

Thomas More Catholic School

Russell Hill Road, Purley, Surrey, CR8 2XP

Inspection dates 11–12 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- The achievement of students is too variable. Students do not make good progress across a range of subjects. More-able students do not make enough progress, especially in mathematics.
- The impact of teaching over time is variable. Teachers do not make enough use of a range of assessment information to plan engaging and challenging lessons precisely.
- Some middle leaders do not have the knowledge and skills needed to improve teaching. Not enough teaching is good or better.
- The sixth form requires improvement. The achievement of students across a range of subjects is inconsistent.
- Governors do not hold leaders in the school to account rigorously enough for the performance of students.

The school has the following strengths:

- The headteacher and senior leaders have a strong and clear vision for the school. They model their aspirations for students through their work. This generates a strong ethos of caring and is a major contribution to the wider development of students in the school.
- Students' behaviour is good. This makes an important contribution to their learning. They feel safe and well cared for at school.
- The school's work to safeguard students is good. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is effective. A range of learning opportunities, including assemblies, helps students think deeply about important issues.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 35 lessons during the inspection. The headteacher and other senior leaders observed alongside inspectors in a number of lessons.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders in the school and members of the governing body. Discussions took place with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors talked with a number of students from all age groups in discussions, during lessons and informally during social time.
- The school's own achievement records for the current year as well as for the previous year were scrutinised, alongside the work seen in students' books during observations in lessons and in a separate book scrutiny.
- Inspectors analysed a range of school records and documents, including the school's improvement plans, published performance data, minutes of governing body meetings, records of attendance and behaviour and documents about how the school keeps students safer.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 25 parents and carers through their responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also considered the views of 36 members of staff.

