

St Thomas More Catholic College

Longton Hall Road, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST3 2NJ

Inspection dates 30–31 January 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students in the main school and in the sixth form are not making the progress needed to secure good achievement.
- Some students do not make the progress expected of them in English and mathematics and few do better than this. Teaching requires improvement because not enough is good or better to secure good learning and progress.
- Lessons are not planned well enough to meet the needs of all students and expectations of the standards students can reach are not consistently high enough.
- The sixth form requires improvement as too few students reach high grades in their A level examinations at the end of Year 13.
- Leadership and management require improvement because not enough focus is placed on setting challenging targets for students and the drive to improve teaching is inconsistent across the college.
- Governors do not challenge leaders robustly enough to improve teaching and achievement. Also, they are not clear how actions taken will improve progress, for example, in relation to the use of pupil premium funding.

The school has the following strengths

- The college has improving teaching high on its agenda. Leaders have identified accurately the areas that require improvement and action taken is beginning to have a positive impact on students' learning.
- Students behave well, want to be challenged more in lessons and have positive attitudes towards learning.
- The pastoral care system is strong as is the support for disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- Governors are committed to improving the college and visit classes. They have a clear impression of the experience of students.
- Leaders and managers share a desire to do their best for the students. This shows in the positive promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons involving 37 teachers out of a possible 67. Four lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Two tutor periods were visited.
- Inspectors spoke to two governors, a representative from the local authority, senior leaders, staff and students from the college.
- Inspectors looked closely at a range of college documents including information relating to teachers' performance and minutes of governing body meetings. They also examined college policies, whole-school and departmental development plans, as well as taking note of the college's records of observations of the quality of teaching and the progress students are making.
- Inspectors analysed the 39 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and considered an analysis of 500 parental responses to a survey the college carried out in March 2012.

Inspection team

Pankaj Gulab, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Bimla Kumari	Additional Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Additional Inspector
James Kidd	Additional Inspector
Stephen Wall	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is slightly larger than average secondary school.
- The proportion of students entitled to the pupil premium (additional government funding to support students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of families in the armed services) is below average.
- The percentage of students for whom English is not a first language is close to the national average though the proportion that comes from ethnic minority families is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below average and those supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.
- The college uses alternative provision at Reach, Merit, Pure MX, Phoenix Learning, Sports Stars and Grounds Maintenance for a small number of students.
- The sixth form is known as the Trinity Sixth Form in recognition of the new partnership with three other schools from September 2012.
- The school is currently undergoing a partial rebuild as part of a national programme.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or better so as to enable students in the main school, particularly in the subjects of English and mathematics, and those in the sixth form, to make at least good progress by;
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve to secure good progress
 - teachers talking less at the beginning of lessons and helping students develop the skills that allow them to find out things for themselves
 - ensuring teachers' written comments make it clear how well students are doing and what they need to do next to improve, and that students act on this advice
 - encouraging teachers to further develop their questioning skills to challenge all students to think more deeply
 - insisting that teachers plan a range of engaging activities in lessons to better meet the learning needs of individuals.
- Improve leadership, management and governance by;
 - raising the targets set for all students to help them make at least good progress from their starting points
 - making sure that all plans, including the college improvement plan, clearly identify priorities to improve achievement
 - ensuring the impact of planned actions can be measured so that progress in making improvements can be easily checked across the year
 - ensuring governors use clear measures of performance to challenge leaders with increasing rigour, particularly with regard to setting targets and pupils' progress.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement. Students enter the college in Year 7 with standards that are broadly average and at the end of Year 11 leave with average standards, indicating that their overall progress is not good and that the college is not adding enough value to their learning. The percentage of students securing five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics has remained close to the national average for the past three years.
- The rate of progress students make in English and mathematics, given their starting points in Year 7, is not as good as it should be. The proportion making more than expected progress in these subjects is slightly below average. The college's current tracking of students' progress in Year 11 suggests that they are on course to make slightly better progress than last year.
- In about half the lessons observed during the inspection, progress required improvement. This was often because the expectations teachers had of how much students could do in the lesson was too low, resulting in challenge that was not high enough.
- Students in receipt of the pupil premium do well when compared to similar students nationally but not as well as students who do not receive it in the college. The average point score achieved by pupil premium students in the college in 2012 was 457 and that for those who do not receive it was 536. The percentage of pupil premium students who secure five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is lower than similar students nationally and much lower than their peers in the college who do not receive it. The college recognises that it needs to address this gap in performance as it does not reflect well on the promotion of equal opportunities and has put plans in place, such as one-to-one tuition, to support students in receipt of the pupil premium.
- Students who have special educational needs or disabilities made good progress in 2012 compared to those compared to other groups of students in the college. This was the result of some individual needs being identified early and the necessary support put in place to meet them. Clear tracking and interventions by the staff responsible suggests the college is on course to achieve a similar performance this year. Students for whom English is an additional language make progress similar to other groups.
- The college has used early entry for GCSE examinations in the past with some success but has significantly reduced this practice to ensure students get a deeper understanding of the subjects they study in order to better prepare them for studies in the sixth form.
- The small number of students who use alternative provision as part of their education are gaining appropriate qualifications and some are achieving well.
- Achievement in the sixth form is variable but overall requires improvement. In most subjects at both A level and AS level students broadly make the progress expected of them but the proportion reaching the highest grades is below the national average. In a small number of subjects, students do not perform as well as they should. The numbers of students who start a course in Year 12 and continue it in Year 13 is variable and not good in some subjects. Many students who choose to go to university are successful in their applications.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although inspectors saw a broad range of quality in the teaching they observed during the inspection, not enough teaching is of good or better quality needed to ensure students make consistently good progress in their learning, either in lessons or over time.
- In lessons where teaching requires improvement, the work set for students is often too easy and expectation of how much they can do is too low. The teachers talk for too long at the start of lessons giving students little opportunity to contribute. They fail to plan for the different needs of students and expect all students to do the same work at the same pace. Few opportunities are given for students to take charge of their learning so they become more reliant on the teacher.

