

# St Thomas More Catholic School

Croftdale Road, Blaydon-on-Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE21 4BQ

**Inspection dates** 9–10 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
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

- It provides students with high quality education, linking outstanding academic achievement to splendid personal development. An exceptionally strong Christian ethos pervades the school.
- The sixth form is outstanding: students do exceptionally well and reach high standards.
- Students of all abilities in all year groups consistently make more than expected progress in a very wide range of subjects.
- GCSE and A-level results are well above national averages.
- There is an exceptionally positive and supportive learning atmosphere throughout the school.
- Teaching is consistently good and very frequently outstanding.
- Very occasionally the pace of learning slows when teachers take too long to give explanations and instructions or do not fully hold the interest of middle- and lower-ability students, especially, boys.
- Students are very eager to learn and participate fully in extra-curricular activities, particularly music, drama and sport. They are justifiably proud of their school.
- Behaviour is almost always impeccable. Students conduct themselves in a very mature manner in class and when moving around school at breaks and lunchtimes. They are polite and helpful and really respect their teachers.
- The school provides a very safe setting for students' education.
- Outstanding leadership and management at all levels, including the governing body, ensure that the school consistently provides high quality teaching that promotes outstanding achievement.
- Parental surveys reveal a high level of satisfaction with the school.

## Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, inspectors observed 36 lessons, including three joint observations with senior staff.
- They looked carefully at a wide range of students' written work
- There were meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, senior staff, middle managers and several groups of students.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide variety of documentation, including the school's checks on how well it is doing, the development plan, analyses of students' attainment and progress and safeguarding records and procedures.
- They took account of 102 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as 104 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

John Paddick, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Mark Simpson	Additional Inspector
Mark Patton	Additional Inspector
Nigel Drew	Additional Inspector
Peter William Harrison	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Thomas More is a larger than average-sized secondary school and has a large sixth form.
- Almost all students are White British.
- Proportions of students supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are all below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium is below average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- A small number of students attend vocational courses at TDR Engineering Training.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- St Thomas More Catholic School converted to become an academy in February 2012. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.

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

- In a very small proportion of lessons, improve the quality of learning by:
  - increasing pace, by ensuring that teachers do not take too long with explanations and instructions
  - ensuring that teachers use the most effective approaches which fully engage the interest of middle- and low-ability groups, especially boys, by using some of the school's outstanding classroom practice as a model to follow.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is outstanding

- Students make outstanding progress and achieve highly in a very wide range of GCSE, AS, A-level and vocational courses. The proportions exceeding expected progress including in English and mathematics are high. They join Year 7 with above average attainment in English and mathematics and proceed to gain GCSE results which are well above the national average. The picture is similar in the sixth form where students build on the very strong foundation provided by their GCSE work to attain well above-average results at AS and A-level.
- GCSE results rose in 2013 compared to 2012. Well over a third of all results were graded A\* or A. This represents very high achievement for the school's most-able students. More than four out of every five students gained five GCSE results in the range A\* to C, including English and mathematics, which represented excellent achievement for students of a wide range of ability.
- The school used early entry for GCSE mathematics in 2012 to students' considerable benefit. Those who had not reached their target grade received extra help and another opportunity to succeed in 2013. Students who reached their target grade at the first attempt went on to study finance, statistics GCSE or mathematics modules of higher-level study to act as a bridge towards A level.
- In 2013, the school's A-level results also rose compared to 2012. Around two thirds of all results were in the range A\* to B and virtually all entries resulted in grades between A\* and E. These results combined with students' well-developed study skills ensure that they are well equipped to continue their education at university.
- The school's excellent tracking system shows that high standards are being maintained and that all groups of students are making at least good progress and many are doing better than that. This was confirmed through inspectors' visits to lessons and a scrutiny of students' work across all subjects. The school sets demanding targets for students of all ability and monitors their progress with precision. Any perceived slippage triggers effective intervention. The tracking system also ensures that students on TDR Engineering courses also do well.
- The school is using its pupil premium funding exceptionally well. It has frequently bought in individual tuition for students who are in danger of falling behind and has substantially reduced the gap in GCSE performance in mathematics and English between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other students. This reduction is reflected in the current tracking figures which show that students supported by pupil premium are progressing at the same excellent rate as other students and reaching similar high levels of attainment.
- Male and female students of all abilities, disabled students and those with special educational needs all achieve at least well compared to these groups' national averages. The few students whose literacy or mathematical skills are well-below average on entry to Year 7 soon catch up. For example, inspectors found, by listening to students reading, that even the weakest in Year 9 could read fluently with expression and relatively good comprehension.
- Students have excellent attitudes to learning, and take a pride in their work and present it well. There are many examples of high-ability students reaching quite exceptional standards. For example, some design portfolios in GCSE textiles are of quite stunning quality. High-quality work in art is displayed with pride in several locations within the school. Students express themselves fluently and accurately both orally and in writing in a wide range of subjects. When they need to use their mathematical skills they do so with confidence, for example in science.

### The quality of teaching

### is outstanding

- The school maintains high-quality teaching in all year groups, including the sixth form. This is evident through the excellent quality of students' written work that inspectors scrutinised during the inspection and the lessons that they observed. It is also reflected in the outstanding examination results.

