

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy

Lynn Road, North Shields, Tyne and Wear, NE29 8LF

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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.

- The school continues to improve because of the success of the headteacher and senior leaders in improving the quality of teaching and raising students' achievement.
- Attainment across many subjects and for all groups of students is high. Different groups of students achieve well and the gap between those for whom the pupil premium applies and their peers is narrowing.
- Teaching is mostly good and a significant minority is outstanding. Relationships between students and staff are exemplary, which helps to ensure purposeful learning across the school.
- Students' behaviour is good and they have positive attitudes to learning. They feel safe and secure and have confidence in their teachers' abilities and support for them.
- Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the school. They are proud to work there and speak highly about the support they receive from leaders and governors that help them to further their careers and excel as practitioners in the classroom.
- The school's specialism of mathematics and computing supports students' learning and contributes well to their confidence and skills.
- The sixth form is good and most students make good progress from their starting points. Leaders in the sixth form are aware of what still needs to be done to enhance further the provision and students' achievement.
- There is a wide range of programmes on offer to students at all levels enabling them to support their learning outside normal school hours. These include sports, revision and international links. All of these contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement by middle-ability groups in English and mathematics, and for some other groups across a range of other subjects, is not yet improving as rapidly as it might.
- Teaching over time is not outstanding due to inconsistencies both in the rigour of teachers' marking and the challenge for the most able students, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons, six of which were carried out jointly with school leaders, as well as carrying out learning and behaviour walks across different areas of the school.
- Students' progress and the teaching they receive over time was assessed through inspectors' scrutiny of work in books and folders during lesson observations and a separate scrutiny outside lessons.
- Inspectors observed support for Year 7 students' reading at the school's own early morning reading club.
- Documents were examined and these included, the school's own view of progress and its improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings, case studies about individual students, and other documents relating to safeguarding. Information about students' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour was analysed. Parents' views were taken into account through the 69 responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View), the school's own recent survey of 492 parents and one letter received by the inspection team from a parent.
- The views of staff were taken into account through the 52 questionnaires received. In addition, the views of the students were considered through meetings with a range of Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and sixth form students.
- Discussions were held with newly or recently qualified teachers, a range of senior leaders, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, as well as governors.

Inspection team

Colin Scott, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lesley Powell	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hargreaves	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Frank Cain	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy converted to become an academy school in December 2011. When its predecessor school, St Thomas More Roman Catholic High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- It is situated in North Tyneside and is much larger than most other secondary schools. Students come from a wide area with many travelling in from outlying wards and the school itself sits within St Oswin's Deanery.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds with very few, but a growing proportion of students for whom English is their second language.
- The school holds mathematics and computing specialist status and receives placements from the National College of School Leaders for aspiring headteachers. It holds many types of recognition including the Sportsmark, Healthy School status and the International School Award.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is slightly below average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care, and the children of service families.
- The school does not currently make use of alternative provision for students and has its own internal exclusion unit to support good behaviour and attitudes.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement for groups of students in a range of subject areas so that all groups make equally good progress, by:
 - clearly identifying underperforming groups of students in all classes, for example, some middle-ability students in Key Stages 3 and 4 across subjects, and then using that information to support the planning and provision for those students within lessons
 - increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching over time, in particular through more appropriate and challenging work targeted at the most able students in Key Stages 3 and 4
 - ensuring that all marking is regular, informs students how to progress and allows them to reflect on advice given.
- Improve the ability of leaders at all levels to further increase the proportion of teaching which is outstanding across all subjects areas and to ensure that achievement is high for all groups, by:
 - supporting subject leaders' understanding of the levels of students' progress and by being able to identify what constitutes 'high' levels of progress within their subject areas
 - improving planning for all abilities within lessons, by making more effective use of the key student tracking information that the school already collects
 - further developing understanding and strategies across the school for using all types of data to identify any slowing in progress or patterns of behaviour so that any issues that may occur can be addressed quickly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter Year 7 with above average attainment. They make good progress and leave at the end of Year 11 with high attainment. The number of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is higher than the national average and rising. In 2012, this stood at 77% compared to 58% nationally and in 2013, it was 78% compared to 60.2% nationally. This demonstrates high attainment. However, for a significant number of middle-ability students, the proportion exceeding the expected progress in English and mathematics is not rising rapidly enough to match the progress of other groups. Similarly, in other subjects some students are not making sustained good progress.
- In the few subjects where progress has not been as strong in the past, leaders have been quick to take action and reverse the decline. For example, attainment in French has significantly risen and the number of students gaining GCSE grade A* to C has increased markedly in the last year.
- The numbers of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding achieve almost as well as their peers and better than typically found nationally. The school continues to reduce the gap in attainment between those students known to be eligible for free school meals and others in the school. The pupil premium funding is used appropriately to provide targeted support and monitoring.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used well by school leaders to support improvements in students' literacy by, for example, paying for summer reading and writing activities to support students' move into the school from Year 6.
- The gaps in achievement between boys and girls are small and the same applies to those students identified as having a disability or a special educational need and others in the school. Overall, the progress of the most able students is good but some, in Key Stages 3 and 4, do not achieve as well as they might.
- Those students who are identified at school action, school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs are making good progress overall. However, those supported at school action do not make such good progress as those students who are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs.
- Reading was encouraged in all subject areas observed during the inspection. However, there are still some teachers who do not always exploit opportunities to support students' literacy skills. For example, an analysis of science books shows that the misspelling of key words and terminology is not always corrected, despite regular marking taking place.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Senior leaders are clear about the need to drive standards even higher and, specifically, how they can do this by enhancing the curricular provision and supporting the quality of teaching in more lessons in order for it to be outstanding. Achievement of the most able students in the sixth form is strong, particularly in mathematics. Success rates in the sixth form in 2012 were high at 93.9% compared to the national figure of 82.1%. In 2013, compared to 2012, students in the sixth form reached their targets and the average points score rose significantly at A-level. This evidences strongly the improvements being made.
- Good progress was confirmed during the inspection by reviewing students' achievement in a range of subjects over a period of time. Evidence considered included information from work in books, and Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 data over the last three years from published information and that supplied by the school.
- Some students are carefully selected and are thus appropriately entered for early entry in GCSE mathematics examination.
- Progress in reading is strong and students' literacy is very well supported through activities, such as the early morning reading club and through targeted literacy programmes across the school. This is having a very positive impact on students' ability to access learning, to use key terminology in subjects and to prepare them well for their next stages in learning and for their adult life.
- The school has recently introduced a new online tracking system to record progress, which it