The teachers drive 'doing' rather than learning. Progress is poorly checked leading to some students not fully understanding the work.

- By contrast, where teaching is good or outstanding, planning of lessons is detailed. A variety of activities are planned to involve students in different ways and with different challenges and regular checks are made on progress. Students know exactly what is expected of them and the pace and challenge of the work fully involves them. They are allowed to work in pairs of groups and draw on each other for support. Students feel they have been given responsibility for their learning and are proud of their work.
- All of this was seen in a Year 7 religious education lesson where a low-ability group tackled the topic of 'what a word is ...' and developed this to the theme of the word of God. The teacher along with teaching assistant conveyed care and challenge and developed students' thinking and communications skills so that students progressed to higher than expected levels, making outstanding progress.
- Marking and feedback to students across the college is variable and in too many lessons it does not let students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Even when this is done, time is not always given for students to act on any comments made.
- There is some excellent support provided by teaching assistants particularly for disabled students and those with special educational needs. In these cases, students make good progress. However, this is not the case across the college and some assistants are not clearly directed by teachers on how to best contribute to the learning in the classroom. As a result, their impact is often limited.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- In spite of some severe restrictions on space due to the current building works, students' behaviour around the college is good. They congregate in cramped spaces like the temporary canteen, leave it clean when they finish and make their way sensibly to lessons.
- Students conduct themselves well. They are polite and courteous to visitors and to each other. They willingly converse with adults and are honest in conveying their feelings about the college.
- Students spoken to are positive about the college overall but do feel they could be challenged more. An internal survey of student views involving over 1000 students in October 2012 showed that they are overwhelmingly supportive of what the college is doing.
- Students say they feel safe and are confident that the college will deal effectively with concerns they might raise. Students are aware of the various types of bullying. They know how to stay safe on the internet and when using other new technologies.
- The three-year trend for attendance is just above average though attendance in the current year is average. The numbers of students who are absent more than 15% of the time has dropped significantly and is on target to reach levels that are below the 2012 national average.
- The proportion of students out of school on fixed-term exclusions in 2012 rose compared to 2011 and is close to national averages. This was because a new policy was implemented which took a 'no tolerance' position on certain types of poor behaviour. The impact of this has been that behaviour has improved and students are clear about what is and is not acceptable in the college. They have taken to the new requirements well with the trend in fixed-term exclusions dropping in the current year.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders and middle leaders share a common desire to do their best for the students in their charge. This has enabled them to develop a pleasant, safe environment in which both students and staff have the opportunity to interact. However, the targets set for improving students' performance are not challenging enough and do not secure good achievement.

Although the college feels some success in meeting these targets, they do not reflect good progress by students.

- The success subject leaders have experienced in meeting these less than challenging targets has meant that some have been less focussed than they should have been on improving the quality of teaching in order to further raise achievement.
- The weaker aspects of teaching have been identified by the college's teaching and learning group and actions are now being taken to address these, with positive impact on students' learning. Senior leaders were accurate in their judgement of lessons when joint observations with inspectors were undertaken.
- Performance management arrangements are now robust and challenging. Every teacher has the target of teaching an outstanding lesson in addition to others related to student progress.
- The college has made some curriculum changes both in the main school and in the sixth form although it is too soon to fully evaluate their impact. Changes at Key Stage 4 will move the emphasis towards GCSE courses in line with national guidelines. In the sixth form, the college has entered into a partnership with three other institutions. Initial indications are that this will increase the choice of subjects and bring opportunities to share good practice with closer and more effective monitoring of progress.
- The college promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and events including charity fundraising for local, national and international causes.
- Safeguarding arrangements are securely in place and enhanced to ensure students are safe in an environment where building work is scheduled for some time. The welfare, safety and attendance of students on courses with alternative providers are checked regularly.
- The views of 500 parents who returned questionnaires in March 2012 were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the college's work. The analysis of the 39 questionnaires completed on Parent View suggests parents have broadly positive views but on some aspects there are more mixed opinions. The college is popular in the local community and regularly oversubscribed.
- The local authority has limited direct engagement with the college but plays a positive role in the partnership of secondary institutions across the city, who meet regularly. The college is a key player in this organisation. Several professional development courses are run by college staff for the wider education community. Partnership working is strong.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very supportive of the college and give readily of their time as evidenced by their monthly meetings. They fulfil all their statutory duties. Through the link governor role, they observe teaching on a regular basis without making judgements. However, they rely too heavily on the senior leaders for information on the overall quality of teaching and achievement of students, including the setting of targets. They accept college improvement plans and other plans like the pupil premium plan without rigorously challenging the outcomes of actions being proposed. They are appropriately involved in performance management but they have not looked carefully at the profile of staff that has passed through the threshold and the impact they have on the progress students make.

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	124465
Local authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	403558

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,090
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	W Davies
Headteacher	M Nugent
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
Telephone number	01782 234734
Fax number	01782 234898
Email address	office@stmcc.net

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