Inspection team

Chris Campbell, HMI Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

Rukhsana Sheikh

Additional Inspector

Lee Faith

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thomas More Catholic School is a smaller than average, Roman Catholic, 11 to 19 school in the Archdiocese of Southwark.
- The school is a voluntary aided maintained school, which has had specialist status in science and mathematics for some time.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for support through pupil premium funding is well above the national average.
- A very high proportion of students come from ethnic minority groups. The largest ethnic groups are of African, other White backgrounds and Caribbean heritage. About a quarter of students are of White British background.
- A very high proportion of students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of girls to boys is well below the national average.
- The school makes limited and infrequent use of a local alternative education provider.
- The school meets the current minimum standards set by the government for students' achievement.
- A section 48 inspection of the school was not carried out at the same time as this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - making sure that marking and feedback are used consistently to improve learning so students accelerate the progress they make
 - ensuring that all teachers use a full range of assessment information to plan engaging and challenging learning activities for students of all abilities.
- Improve the quality of leadership by:
 - providing training so that all subject leaders develop the skills needed to improve teaching
 - ensuring that middle leaders sharpen practices in monitoring the impact of teaching over time and hold teachers in their teams to account for the performance of students.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Subject leaders are not consistent in ensuring that teaching is sufficiently challenging, especially for more-able students. The effective practices seen, for example in English, are not shared well enough in other subjects. As a result, progress for all groups of students across subjects is not consistently good.
- Leaders at all levels do not ensure that teachers take enough account of assessment information to plan challenging activities for students of all groups and abilities.
- Subject leaders do not make sure that marking and feedback to students are frequent and specific enough to ensure that they contribute to students' progress.
- Subject leaders have an inconsistent knowledge and understanding of what characterises good and better teaching. They are therefore limited as to how much they can lead and model good and better teaching in their teams.
- The headteacher and senior leaders model the highest aspirations for all their students. Their clear vision and firmly held values generate a caring ethos across the school. This underpins the work of the inclusion team to ensure that all students have the support they need to access the curriculum. The school has restructured leadership to improve its inclusion work. This is improving progress, especially for students with English as an additional language and those who are new entrants to the school. This reflects the school's work to ensure equality of opportunity for all its students.
- Senior leaders have clear expectations of teaching to promote good achievement. However, this is not translated effectively enough into actions by subject leaders so that teaching improves steadily. While senior leaders know which subjects are not performing as required, the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching is generous.
- The positive model provided by the headteacher is a major contribution to the respect and care students show each other and staff members. It enables them to recognise the needs of others in school and in their local community. For example, the school supports a local hospital through charity events.
- Senior leaders have begun to use examples of effective practice to build subject leadership capacity. Senior leaders have accurately identified inconsistencies in the quality of marking. They have begun to work with the whole staff to address this and are using examples of stronger practice, for example in English, to develop better practice across the school.
- The school's work to combat discrimination is effective. The strong promotion of fundamental British values is underpinned by the religious character of the school. Students show good knowledge of other cultures, lifestyles and faith beliefs. Students learn about these through a range of subjects, including science and religious studies. Students have good opportunities to think deeply about important social, moral and spiritual issues through a programme of thought-provoking assemblies. Students told inspectors that they welcome diversity and see it as an asset in their school.
- Students are well prepared for life in modern Britain because the curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders organise it so as to respond to the learning needs of students and guide them into different routes at stages through the school. However, too few students achieve well across a range of subjects at GCSE to maintain the higher standards reached in more recent years. Support and intervention for those students at risk of underachievement are becoming more effective, but this is not yet consistent across key subjects such as mathematics and English. The planned curriculum is complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities which include work in the community and a wide range of sporting activities.
- Leaders ensure that students have access to independent advice and guidance at intervals through the school. This helps students and their families make informed choices about the courses they take in school and how to plan their next steps in education and training when they leave. Students in the sixth form confirmed that they feel well informed about their choices beyond school.
- Leaders in the school monitor attendance carefully. As a result they have noted a small decline in attendance and have increased the support and challenge they bring to families, including some hard-to-reach families to attend well. This is leading to improved attendance figures so far this year.
- The excellent example provided by the headteacher and senior staff underpins the good behaviour seen by inspectors. Students respond positively to this example and the high expectations of them. There are few instances of poor behaviour recorded by the school and parents and staff alike confirm that behaviour is well managed. The attendance and performance of students attending the alternative provision, full or part time, are monitored carefully by pastoral leaders.
- The local authority provides light touch support to the school. This has helped the school recognise some of its strengths and weaknesses. The school reports that it values the collaboration of the local authority's human resources and safeguarding teams.

■ The governance of the school:

- Members of the governing body strongly support the headteacher and the values that the school promotes. There is variable understanding of their role to challenge senior leaders and hold them accountable for the performance of students. Governors know which subjects are performing well and those that are not. They have a less precise understanding of the progress students make. However, they rely too heavily on the information provided to them by school leaders and do not use a wider range of information they collect themselves to form their own judgments and challenge school leaders.
- For example, they know the school's view on the quality of teaching but do not challenge it enough by finding their own evidence of the impact of teaching over time. Governors are linked with subject areas but do not use these opportunities to collate and form an overview so they can challenge senior leaders with sufficient rigour.
- School leaders produce an annual report on the impact of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged students. However, governors do not scrutinise it in enough detail. The support provided through the pupil premium to some areas, for example English and literacy, is much more successful than it is in mathematics.
- Governors have, however, demonstrated that they take rigorous action when required. They understand the important role that performance management plays. They are determined to reward good teaching and do not make pay progression awards where they have evidence that it is not warranted.
- Governors have a keen sense of their duties to safeguard children. The school's arrangements for the safeguarding of students meet statutory requirements, including making all required pre-employment checks for staff.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Students understand and respect the values promoted by leaders in the school. They told inspectors that they are proud of their school. They consistently show respect for each other and socialise well together. They take care of their school environment. Students told us that this was the norm and school behaviour logs confirmed that there are few instances of poor behaviour.
- Students have positive attitudes towards their learning. They want to learn and apply themselves well to tasks, even when learning activities are not challenging for them. This willingness to learn contributes well to the progress they make. On rare occasions, some students are less engaged in learning.
- Behaviour during breaks and lunchtime is good. Students enjoy each other's company and use a wide range of facilities sensibly. They respect the needs of others, for example in the variety of ways they use the flexible learning centre.
- The strong positive ethos promoted by the school impacts on students' willingness to support others, for example a local hospital charity. However, it also impacts positively on day-to-day behaviour outside of school. An inspector witnessed how some students in Year 9 were careful to help Year 7 students cross a busy road safely on the way to school.
- In discussion, students told us that they know about different sorts of bullying, including cyber bullying. They reported that bullying is rare and that they knew what to do if it should happen. They have confidence that the school would sort out issues effectively. They told inspectors that the diversity seen in the school was an asset which helps them understand, respect and show tolerance towards others and their beliefs and lifestyles.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because there are too few opportunities for all students to develop a real thirst for learning though outstanding teaching. When teaching is at its best, students revel in developing their thinking and sharing ideas. However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Leaders ensure that an accurate single central register is kept. Governors and leaders follow all pre-employment requirements. Students told inspectors that they feel safe at school and that they are well cared for by staff.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, show a good level of awareness of personal safety, including in the use of information technology, because they learn about this at intervals as they go through the school.
- Students take some responsibility for promoting safety and look after each other. Older students are