- The school's lesson observation record indicates that virtually all teaching is at least good and that a good proportion is outstanding. This closely matches the inspection team's findings
- Teachers demonstrate fully the qualities outlined in the National Teaching Standards. Their expectations of students are high and planning is precise and extensive. They think carefully how best to use the available lesson time with a sequence of activities designed to interest and fully motivate their students. Teaching approaches are highly effective as teachers cater fully for all students' needs. Consequently, students make at least good and frequently rapid progress, developing new skills quickly and acquiring knowledge and understanding at a fast pace.
- All teachers explain work clearly and virtually always ensure that there is a good balance between their input in lessons and their students' activity. Class management is outstanding and frequently provides students with an excellent atmosphere for discussion and debate. Teachers check to ensure that all of their students are making at least good progress.
- In many lessons, teaching is of the highest quality rather than just being good. In these lessons, the teacher ensures that a huge amount of learning takes place in a very short time. Students are not just fully engaged, they are frequently spellbound through the compelling nature of the teacher's presentation and explanations often incorporating splendid visual stimuli or music. Their motivation and drive is so strong that they then respond by quickly taking ownership of their own learning and debate in groups and pairs to a high level.
- In a very few instances inspectors observed parts of lessons where the pace of learning declined. This occurred when teachers took too long with explanations or used approaches which did not fully engage the interest of average- and below-average ability students, usually boys.
- The marking of students' work is of good overall quality. Teachers frequently indicate how the quality of work relates to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades so students know how well they are progressing in relation to their targets. Marking usually picks up errors and frequently indicates where the student has made spelling mistakes with key words. Teachers expect and receive written work that is almost universally well-presented. In the best practice in the school, teachers clearly indicate to students what they need to do to improve their work and then follow this up to ensure that they have acted upon the advice they have provided.

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

- Students in all year groups including the sixth form display exceptionally positive attitudes in the classroom and conduct themselves in a very mature manner when they are socialising or moving around the site. They are exceptionally eager to do well and to participate in all of the activities that the school offers them. Examples of this are the very large numbers of students who participate to a high standard in sport, drama and music. In the classroom they relate outstandingly well to each other during discussion and debate, and fully recognise that teachers and their assistants go out of their way to ensure that all their needs are fully met.
- Virtually all parents who responded to Parent View say that behaviour is at least good. This very positive view is endorsed through the staff questionnaire and through speaking with the students themselves.
- On the rare occasions that individual students' conduct falls below the school's very high expectations, members of staff are extremely effective in putting measures in place to improve it. As a result exclusions for poor conduct are low.
- Inspectors interviewed many groups of students during the inspection. They say that they are happy in school, feel safe, and recognise that it provides them with an excellent education. They have a good understanding of the different types of bullying. Bullying, they say, is rare and if it does occur they are perfectly confident that members of staff will be successful in eliminating it. Students fully understand the potential risks posed by stupid conduct, alcohol, drugs and the internet. They confirm that behaviour in class and at breaks is virtually always good.
- Attendance is above average and persistent absence low. This is partly because the school takes very effective action to monitor attendance patterns and eliminate absence and also because the

students enjoy their education at St Thomas More and recognise its high quality.

## **The leadership and management** are outstanding

- St Thomas More Catholic School is very successful because the headteacher leads it in outstanding fashion. He knows what constitutes a high quality of education, combining academic success and excellent personal development in a school with an exceptionally strong Christian ethos.
- He very effectively shares this very clear vision with his senior team, managers at all levels and staff. He is particularly well-supported by his strong senior team and the group of very effective middle leaders who help him to ensure that his vision is translated into reality and sustained. The staff questionnaire shows that morale is excellent and that members of staff at all levels are proud to be associated with such a successful school.
- The school has effective methods of checking on how well it is doing, so managers know where there are real strengths and areas which still need to be improved. There is no room for complacency. When improvements are deemed necessary, high profile action plans with timescales chart intended progress and clarify how developments are to be monitored and evaluated. For example, any dips in examination results at GCSE or A level are taken very seriously, examined in detail and eliminated quickly. An example of this is the way that the school has improved the academic standards reached by students supported by pupil premium so that by Year 11 they are the same as those reached by other students.
- Management of teaching is effective in maintaining high standards in the classroom. Managers monitor lessons accurately and provide teachers with areas for improvement if their teaching is deemed to be good rather than outstanding. Performance-management arrangements are robust and effective.
- Leaders have designed a splendid curriculum which provides an excellent balance between large numbers of GCSE, AS, A-level and vocational courses and a very wide range of extra-curricular activities designed to widen students' horizons and increase confidence. For example, when students arrive in Year 7 they are provided with musical instruments and a route towards developing excellent playing. Equality of opportunity has a very high profile and the nature of the curriculum is pivotal in very strongly promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Careers education very effectively provides students with all the information that they need to make informed decisions about the next stage of education or the world of work.
- Safeguarding meets all requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have a very clear view of the school's strong characteristics and know what still needs to be improved. They rigorously challenge managers and play their part in ensuring that high standards are maintained and that performance-management arrangements are effective.
  - They have a clear understanding of how well the school is doing with examination results in relation to national averages and students' progress.
  - Governors have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and ensure that teachers merit salary progressions and promotions.
  - They can explain how they know that the school uses its pupil premium funding effectively, and they have a good understanding of the way that managers do all they can to close gaps in performance between groups of students or subjects.

## 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>	137851
<b>Local authority</b>	Gateshead
<b>Inspection number</b>	426015

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>	Academy converter
<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>	1,530
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	310
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Patrick Chinnery
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jonathan Parkinson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 499 0111
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