

# St Thomas More Catholic School

Darlaston Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands WV14 7BL

**Inspection dates** 28–29 November 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>3</b>
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although improving steadily, students' achievement varies too much from subject to subject.
- Too few students have made the progress of which they are capable in English by the end of Year 11.
- The progress of students in the sixth form is not good enough. Therefore the sixth form requires improvement.
- Teaching requires improvement. Some teachers give students work that is not suitable for them; sometimes the work is too simple for more able students and sometimes it is too difficult for other students.
- Some lessons move on too slowly, which limits students' progress.

### The school has the following strengths

- Both teaching and students' achievement are improving rapidly because of the good leadership and management of the headteacher, governors and other key staff.
- The school is a welcoming community, which encourages all students to respect others and behave well.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress because of effective support.
- Students are cared for well and they feel safe. They have a good understanding of how to manage risks to their own safety and that of others, including when using the internet.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons, of which nine were jointly observed with a member of the school’s leadership team. Inspectors visited other learning activities and scrutinised samples of students’ work.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students, school senior leaders, middle managers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.
- A variety of school documentation was examined, including the school’s own information about the 2012 examination results and the progress of current students, the minutes of the governing body, the school’s self-evaluation and development plans, behaviour and attendance logs, records relating to safeguarding, and records relating to the management of staff performance.
- Inspectors looked at records showing the development of students’ reading and heard the reading of a number of Year 7 students who had received additional support in literacy.
- Inspectors took account of a questionnaire completed by 49 staff, together with 32 responses submitted by parents and carers to the online questionnaire Parent View.

## Inspection team

Sean Thornton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Blakey	Additional Inspector
Dorothy Bond	Additional Inspector
Wiola Hola	Additional Inspector
Jalil Shaikh	Additional Inspector
Jean Whalley	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school serves a wide area of Walsall and Wolverhampton.
- An above-average proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is above the national average; the largest group is of Indian heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average but the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
  - plan tasks and provide resources that meet the needs of all students, making sure that work is demanding enough to challenge able students and not too difficult for the less able
  - ensure lessons have good pace so that all students are engaged
  - enable students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form to develop their skills as independent learners.
- Improve the achievement of students by
  - increasing the proportions of students making expected, and better than expected, progress in English in Key Stages 3 and 4.
  - ensuring that able students make faster progress
  - ensuring that students' achievement is consistently good in all subjects
  - accelerating the progress of students in the sixth form.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students generally join the school with average levels of attainment; an exception was the group who completed Year 11 in 2012 whose prior attainment was below average. By the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment remains in line with national averages, showing that students do not yet make the rapid and sustained progress that is required.
- Although the percentage of students who gain five or more GCSEs at A\* to C including English and mathematics increased from 2009 to 2011, the improvement is not secure; students' progress in English and mathematics is variable, and does not always compare well with national figures.
- At Key Stage 4, there is a large variation in the results gained by students in different subjects. In some subjects students achieve well while in others targets are not met.
- More able students have not made enough progress by the end of Key Stage 4; they do not fulfil their potential. The school has recognised this but the impact of the measures they have taken to increase the success of these students is, as yet, limited.
- The attainment of students in the school's sixth form is average.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is good. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson, a group of these students made rapid progress in their understanding of number value and then made a smooth transition into beginning to understand algebra. The large majority of students from minority ethnic groups also make good progress.
- The pupil premium funding is well targeted and is beginning to reduce the gaps in achievement between groups of students. The difference in average point scores between students who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not is less than that reported nationally. The pupil premium funding has been used to appoint teaching assistants in core subjects, to provide additional out-of-school learning sessions, to boost literacy, to enable eligible students to attend extra-curricular enrichments and to pay for examination re-sits so that their families are not disadvantaged.
- The school has introduced a range of improvement strategies, and many of the measures of GCSE attainment, for example capped point scores, are rising. The changes introduced into the sixth-form curriculum are helping some students make more rapid progress.
- Many students enter the school with weak skills in reading. Through a range of precisely targeted strategies, these students are now catching up on their peers.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching across the school is, as yet, of too inconsistent quality. There is too much variation in the quality of teaching between subjects and within subjects themselves. There are examples of good and outstanding practice, but this has not been shared effectively. In weaker lessons, the work is not always sufficiently well matched to the needs of the students in the class.
- Able students do not receive sufficient challenge in their lessons. The work provided is often too easy and teachers' questions too brief.
- School leaders have improved the systems for tracking students' progress but this information is not always used by teachers to plan their lessons. As a consequence, students make less progress than they should.
- In some unsuccessful lessons, teachers dictate too much of the lesson. Activities are too teacher directed, so students are not given enough opportunities to develop as independent learners. In other lessons, the pace is too slow, so students' progress is slower than it could be.
- All teaching observed in the sixth form was good or better and the students' progress in these lessons was better than that indicated by examination results. In a Year 12 health and social

care lesson, students were highly motivated by the teacher's engaging PowerPoint resources on 'approaches to health promotion'. They then worked very well in groups, demonstrating intelligent discussion and high levels of enthusiasm, and making outstanding progress.

