

St Thomas More Catholic School

Darlaston Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV14 7BL

Inspection dates

7–8 January 2014

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

- The quality of teaching requires improvement as it does not ensure that students make good progress.
- Students' attainment in mathematics is in line with the national average, but not enough students make good progress.
- Students' achievement in geography and modern foreign languages is not good.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Not enough teaching is good enough to support students to make good progress.
- Expectations of students are not always high enough to challenge the most able.
- Some teachers do not use information they have about students to make sure that work is matched to their interests and abilities.
- Not all teachers follow up work with students. As a result, marking and feedback from teachers have limited impact in some subjects.
- Exclusions remain significantly higher than the national averages.
- Leaders' and managers' evaluations of their work are sometimes too generous. The impact of actions is not reviewed often enough and information is not always used to inform the next steps to raise achievement and standards.
- The link between funding and the impact on students entitled to the pupil premium is not always clear.

The school has the following strengths

- Good relationships are evident in classrooms. Students say that they feel safe in school. Bullying is dealt with effectively.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and most are pleased with the improvements that are being made.
- Teaching and achievement are improving in many areas and most rapidly in English.
- The new headteacher is driving changes in the school to further promote positive attitudes.
- Leaders provide extensive support for those teachers who need help. As a result, teaching and achievement are improving.
- Governors are perceptive and ask challenging questions of the headteacher and senior leaders in order to secure improvements..

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 40 lessons, of which 21 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to year assemblies and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the school’s leadership and management, and groups of staff.
- Members of the inspection team held meetings with six groups of students representing all age groups in the school. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- Additional meetings were held with the Chair and other members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work and scrutinised documents including the school’s own evaluation of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan and statistical information about students’ achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- There were 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 86 responses to the staff questionnaires. Additional comments were received from parents, and consideration was given to the views expressed by families in response to the school’s own surveys completed by almost 800 parents.

Inspection team

Rob Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Mark Shenton	Additional Inspector
Glenn Goddard	Additional Inspector
Steven Goldsmith	Additional Inspector
Valerie Fehners	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form and specialist status for business and enterprise.
- It serves a wide area of Walsall and Wolverhampton.
- Over 60% of the students are from White British, Irish or other White or mixed White backgrounds. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is above the national average. The proportion of students who speak English is above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Around 12% of the students are disabled or have special educational needs. The proportion of students supported by school action is average and the proportions identified with school action plus and those with a statement of special educational need are below national averages.
- A small number of students are enrolled on alternative programmes operated by the Jane Lane College, Shepwell Centre and Orchard Centre.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- The school exceeds current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has recently seen a number of significant staff changes. In the last year, the school has been led by three different headteachers. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in April 2013 and September 2013 respectively.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is typically good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have higher expectations of all students
 - use the information they have on on students' prior learning to plan for the next steps in the students' learning so that work is hard enough for the more able and the least able are better supported
 - follow up the marking of students' work to check that students have acted on the comments and can show that they have a better knowledge and understanding of their work.
- Improve the achievement of students by:
 - ensuring that they make good progress in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4
 - supporting all students to achieve well in geography and modern foreign languages
 - building on the improving picture in the sixth form so that more students make good progress and achieve good outcomes in most A- and AS-level subjects.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders and managers:
 - promote a more positive and tolerant culture within the school and support students to take greater responsibility for their learning, increase their self-discipline and so reduce exclusions
 - monitor the impact of students' work more often and use the information more effectively to plan the next steps to raise the quality of teaching and student achievement
 - ensure that governors understand the impact of pupil premium spending on students' achievement.
- An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance can be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- There are a number of subject areas where students do not make good progress. In mathematics, progress is not rapid enough because middle ability students do not achieve as well as they could. Expectations are not high enough for the more able to make good progress.
- At Key Stage 4, more students gained good grades in more subjects in 2013 compared with 2012. However, targets have not been met in geography and modern foreign languages.
- Students join the school with skills that are typically in line with those expected for their age. 58% of students gained five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics in 2013. Results remain broadly in line with the national averages, although they continue to rise from a low level in 2009. This shows that students continue to make the progress expected of them. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds make similar progress.
- In English, more students are making faster progress from their individual starting points than in the past. This is a marked improvement since the last inspection and school data suggest that this improving trend is continuing for students currently in school.
- Evidence gathered during the inspection from robust data provide by the school, observations of teaching, scrutiny of students' books and discussions with students shows that progress is accelerating in more subjects.
- Students who are disabled or have special educational needs make progress similar to other students. School action plus students make good progress. This is because of the additional lessons, coaching, mentoring and targeted support they receive.
- Students known to be eligible for the pupil premium have narrowed the progress gap when compared to similar groups nationally. In 2013, the progress of these students is the same as their peers in the school. Whilst the gap in achievement in mathematics has remained at half a grade, the difference in English has narrowed to one quarter of a grade due to better teaching and targeted interventions.
- A significant number of students join the school with weak reading skills and are supported well using Year 7 catch-up funding. A good range of interventions, including the 'Star Reading' programme, combined with a whole-school focus on planned literacy support in lessons, is securing good improvements in the reading ages of students during their first year at the school.
- A very small number of students attend alternative courses and provision at other sites. Their progress and attendance have improved and are now good because these students are interested, engaged and receive the right support that meets their needs.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection and progress and attainment in performance studies and business studies are particularly strong. Achievement is not yet good because in the majority of subjects it still requires improvement, but there is strong evidence to show that more students are securing at least the grades expected of them, and better, at both AS and A2 level.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because, although improving securely, not enough is yet consistently good or outstanding.
- Too many inconsistencies remain across some subjects and year groups. Some teachers do not use the information they hold on students' attainment or progress well enough. As a result, teachers' expectations of what students can do in lessons are not always high enough and teachers do not challenge the most able or support the least able students.
- Most teachers mark students' work regularly, and frequently provide written feedback so that students understand what to do to improve. In the best practices, students often mark and discuss each other's work before making improvements. Some teachers follow up students' corrections to check their grasp of ideas before moving on. However, this is not always done and

leads to the unnecessary repetition of work and slows progress.