believes will enhance leaders' ability to check more rigorously on the achievement made by individuals and groups of students. However, this has not yet had time to be fully implemented or integrated successfully across all areas of the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching across the school is usually good, with some lessons that are outstanding. During the inspection, no inadequate lessons were observed and there was only a small number that required improvement. In the sixth form, all lessons observed were either good or better with half being outstanding.
- Analysis of inspection data, including that supplied by the school, as well as work scrutiny and lesson observations, enabled inspectors to assess accurately the quality of teaching over time. The proportion of teaching that was outstanding was variable across key stages and was highest in the sixth form. The most scope for improvement in the proportion of outstanding teaching is in Key Stage 3.
- Teachers know their subjects well and authoritatively impart that knowledge to ensure effective outcomes for students. Students respond well, are confident and ask searching questions of their teachers to deepen their understanding of the subject they are studying.
- Good teaching means that students' attainment is rising steadily. Progress is most rapid when teachers:
 - skilfully use prior information and data about individual student's progress to inform their planning and then set work that carefully matches the needs of each student
 - set high expectations that consistently challenge students
 - set tasks which stimulate the students' interests and motivate them to learn more
 - adapt their lessons appropriately, taking into account the learning they observe and the responses students make to questions used by staff to check on students' understanding.
- In the best lessons observed, students were encouraged to reflect on their understanding. This was supported through accurate and informative assessment that established exactly what students needed to do in order to move on to the next stage in their learning. The clear and aspirational targets set were clearly understood by students and supported their thirst for learning. Also in these lessons, tasks were set that motivated students to learn and they showed a strong love of learning. However, in a significant number of lessons, some tasks were less challenging and students passively took part without displaying the same levels of motivation.
- Marking is regular and in the best practice, students are left in no doubt about how well they have done, the level at which they are working, and how to improve further. They are given time to reflect on this. However, this is not evident in all classes or subjects.
- The growing number of students who speak English as their second language are identified and supported well in all lessons because teachers and teaching assistants ensure that they can access learning opportunities equally.
- Many lessons support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students by allowing them to reflect on the subject within the context of real-life situations. In a further mathematics lesson, for example, students knew implicitly how integration is used within engineering, allowing them to understand how the topic supported working life.
- Teaching assistants are deployed extremely effectively in classes. They know exactly what their role is within the lesson and provide effective support to assist the progress of those students who are identified as having a particular need.
- Responses from Parent View, from staff questionnaires and from meetings with students show that parents, teachers and students believe that the young people are taught well at the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are extremely courteous and respectful of each other and of staff. Similarly, staff have a high regard for their students and care for them well. This results in classroom behaviour that is usually supportive of learning.
- Around school and in social areas, the environment is calm and productive. During the inspection, evidence indicated that behaviour in and around the school was never less than good. Students say that behaviour is usually good.
- The school keeps accurate records of all incidents and students say that there is rarely any bullying and that, should it occur, they feel confident that the school will deal with it quickly.
- Students are skilled in recognising how to be safe in and around school, in practical lessons, and when using new technologies. They say that they are very safe and this view is supported by parents who responded to Parent View. The school has been keen to embed, both through its programme of assemblies and in its ethos, support for students to stay safe.
- The school is very inclusive and has robust systems and published policies in place that staff know well in order to promote acceptance of all groups within society and to tackle any discriminatory or negative language. On the rare occasions that language is used in any negative context, it is tackled swiftly. The school's own inclusion unit is used well to support those students, who find conforming to the school's moral and social ethos more difficult than most, to overcome their difficulties.
- The school is extremely supportive of all groups of students and staff regardless of faith, belief, race, disability or sexuality. There are clear case studies and strong examples where the school's inclusive ethos has supported well particular groups of students who have required help in dealing with personal issues.
- Attendance is high and there is no group of students whose attendance is less good than other groups in the school. Absence levels are lower than those in similar schools and persistent absence rates are half that of similar schools. Students recognise the importance of good attendance and punctuality.
- Fixed-term exclusions are lower than that of similar schools and permanent exclusions are rare. The school operates its own inclusion unit to reduce and prevent exclusion and this continues to work well, reducing exclusions over time.
- The school's ethos strongly supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of life in the community and in the wider world, enabling students to be confident, caring and supportive young people.
- In the best lessons, students clearly display a thirst for acquiring new knowledge and are excited about their learning. However, this is not always the case and sometimes students' behaviour is more passive and leads to a slowing of their progress. This is more evident in lessons that require improvement.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and governors have high aspirations for their students and staff. They know what needs to be done in order that achievement can continue to rise for all groups of students.
- Leaders apply rigorous performance management systems that continue to impact positively on the quality of teaching. However, they recognise that there is a need to continue to drive improvement in teaching to ensure that it is of the highest possible quality.
- The headteacher delegates responsibilities astutely and this supports the development of the senior team well, whilst also ensuring that she keeps a clear view of their performance.
- Senior leaders are skilled in checking on the quality of teaching taking place in lessons. During joint observations, leaders' judgements were found by the inspection team to be extremely accurate. However, more emphasis on the learning and progress of students needs to be given when judging achievement and teaching over time.
- Middle and senior leaders keep regular records of individual student's progress. However, these systems are not yet consistently used by teachers in order to set work that is appropriate for all groups within the class. Similarly, leaders at all levels need to be more sharply focused as to how

