

St Thomas More RC College

Specialising in Mathematics and Computing

Town Lane, Denton, Manchester Lancashire, M34 6AF

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Students thrive in this school because all are welcomed and valued. Promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of the highest quality. School leaders and governors ensure that high quality learning is able to take place.
- Students achieve very well and for most, achievement in English and mathematics is outstanding. Provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is excellent; consequently, their achievement is at least good and sometimes outstanding.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection because school leaders have much better systems to monitor the progress of students and the performance of teachers. This enables more timely support and improvement.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching spread across subjects and very little is less than good. When teachers do not fully recognise the potential of their students and have high enough expectations, students' progress requires improvement.
- Almost all students are keen to learn and work diligently in lessons. When not directly supervised, students are polite, respectful and move around the school calmly and safely. Behaviour is good and students feel very safe. Bullying is rare and always quickly and effectively dealt with by staff.
- Staff work hard in the school to ensure all students' emotional, social and spiritual needs are met. Students who have been excluded from other schools have found the support they needed in this school and have achieved well. Where there is a need, staff also work very well with parents and carers to assist in developing their parenting skills.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Attainment of the most able students, although in line with national averages, is not yet significantly above.
- Results in design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages are not as good as those in other subjects within the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors worked with senior staff while observing teaching and learning and reviewing work previously completed by students. Inspectors observed 26 lessons taught by 25 different teachers. Inspectors spoke to many students during breaks and lunchtimes, and during lessons.
- Inspectors observed a school assembly.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior leaders and with staff. A discussion was held with an external advisor on school improvement. Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including internal and external data about students' progress, school development planning, behaviour and attendance records and students' work. They investigated safeguarding procedures and records.
- When planning the inspection, there were eight responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). A further 44 responses were made during the inspection and all were taken into account. Inspectors reviewed responses to parental surveys conducted by the school.

Inspection team

Neil Mackenzie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ramesh Kapadia	Additional Inspector
David Thompson	Additional Inspector
Mark Wilson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas More RC College specialises in Mathematics and Computing and Applied Learning. Students attend from a wide area including parts of east Manchester.
- The college is a smaller than the average-sized secondary school. More girls attend the school than boys.
- Since the last full inspection, there have been some staff changes, which include the appointment of three assistant headteachers.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is similar to the national average.
- Students are predominantly of White British heritage with an increasing proportion from other backgrounds including those who are new to learning English.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is smaller than that found nationally. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is significantly above average.
- The college is a provider of local authority support for students affected by autism.
- Fifteen students attend alternative provision to study a range of courses for part of their education at Tameside College. Two students receive full-time education from the hospital education service.
- The college meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the attainment of students in design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages so that it compares favourably with English and mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching in school so that all students, particularly the most able, achieve their full potential by:
 - ensuring all teachers have high enough expectations which reflect students' potential and ambition
 - ensuring all teachers use assessment information to plan learning activities that provide suitable challenge, precisely matching the needs and potential of every student in the class
 - ensuring all teachers evaluate students' understanding throughout lessons and respond by adapting activities when necessary
 - increasing the use of paired and group activities to create more opportunities for students to become fully active in lessons and develop the skills they require to learn both collaboratively and independently
 - ensuring that assessment and feedback given to students in all subjects are more frequent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Attainment of students on entry to the school has been broadly average, although currently students joining the school have levels of attainment which are higher.
- This is a school where most students have achieved consistently well for many years in most subject areas. Outstanding results in English and mathematics have been a particular highlight.
- Students have not achieved as well in design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages in the past. However, achievement for current students is improving in all of these areas, and in particular, within modern foreign languages.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including students who are affected by autism, is at least good and sometimes outstanding. This is because staff provide significant support for these students. The progress of students who attend part-time, off-site courses is accurately monitored, and they achieve as well as others.
- There has been a gap in performance between students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium and other students within the school. However, this gap in attainment is closing and the progress of pupils who attract additional funding is improving.
- While results for most students are significantly above average, the proportion achieving the very highest grades of A or A* is average.
- Students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) are very well developed. Almost all students move on to education, training or employment.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved across the school because school leaders have developed very effective systems to monitor student progress and the performance of teachers. Leaders and managers can now intervene when a student's progress begins to slow, and can quickly help them to catch up if they fall behind. The school provides a good range of professional development for teachers, all of which is well targeted to individual teacher's needs. Teachers value this support as the quality is good, and they believe it has improved their skills as teachers.
- Teaching is mostly good, with some being outstanding. There is a small minority that requires improvement.
- In the best lessons, students work enthusiastically and are encouraged to discuss their work with each other in order to solve problems and gain confidence. The teacher checks students' understanding and challenges them to think more deeply through very searching questioning. Students enter these lessons knowing they are going to learn and make rapid progress.
- In the weaker lessons, lesson planning is poor and teachers do not know what their students already understand, or what they are capable of achieving. Teachers tend to teach to the whole group rather than targeting work to the needs of individual students. Teachers do not analyse the responses of students and adapt activities to help students either overcome misunderstandings, or extend their understanding. Students do not always get the opportunity to discuss their work with others or to work in different groups, such as pairs or larger groups. Students do not learn quickly enough in these lessons.
- Teachers know how to give valuable written guidance on how students can improve their work. They ensure students respond to these comments positively and students resubmit redrafted and improved work. In some subjects, this cycle of assessment and improvement does not happen frequently enough. Assessment is not good enough in these subjects.
- Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the progress of all students, and those with specific needs in particular. For example, students who are new to learning English make rapid progress across all subjects because adults find the right balance between support and