- Where teaching is good, most teachers create a strong climate for learning in their lessons. Activities and resources are used well to provide opportunities for learning. Collaboration between students is promoted through the researching, sharing and evaluating of facts and understanding which reflects the recent 'TEEP' Initiative in school. Not enough lessons provide this same level of independence. Too often, students are dependent on the teacher before they take the next steps in their learning and this slows their progress.
- The greatest improvement is in English where there is some outstanding teaching; this has impacted on achievement, with more students making good progress than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively in the majority of lessons to support students who have fallen behind or experience difficult learning behaviours. Teachers work closely with teaching assistants to ensure they know what and how they are to help specific students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Students are not always tolerant of each other and do not take responsibility for their own actions and think about what impact they have on others. Students do not take enough responsibility for their learning to support them making good progress.
- Numbers of exclusions are high compared to the national averages. The school's own inclusion centre is an effective alternative to external exclusions and provides good support to managing students that challenge the school's high expectations.
- The large numbers of students at the school place pressure on stairwells and corridors. Most students move around the school in a sensible way, but there are those who do not comply with the left hand rule and this can lead to some inappropriate behaviour. Lessons are sometimes taught at a distance from each other and this can result in small numbers of students arriving late to lessons.
- Students comment on the short time available to them to access the canteen during morning break and lunch sessions. The large numbers of students eating in the canteen in very short periods of time mean that some litter can be found around the school. Students do not always show the self-discipline to manage themselves appropriately.
- Most students settle well and show good attitudes to learning in lessons that interest, challenge and engage them; however, some students do lose interest and can disrupt learning.
- Some parents have expressed concerns about the behaviour of students in the school. However, over 95% of parents responding to the school's own survey agree with the staff that behaviour is generally well managed.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students report that they feel safe. They clearly understand the dangers of the internet and social media sites. They have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying and express real confidence that the school will deal effectively with any reported incidents. The school promotes equality of opportunity, positive relationships and ensures discrimination of any type is not tolerated.
- Parents and staff confirm the views expressed by students and believe the school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Over 95% of parents would recommend the school to other families.
- Students wear their uniforms proudly, say they enjoy school and appreciate the opportunities they are provided with.
- Attendance has risen this year and is now above average. Persistent absence has fallen.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because, although teaching and learning

have continued to improve since the last inspection, there remains too much teaching that is less than good. Staffing issues, which the school has worked hard to resolve, have led to too few students making good progress in mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages.

- The headteacher and all school leaders regularly monitor students' progress and evaluate the quality of the school's work. The rigour of evaluation is not consistent and is, at times, over generous as it does not always link the impact of its work to the judgements, which means that plans for improving teaching and achievement have not always been implemented rapidly or focussed enough.
- The newly appointed headteacher has raised expectations of staff and students and galvanised the support of teams to develop the vision for the school. Senior and middle leaders and staff show a high level of commitment, capability and determination to secure and embed the procedures needed to improve teaching, behaviour and achievement in the school.
- Senior leaders and the new headteacher are highly effective in linking the quality of teaching observed to achievement across the school. As a result, the quality of performance management and holding teachers to account is now more rigorous. There is a clear link between students' achievement, teaching quality and pay. Similarly, professional development targets and training offered to teachers are clearly linked to key school targets for improving achievement. The recent initiative of 'TEEP' training has improved the quality of teaching as seen in English.
- In the sixth form, leaders and managers have clear structures and systems in place to support students and to develop their skills so that they might succeed in the future. This has led to better results at both AS and A level. High proportions of students now go on to higher and further education.
- The curriculum caters well for the needs of all students and supports good progression through and after Key Stage 4. Literacy is well supported throughout the school. The few students that attend off site provision have their needs met well and the school routinely checks to ensure they are safe and well cared for. All students benefit from a wide variety of enrichments, including after-school activities and educational visits.
- The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is supported both by the curriculum and the wider life of the school. The Catholic ethos is strongly promoted within the school. The school voluntary programme has raised money for local charities, including Coppers for Compton, and has recently provided musical events for the Hope Community. The student council is active in contributing to bringing about positive changes to the school. Improvements to the general amenities are evident.
- Parents are supportive of the school. Staff questionnaires are very positive about the improvements taking place across the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well established and comply fully with requirements. The school takes the protection of its students very seriously.
- The local authority has a good relationship with the school and is working closely with the leadership to improve teaching and raise standards of achievement for all students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors show a thorough and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are clear about what needs to change. Governors ensure that they are well informed about the quality of teaching and its impact on student achievement. They are knowledgeable about how the pupil premium funding is used. However, the links between spending and the impact on students who should specifically benefit is not always clear. Governors robustly hold the headteacher, senior and school leaders to account, have raised questions about the school's over-positive view of teaching in some lessons, and have challenged the school to raise the quality of teaching more quickly. They understand clearly what the available data are telling them about students' progress and attainment and have agreed the headteacher's strategy to secure good teaching, improved behaviour and raised achievement. The governing body is in full agreement with the headteacher that staff performance is to be recognised in direct proportion to students' rates of progress and levels of success.

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	104259
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	431692

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	1472
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Dalton
Headteacher	Peter Mayland
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 November 2012
Telephone number	01902 368 798
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