

Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College

Urban Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 8HT

Inspection dates 19–20 June 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Overall, students make outstanding progress. Standards have risen steadily over time and students' achievement across the range of subjects is consistently above average.
- In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five GCSEs grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was exceptional and among the very best results nationally.
- Teaching is outstanding because teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Teachers benefit from outstanding training opportunities which help them to keep on improving their skills and developing their leadership potential.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding because students' attitudes to learning are exemplary. Attendance is above average because students are happy at school. Students value the support and encouragement offered by staff.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching across a number of subjects, including: English, mathematics, religious education, science and physical education.
- The headteacher sets high expectations for staff and students. Leaders are relentless in their drive to ensure that standards continue to rise through the rigorous monitoring of teaching and tracking of students' progress.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because the school's Catholic ethos promotes an accepting, respectful and caring school community.
- Governors provide senior leaders with an outstanding level of challenge, particularly in making sure leaders are held to account for students' achievement.
- The new sixth form is good and improving rapidly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons, 15 of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, groups of students, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 249 parents who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire. They analysed the results of the staff questionnaire to which 85 replies were received.
- Inspectors analysed the 2012 examination results and the published results for previous years. They looked at the school's data on students' progress, lesson plans, minutes of meetings and records relating to behaviour, safety and attendance. They also reviewed the school's checks on how well it is doing and school improvement plans.

Inspection team

Lisa Fraser, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Derek Barnes

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Barbara Dutton

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Clive Hurren

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is average in size.
- The majority of students are from White British backgrounds; White and Black Caribbean, Irish and students from any other White background are the largest other minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school was designated as a National Teaching School in March 2013.
- The headteacher is a national leader in education (NLE).
- The school works with national organisations including Future Leaders and Teaching Leaders.
- The school supports eight primary schools and five secondary schools to help them improve the quality of teaching, students' achievement and school leadership as part of the National Leader in Education programme.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Ten Key Stage 4 students attend off-site alternative provision for part of their learning, which includes courses in motor vehicle maintenance, hair and beauty, and construction at Trafford College, Manor High School and Education Business Solutions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement even further by:
 - continuing to support students to achieve more A and A* grades through the 'Good to great' programme
 - ensuring that students' achievement in the new sixth form is outstanding by maintaining the same excellent levels of rigour in tracking students' progress as in other areas of the school's work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students join the school with average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 11 students' overall achievement across a range of subjects has been significantly above average over a sustained period.
- In 2012, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was truly exceptional, placing the school among the very best results nationally. Current data indicate that students' achievement across all year groups is similarly strong.
- There are varied reasons for these outstanding results which include the school's high ambition for students and senior leaders' close tracking of students' achievement, particularly in English and mathematics. This leads to highly effective targeted support that enables all groups of students to fulfil their potential.
- Early-entry in GCSE mathematics is successful because considerably more students make expected progress than average. As a result of the school's 'Good to great' programme which supports students to reach the top grades, increasing numbers achieve A* and A grades.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action plus make above average progress overall. Excellent one-to-one and small group teaching sessions, often led by higher level teaching assistants, are greatly effective in ensuring these students meet and exceed ambitious targets for their achievement.
- Pupil premium funding is used very effectively on a range of initiatives which include one-to-one tuition in English and mathematics, and subsidised visits and activities. As a result, the gap between these students and their peers in school closed markedly in 2012. Students are now less than a third of a grade behind their peers in English. In mathematics, current data indicate that students supported by the pupil premium are actually outperforming their peers by a tiny fraction. Senior leaders are committed to tackling disadvantage and ensuring equality of opportunity for all students.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well because students who join the school with low reading ages make outstanding progress. For example, in reading these students have made an average of 14 months' progress in only three months.
- Senior leaders work hard to make sure that teachers in all subjects help students to improve their literacy and numeracy. All staff have received training in phonics (linking the letters with the sounds they make) and as a result, students make exceptional progress. For example, one student made 46 months' gain in reading in just one year.
- Well-trained teaching assistants support students' numeracy development very successfully because Year 7 students targeted for extra help have made an average of two years' progress in five months.
- A small number of students study off site for part of their learning. Their attendance is well-monitored by school leaders and these students make good progress.
- In 2012, students' attainment in the newly established sixth form was good. Projected A-level results for this year look even stronger because the school insists on high standards.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because senior leaders monitor teaching rigorously and set high expectations for teachers.
- Teachers have outstanding subject knowledge and make very good use of information about students' prior attainment in their planning; this means that lessons match the needs of each individual student and ensure their outstanding progress. A variety of innovative resources, including information and communication technology, are used skilfully by teachers to develop

students' understanding. Homework tasks build effectively upon students' learning in school.