that data can be used to target and support particular groups of students, in order to bring about further and continued improvement in their achievement, for example, in middle-ability groups in Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Students speak highly of the opportunities available to them in the school. They give examples of how the curriculum usually inspires them and of the extra learning activities available out of school hours, such as sporting activities and international visits. They say the curriculum is good and matched to their needs and interests. Inspectors agree. Despite this, the school is keen to explore continuous improvement in the curriculum to ensure that it always matches the needs of students. Overall, the school's promotion of equality of opportunity is good.
- The work of both the headteacher and deputy headteacher has been a key factor in ensuring that students and staff at all levels feel, and are supported. Teachers are keen to stress that there are numerous opportunities made available to them so that they can enhance their careers and classroom expertise.
- The school continues to receive external challenge and support from North Tyneside local authority, as well as from a serving headteacher from a school in a neighbouring authority. It says it values this support and inspection evidence corroborates the view that this arrangement is providing opportunities for leaders at all levels to continually reflect on what needs to be improved and how to do it.
- All statutory requirements regarding to safeguarding are met, both on and off site.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and the attainment levels reached by students. The governors interpret achievement data well and use this knowledge to help to challenge senior leaders in the drive to continue to raise students' attainment. They also hold leaders to account for the performance of staff at all levels.
 - Governors are aspirational for the school and continually seek further opportunities to be more involved in life at the school. The school responds well to this by offering training and support to allow them to carry out their role effectively.
 - Governors have a good knowledge of how the pupil premium, Year 7 catch-up and other funding are used to bring about positive outcomes for students.

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	137734
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	426016

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1,640
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	323
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fred Stimpson
Principal	Diane Donkin
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0191 258 8340
Fax number	0191 200 6336
Email address	info@stmacademy.org.uk

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