

St Thomas More High School

Kenilworth Gardens, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0BW

Inspection dates 3–4 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Although the academy reaches national standards overall at the end of Key Stage 4, students do not achieve well enough in English language, religious education, foreign languages and history.
- Overall students are not making enough progress, from Year 7 to Year 11. This is particularly the case in English and for students who join the academy with standards which are average.
- Not enough teaching is consistently good and outstanding. Some teachers are not clear enough about what they want students to learn in the lesson.
- In too many lessons, all the students do the same work. For most students, this means that work is too easy, but, for a few, it is too difficult, and teachers rely too heavily on additional adults.
- The quality of marking is too variable and it is not used to make sure that all students work at the right level in lessons.
- Information about how well different groups of students are doing is not always used effectively by teachers in lessons.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy is a welcoming, family community where staff and students show respect, tolerance and concern for others.
- Behaviour is good and students feel safe. Students display good behaviour and are keen to do well.
- Attendance is above average and improving.
- The sixth form is good. Students are exceptionally well prepared to take their next steps in education, training or employment.
- Under the leadership of the interim headteacher, senior leaders have made key improvements in achievement, teaching, behaviour, the sixth form, the curriculum and support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- The governing body is supporting and challenging the academy in making rapid and sustained improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 part-lessons, taught by 37 teachers. Six lessons were observed jointly with academy leaders. Inspectors also attended two registration periods, one of a religious character.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and subject leaders, teachers, four groups of students and governors. Telephone conversations were held with the academy adviser and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including the academy’s documents on safeguarding and finance, governing body documents, the academy’s view of its own performance and plans for future improvement. In addition, the inspection team examined the academy’s information on how well students are doing, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents used by the leaders to evaluate the academy’s work.
- Inspectors considered the 99 responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire, and 35 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Anne Pepper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Stanton	Additional Inspector
Karen Kerridge	Additional Inspector
Ian Starling	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas More High School is an average-sized secondary school.
- It is an academy trust in the Diocese of Brentwood. It has a mixed sixth form which makes up a quarter of the students. Most students are White British.
- St Thomas More High School converted to become an academy on 17 August 2011. When the predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2008, its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium is below average. This additional funding is given to schools for children who are looked after by the local authority, children with a parent in the armed services and those known to be eligible for free school meals. The academy has a very small number of students who are in the care of the local authority.
- The academy uses alternative provision provided by Southchurch Vocational College (YMCA), Crown College and South East Essex College.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The previous headteacher left in April 2012. A new headteacher, the previous interim headteacher, was appointed in April 2013. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and will start in September 2013. A new member of staff responsible for managing the provision for students identified with special educational needs was appointed in January 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to at least good in order to raise the achievement of students in a range of subjects, but particularly in English, by:
 - eradicating inconsistencies in the quality and frequency of teachers' marking of students' work
 - ensuring that teachers are specific about what students at all levels are expected to learn in a lesson
 - using information from marking, assessment and targets to set tasks at the right level for each student in the class
 - systematically tracking the progress students make from their different starting points and intervening early to ensure that all groups of students make good progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because the progress made by different groups of students is too inconsistent and not enough students make good progress overall. Progress is not good enough in English for students who join the academy having achieved Level 4 at primary school and those students eligible for the pupil premium.
- Students start at the academy having achieved above-average standards overall. They leave having achieved well above average standards in mathematics, science, geography, art, computer studies and English literature, but not in English language, religious education, history, or foreign languages.
- The percentage of students in Year 11 gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics improved to 65% in 2012. The academy's information about current students' progress suggests that the trend of improvement will continue. The academy does not enter any students early for GCSE examinations in English or mathematics.
- Students from different ethnic backgrounds do as well as other students. Leaders keep a close eye on the progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. As a result, these students make the progress they should. The academy can point to notable examples of students who have succeeded against the odds.
- A small number of students in Year 10 have attended alternative provision provided by the Southchurch Vocational College (YMCA), Crown College and South East Essex College. These students are now successfully integrated into the main academy provision ready for Year 11. The academy carefully checks how well they are doing and this shows that they are doing as well as they should. There are no students currently studying anywhere other than at the academy.
- Pupil premium funding has been used to provide extra classes, additional staffing and support for educational visits. In 2012, the gap between this group's attainment and their classmates was over one year in English and 2 years in mathematics. Current information for Year 11 students shows the gap has narrowed considerably and, for current Year 10 students, the gap has almost closed.
- Reading is promoted well in the academy and students read widely and often. Dedicated additional time and support is provided for some students. All students have their reading books on their desks in every lesson and read at every opportunity. Impact is seen in lessons as well as the good outcomes for English literature in 2012.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. As a result of careful checks, current Year 13 students made good progress in Year 12. In 2012, results at AS level were significantly above national figures in a range of subjects. Results at A level were in line with the national average in most subjects. Current data shows that students in Year 13 are improving in line with the increases they have already shown at AS level. These improvements are most in evidence in English literature, religious education and history.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching in the academy requires improvement because students are not making

as much progress as they should. There is not enough consistently good and outstanding teaching to enable students to achieve well over time.

