every student fully enough to enable them to make rapid and sustained progress over time. As a result, not all students are always learning exceptionally well.
- Students develop a wide range of skills in writing, communication and mathematics across all subjects. Oracy is a particular strength in many subjects where students are enthusiastic to speak and present their work to their fellow students.
- Students respond particularly well to assessing each other's work. In a Year 10 physical education lesson, students used the skills descriptors to assess the work of their peers and feed back on their performance. This resulted in an immediate improvement in students' performance and rapid progress.
- Learning and progress in the sixth form are good as a result of carefully chosen and varied activities that promote independent thinking and enquiry.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The overall quality of teaching over time is good. Teachers develop very positive relationships which enhance students' moral and social development. They foster a positive climate in the classroom that encourages students to succeed and to share in one another's success.
- The best teaching helps students to make rapid progress because learning is designed from the individual's starting point and challenges them at a pace that suits their particular needs. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson the teacher not only used data about students' abilities but also her assessment of their interpersonal skills to create effective working groups. As a result, students made rapid progress.
- This level of challenge is not always evident, however. In a number of lessons the work students were asked to do was not well enough matched to their ability levels, and as a result progress was slower and not sustained.
- In most subjects teachers demonstrate high expectations, good subject knowledge and a passion for their subject. This ensures that activities are stimulating and provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding. A student's question in a Year 12

geography lesson was met by the teacher with a counter-question which developed into a highly effective coaching exchange.

- This quality of questioning is not apparent in all lessons and in some, the level of challenge provided by questioning was limited because the teacher did not take the opportunity to probe the students' understanding with additional or more targeted questions.
- Students appreciate the regular assessment and feedback they receive about their work and say that it helps them to improve. Marking observed during observations of lessons was indeed regular and much included information about the next steps students should take to improve, but in a small proportion of cases it was less specific.
- Teachers routinely assess students' progress during lessons using a variety of strategies, and then adjust the learning to meet the needs of students.
- Parents and carers are very clear that teaching is good at the school and pupils generally share this view.
- In the best lessons, teaching assistants are closely involved with the lesson planning. As a result they are deployed well and set tasks that are highly effective in accelerating the progress of the students they work with.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and improving. Class sizes are generally small and teachers take advantage of this in offering personal interventions and challenge at every opportunity.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The majority of parents, carers and students confirm that good behaviour is the norm and the school is a safe place to learn. Expectations of behaviour are high and consistently reinforced by all adults and the prefects, who take their responsibilities very seriously.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the site is good. Students are courteous and polite. They respect each other and move calmly and quickly between lessons, arriving punctually and ready to learn.
- Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons are often outstanding. There are few incidents of poor behaviour or disruptions to learning, although students report that these occur occasionally in Year 10 and 11 lessons.
- Students feel safe in school and enjoy coming to school – as shown in their consistently above-average attendance. The curriculum supports them well in learning how to stay safe and they have a good understanding of the different forms bullying can take.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and students report that they are dealt with promptly and fairly. Bullying logs are maintained appropriately but incidents are not analysed in great detail.
- There have been no permanent exclusions in the last two years, and fixed-term exclusions are at very low rates and decreasing.
- Students' attendance at work-related courses away from the school site is managed well. Their behaviour and attendance are tracked and monitored effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher articulates his vision for the school with clarity and passion and he was a popular appointment amongst staff, students and parents and carers.
- The senior leadership team are highly capable. They are ambitious for the students and the school, and rigorous in their approach to the improvement of teaching and learning.
- Checks on the quality of teaching clearly identify strengths and weaknesses. Prioritising

sixth form teaching has meant that light-touch monitoring has occurred in other areas of the school in the last year. This has resulted in some minor shortcomings in the provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs not being identified or addressed. This has led to slowing of progress for a very small minority of individuals.

- Senior leaders regularly and systematically review and monitor the progress of initiatives and take actions to intervene. However, their formal recording of the success of actions taken is not sufficiently focused to support effective evaluation.
- Development plans identify appropriate targets for school improvement and set realistic timescales but success criteria have not always been written in terms of student outcomes.
- The large majority of school leaders are effective in monitoring the quality of, and supporting improvements in, teaching and learning. They form the core of a strong 'teaching and learning' group that leads on continuous professional development in the school.
- The performance management process is well structured. It very effectively links the needs of individuals and groups of teachers to good-quality continuous training, and informs decisions on movements up the salary scale.
- The broad and balanced range of subjects on offer generally meets the needs of the students, and is supplemented with work-related courses at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. This provision is monitored well by senior leaders. Literacy, numeracy and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are not so well coordinated. However, provision of these aspects and the experience of students in the classroom are good.
- Enrichment opportunities include a wide range of activities in which there are high participation rates. In a discussion with a group of Year 11 students, more than half had enjoyed at least one trip to a foreign country and all had taken part in a school residential programme, adding to their cultural and spiritual development.
- The school intends, as it grows, to offer a wider range of sixth form courses to more readily meet the needs of all its students. Subjects are well planned, and the school employs informal links with other schools in order to offer less popular courses.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this school, which was previously judged outstanding.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school, and this confidence ensures that the school is underpinned by coherent shared values which are deeply embedded in students' lives.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - governors systematically challenge school leaders on the performance information they receive to secure improvements in teaching and students' achievement
 - they monitor the performance management of staff closely
 - governors are mostly well informed about the financial arrangements of the school but less aware of the allocation and impact of the pupil premium.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	125758
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	400213

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	912
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Ison
Headteacher	Francis Hickey
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 February 2009
Telephone number	024 7664 2400
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