- Some good and outstanding lessons were seen in Key Stages 3 and 4. In these lessons, students responded well to opportunities for active learning. For example, an information and communication technology lesson in Year 9 enabled students to make outstanding progress because of a combination of rapid pace, probing questioning, good behaviour management and the outstanding use of technology.
- The school's increased focus on the quality of teaching, and its impact on learning, is becoming established. This focus is improving the quality of teaching by providing mechanisms for sharing good practice, taking a proactive approach to any teaching that is less than good and making clear links to teachers' performance management.
- New marking systems, are now being adopted throughout the school. They provide detailed feedback, lead to reflection, and require responses from students. These systems are proving effective and are valued by the students who report that most teachers keep them well informed about their progress and targets.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- The school succeeds in encouraging students to behave well. Students enjoy school and are proud of it. Their attendance is consistently above average and they are punctual for their lessons, moving sensibly around the large school site.
- Staff, parents and carers agree that pupil behaviour is good and that pupils feel safe.
- The rates of exclusions are low and the school's own inclusion centre provides a highly effective alternative to external exclusions for the rare incidents of serious disruption.
- Students report that there is a small amount of misbehaviour in lessons but that it is dealt with effectively. They comment also that incidents of bullying, including cyber bullying, are rare and are dealt with promptly, adding to their feelings of security. Discrimination of any type, for example through racist or homophobic language, is not tolerated.
- There is a clear whole-school policy on behaviour and almost all staff manage students' behaviour well.
- Sixth-form students are good role models for younger students and make many contributions to the life of the school.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The headteacher's commitment to the school, and his high aspirations for all students, are shared by all staff. Senior leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have put in place strategies to raise standards, although it is too early to judge the impact of these strategies.
- Students' achievement, including in the sixth form, is regularly monitored and evaluated. This improved tracking is leading to accelerating progress but this rich source of information is not yet used fully in planning learning programmes.
- Systems for the evaluation of teaching are good. Most senior leaders are accurate in judging the quality of teaching, and new members of the senior team receive prompt and appropriate training. The results of these evaluations are used in planning a wide range of continuing professional development, which is leading to school improvement.
- The school's self-evaluation summary is well written and accurate in its analysis, so the school

itself has identified the major areas for further developments.

- The school's curriculum provides well for the needs and interests of its students. There is a variety of flexible pathways in the school's three-year Key Stage 4, and a strong commitment to developing literacy provides a sure foundation for students' progress. Students who complete GCSE courses in modern foreign languages or religious education in Year 10 are entered early for their examinations but this does not have a negative effect on their results. A very small number of students attend courses at other local providers where they make good progress. The sixth-form curriculum has been broadened so that it is now providing a wider variety of subjects, including vocational courses, so that students' achievement is beginning to improve. The curriculum is enhanced by a variety of enrichments, including educational visits and a range of after-school activities.
- The school works hard to raise the aspirations not only of its students but also of their families, and dedicated staff work hard to ensure contacts with all families. The school promotes all aspects of equality strongly.
- The system of performance management is effective and it has been updated to respond to government changes. Salary progression is taken seriously in the school and it occurs only when merited by performance.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is supported, both by the curriculum and by the wider life of the school. An assembly observed was led by sixth-form students; it included a prayer, reflection and discussion and was received with great attention and courtesy. There is an active school council and many examples of the school making contributions to the wider community.
- All aspects of safeguarding are fully met. All staff and governors take their responsibility to keep students safe very seriously.
- The local authority works closely with the school in programmes of evaluation and provides support in improving teaching in order to raise achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body shows a very detailed understanding of the school's strengths, weaknesses and priorities for improvement. Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching in the school; they realise that improvements are needed in order to raise students' achievement. There is a well-organised system of committees and of governors linked to both subjects and year groups. In their meetings, governors hold senior leaders to account and ask challenging questions. Governors manage the school's finances well, for example by ensuring that the pupil premium is targeted and used effectively. The governing body manages the performance review of the headteacher efficiently, ensuring that agreed objectives align with the main areas identified in the school's planning. They are fully involved in the performance management system for other teachers; all promotions, with their financial consequences, are discussed in a governor committee.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104259
<b>Local authority</b>	Walsall
<b>Inspection number</b>	404935

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary Aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1471
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	276
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Richard Dalton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sean Flynn
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18–19 January 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01902 368798
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