developing independence. Similarly, there are no barriers to those students who are affected by autism, as their needs are met well. Almost all students have a highly developed sense of community and strong moral code. Consequently, they respect and care for each other.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- In the vast majority of lessons, student behaviour is at least good. Students listen well, are attentive and are rarely distracted. Students are keen to learn. There are occasional incidents of disruption within lessons but these are minor, short lived and distract very few students. If students complete a task, they tend to wait politely for further guidance for the teacher.
- When not directly supervised, students' behaviour is similarly good. Students generally show respect for each other and for their environment. They socialise well and most are confident when talking to adults. One student described behaviour around school as 'there's never anything serious, just a bit of mucking about'. Students also told inspectors that bullying is rare, it is in the form of name-calling and when it does happen it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Through surveys, parents say that they agree that behaviour is at least good. Students are taught how to recognise all forms of bullying and how to respond to them. All students feel there are many adults they can turn to for advice and support.
- An important aspect of the school's strong caring ethos is ensuring every student is safe whether they are on site or being educated off site. There is a strong element of personal safety taught through subjects, particularly in ICT, citizenship and practical subjects. Students say they are very safe in this school and parents agree.
- The school works with students to help them understand reasons behind misbehaviour and the consequences of it. The personal skill of reflection is actively promoted. Systems to monitor strategies to help students behave consistently well are very effective. There have been no permanent exclusions in recent years.
- As a result of strong school leadership and hard work by staff, students both enjoy and value their experience at school. Their attendance rates are high and they are almost always punctual.

The leadership and management are good

- The governors, school leaders and managers convey high expectations to staff and students. Attainment has risen since the previous inspection because of improvements in teaching.
- The school has an accurate view of its performance. Long term plans are good and actions taken to improve the performance of the school have worked well. Performance management procedures are highly effective in directing staff on how to improve their teaching and rewarding those who are successful.
- Recent improved leadership of the modern foreign language department has led to better teaching and is now beginning to accelerate students' progress.
- The school's curriculum is constantly under review. Alterations are made to reflect students' interests, ambitions and needs. Students' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are developed well across all areas of the curriculum. Students say that they are given very good information, advice and guidance particularly when choosing GCSE courses and when considering their future beyond this school.
- Provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is excellent. Staff carefully avoid protecting students from experiences they might encounter in their future lives, helping them to learn how to cope with different situations very successfully.
- The school values students from different faiths, cultural backgrounds and beliefs. There is no discrimination.
- Students' personal development is central to the school's work and all aspects enhance students' exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is an excellent range of enriching experiences including arts, sport science and community service. Students make

regular school radio broadcasts and produce a digital newspaper.

- The school seeks and welcomes external evaluation. The local authority recognises the school's strengths and acts as an agent to ensure surrounding schools can benefit from its expertise, particularly in developing leadership, improving results in English and mathematics and providing high quality care.
- The school works very successfully with parents who seek guidance on how to better support their child's education. It makes considerable and successful effort to make contact with parents who are reluctant to engage with school. The school also has excellent working relationships with a wide range of agencies.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors offer good support and challenge to the school. Annually, they review their skills and actively seek training or expertise to fill any gaps. Governors have a secure understanding of the school's performance and they know how it can improve. Financial aspects are well managed. Governors are well informed and have robust practices on pay progression related to quality teaching. They have been particularly careful to make sure the extra pupil premium money is making a difference to the achievements of pupils receiving this.

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	106271
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	403007

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	775
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter McDonald
Headteacher	Janet Burns
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2008
Telephone number	0161 3362743
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