- The quality of marking has improved but there is still some variation. The best, for example in Year 10 geography, contains high-quality written feedback which gives students a clear indication of the grade they are working at, whether they are on target, and guidance on how to improve their work. Other examples included a target sheet in the front of the book to provide an ongoing summary for the student. However, some work was marked very sparsely or only with brief comments.
- Where teaching requires improvement, all students do the same work. In most cases, this means that the majority of students in the class are finding the work too easy, but, in a few cases the work is too difficult for some students. Teachers rely too heavily on additional adults in the class.
- Where teaching is good, teachers are using marking, assessment information and the students' targets to ensure that learning in lessons is carefully matched to students needs and it is made very clear to students what they are expected to learn in the lesson. For example, in two Year 9 science lessons and a Year 10 mathematics lesson, students received very specific individual feedback on a recent mock test and the rest of the lesson was well planned to target specific areas and ensure all students at all levels made good progress. This is not typical, however. There remain too many lessons where teachers do not make it clear to all students what it is they are expected to learn in the lesson.
- Although there is further to go, lesson observations during the inspection, the academy's own information about the quality of teaching including that provided from external reviews, and staff, students' and parents' views all indicate that teaching is improving. This is as a result of improved professional development, including processes for observing teaching and giving feedback, and the use of external observers.
- There is a strong focus on developing skills in reading, writing and mathematics. 'Green pen' marking is used to improve literacy skills in students' books as well as for students to annotate and review their own work. Mathematics is used well across the curriculum, as shown by the strong results in science and geography.
- Students in the sixth form receive good-quality guidance and support, so that most students stay on from Year 12 to Year 13. As a result, students are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students typically behave well in lessons and around the academy and there is strong participation in the range of other activities available at lunchtime and after school. They are proud to wear the academy uniform and the special braids on their blazers and ties that denote prefects.
- Students' good behaviour in lessons is linked to teaching that is active and engages their interest. Students respond well to working in pairs and groups. They cooperate well when the teacher chooses the pairs or groups in order to promote a particular aspect of learning.
- Attendance is consistently well above average and continues to improve. Significant improvements have been made in the last year in punctuality with the use of a 'late gate', where

students receive a sanction for being late to school.

- Students feel safe in and around the academy because teachers apply behaviour policies consistently and have high expectations for how students should behave in their lesson and around the school. Incidences of all types of bullying or racist incidents are extremely rare. Students and parents are confident that any bullying is dealt with effectively.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well through a range of activities inside and outside the classroom. For example, in class, teachers use art to encourage students to reflect on life and spirituality. The second day of the inspection was the annual St Thomas More Feast Day. Students joined visitors in sports, religious and other events, reflecting the values and strong community of this academy. The academy was overall winner of the Shine 2013 school media awards for their school magazine, set up to make a profit to be donated to a local charity.
- Sixth form students show personal responsibility in volunteering to act as learning mentors to younger students.
- Fixed-term exclusions were too high in 2012, but have halved this year as a result of actions taken by heads of year and robust monthly monitoring by senior leaders.
- Only rarely do students lose concentration in lessons, and this is when the work does not fully match their capabilities.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher, while in an interim role in the past year, has quickly identified and taken decisive action to improve achievement, teaching, behaviour, the sixth form, the curriculum and support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Staff, parents and governors all comment on the more positive approaches being taken in the academy, with greater openness and better communication at all levels. They attribute this to the headteacher's clear and non-negotiable expectations for students, staff, teachers and leaders.
- Appraisal has been effectively used in the past year to set and monitor suitable improvement targets for all teachers as well as eradicate any weaker teaching that remains. Academy records show that leaders who have taken on new roles and leaders appointed during this year are performing well.
- The curriculum has improved and is good. Students can choose from a range of suitable examination courses at Key Stage 4. There is improved take-up for triple science and foreign languages for current students in the academy. The flexibility of the different choices for students is strength of the academy. This means that students with talents in the arts, performing arts, technical or work-related subjects have the opportunity to achieve well.
- The school has strong partnerships with its local schools and community. During the inspection, many schools, students, parents, governors and other visitors came into the school. There was a Deanery Mass, the St Thomas More Feast Day celebrations, and a group of primary pupils studying mathematics and information and communication technology for two days.
- Senior leaders hold subject leaders to account effectively and there has been an improvement in

the achievement of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs and those who are eligible for the pupil premium. Subject leaders check the quality of teaching and link it to the progress that students make over time. However, subject leaders have not ensured consistency in the approaches being used by teachers to monitor students' progress towards their targets in different subjects.

- The academy make good use of external support. It commissions external reviews and acts on the findings, as can be seen by the improvements in teaching and in provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The school adviser and local authority know the school well and have a strong understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher has a mentor from another local Catholic school. Leaders recognise that the school would benefit from some additional support on the analysis of progress tracking data for groups of students including disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors make a strong contribution to the good overall leadership of the academy. They took the initiative in commissioning external reviews and in the process leading to the appointment of a new headteacher. Governors know about the overall quality of teaching and the link between teachers' pay and students' progress, and the use of appraisal including the appraisal of the headteacher. Governors are beginning to take more advantage of academy freedoms, including reviewing their pay policy. They use a range of data about the academy's performance to reward and challenge senior leaders and to check on what is done to reward good teachers and tackle underperformance. The governing body ensures that arrangements for students' safeguarding meet the current regulatory requirements.

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	137310
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	413431

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1017
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	269
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Barry
Headteacher	Gemma Ackred
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01702 344933
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