- In all lessons relationships are outstanding and students rise to the challenges their teachers set. One student remarked enthusiastically, 'Sometimes my brain explodes because I'm thinking so hard'. Students cooperate exceptionally well with each other in pair and group work which develops both their subject knowledge and social skills.
- Senior leaders have led a strong whole-school focus on improving students' literacy and numeracy. As a result, all teachers provide opportunities for improving speaking and listening, reading, writing and calculation skills in lessons.
- Outstanding teaching was observed during the inspection across numerous subjects including: mathematics, religious education, science and physical education.
- Teachers' marking is thorough and consistent across all subjects because there is a clear whole-school approach. Students speak positively about how the quality of advice they receive helps them improve because teachers' feedback is regular and detailed. As a result, students feel they are making progress and take a real pride in their work.
- In the sixth form inspirational teaching in English and philosophy and ethics lessons ensures that students make outstanding progress.
- In a tiny minority of less effective lessons students rely too much on the teacher; there are sometimes not enough opportunities for students to show their initiative.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students are happy at school because the school community has an outstandingly positive ethos. In lessons students' attitudes to learning are exemplary. Students know what is expected of them and are enthusiastic, motivated and keen to do well.
- Excellent monitoring and intervention systems are making sure that both attendance and persistent absence show even more improvement. Attendance is already above average for all groups of students, including those in alternative provision.
- Any behavioural issues are quickly addressed through the recently introduced house system. As a result, fixed-term exclusions are well below average. No permanent exclusions have been recorded for some time.
- Arrangements for students' safety are very secure. Both students and their parents say they are safe at school and that bullying is not an issue. Students show a good understanding of the dangers of bullying in all its forms, including that based on racism and homophobia. Lessons in information and communication technology emphasise how students can keep themselves safe online.
- Around the school and in the canteen, students are courteous, well-mannered and respectful of staff and each other. Students self-manage their behaviour well and live up to the school's high expectations.
- Students are given many opportunities to develop their leadership skills by getting involved in school life. For instance, students can apply for the positions of form representative or prefect. Recent changes to the school uniform have been led by the school council.
- In the sixth form students' attendance is outstanding. Students are exceptionally positive about how the school has helped them to develop their knowledge and skills. Sixth formers are good role models who take an active participation in mentoring and supporting younger students.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding because of their close focus on the quality of teaching and the impact this has had on raising students' achievement.
- The headteacher provides strong leadership because he is ambitious for students. Together with his senior team, he has ensured that all aspects of the school's work have maintained the highest levels over a sustained period of time.

- Developing the leadership potential of all members of staff is central to the headteacher's vision. An excellent range of leadership training programmes, led by the associate headteacher, has ensured there are examples of outstanding leadership at all levels, including in the sixth form and in the leadership of behaviour.
- Self-evaluation indicates that leaders know the school well, are not complacent and are continuing to drive the school forward. School development plans give an excellent level of detail about exactly how teaching will be improved. Senior leaders have the full backing of staff because they are outstanding teachers who lead by example.
- Outstanding systems for monitoring the quality of teaching are well-established. Teachers' Standards underpin the school's approach to lesson observation and performance management. Improving teaching is an agenda item at every meeting of senior leaders. Middle leaders are fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas.
- Performance management is a model of excellent practice and is used to inform decisions around pay and reward good performance. Targets are appropriate for teachers at every stage in their careers and link clearly to actions identified in the school development plan.
- Teachers' development needs are supported by outstanding training opportunities. For example, all teachers have benefited from the Developing Outstanding Teaching Programme which includes workshops delivered by senior leaders that are designed to help teachers improve their skills.
- Support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is having real impact because inspectors observed examples of outstanding teaching delivered by NQTs during the inspection.
- The range of subjects is broad with a good balance of academic and vocational subjects which meets students' needs.
- Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding because both a strong work ethic among students and good pastoral support have been established in a relatively short period of time.
- Other schools highly rate the support they receive from school leaders to improve their quality of teaching as part of the school's involvement in the National Leader in Education programme.
- Good support has been provided by the local authority to assist the school's work in raising achievement in English, geography and literacy.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, reinforced by the school's Catholic ethos. All staff model the school's values of ambition, diligence and integrity in their interactions with students. Both staff and students who have received 'The heart of Blessed Thomas Holford' award wear their badges with pride.
- Students are also encouraged to understand and empathise with the beliefs of others, particularly in religious education lessons which tackle a range of contemporary issues in a thought-provoking way.
- Students appreciate the wide range of after-school activities and sports clubs. A significant number of students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.
- All safeguarding requirements are met. Staff are fully trained and knowledgeable about risk assessment and child-protection issues. The school takes all reasonable steps to ensure the behaviour and safety of students when attending off-site provision.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body knows the school well and provides senior leaders with outstanding levels of support and challenge, particularly around students' achievement. Governors are exceptionally well-organised through an effective committee structure and take swift action to address any areas of concern. The governing body is knowledgeable about the quality of teaching, how staff are rewarded and how underperformance is tackled. Governors understand the success the school has had in raising the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium because information is clearly available on the school's website. Governors are committed to supporting the school by attending appropriate training, most recently safeguarding training delivered by the local authority.

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	106376
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	413311

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	1,009
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Hope
Headteacher	John Cornally
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2008
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