nominated to be available to give help and advice to peers in social time.

- The vast majority of parents and carers who completed the Parent View questionnaire confirmed that they believe the school provides a safe and caring environment.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers do not consistently challenge more-able students to produce work at the standard or with the pace they should. The work produced by more-able students in books shows that their progress is not fast enough. At times, teachers' questioning to lead these students to the next stage in their learning is effective. It reshapes their learning and helps them to make good progress. However, this is too rarely the case.
- Teachers do not make consistently good use of assessment information which is readily available to them. As a result, they do not always plan engaging and interesting activities that challenge students to attempt work at the right standard. As a consequence, students, especially the more able, do not make enough good progress. Inspectors saw that in many cases students' books revealed that all students carry out the same work. When students were given challenging work, for example in a Year 7 philosophy for children lesson, they showed that they can rapidly develop their thinking skills and understanding of important concepts.
- Teachers have consistently high expectations of students' behaviour in class. They have established effective working routines with their students. As a consequence, students are positive participants in their classes. They follow instructions readily and apply themselves in almost all cases. Very occasionally, work that does not challenge students accurately enough leads to some low-level disruption. This contrasts starkly with the very positive attitudes for learning displayed by the vast majority of students. Typically teachers and classroom support staff get on very well with their students and their good relations help students to work well with each other.
- Teachers and classroom support staff involved in providing additional support and intervention demonstrate a keen understanding of the specific needs of their students. As a consequence, these students make accelerated progress, especially in their literacy and English skills. Additional support in mathematics and numeracy are not as effective. Members of staff in the inclusion team are effective in helping students overcome barriers to their learning. For example, they work effectively with students at an early stage of development of communication skills in English. This helps them to integrate socially into the school and to acquire quickly the language skills they need to access the wider curriculum.
- Students are provided with frequent opportunities to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum, including during assemblies. Discussion and group work support the development of their oracy skills well. The students that inspectors talked with showed they were confident and thoughtful and able to reflect and express their ideas. The flexible learning centre is a hive of activity at lunchtime. This well-used resource is successful in encouraging learning and reading. The planned use of numeracy skills across the curriculum is less well developed.
- Classroom support staff are well informed about the support they are required to provide to identified students. They use the information they are given by the coordinator for special educational needs well to support students' learning. They contribute to students' learning, too, by carefully recording the small steps in progress they make and discussing these with teaching staff.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The progress over time seen in students' books is inconsistent. Where it is good, for example in English, students regularly produce extended pieces of writing. They benefit from frequent high-quality marking, which provides them with clear advice on what to do to improve their work. They set out their work clearly and present it well. In other cases, the progress seen in students' books is variable. The amount of work students produce is too little to lead to good or better progress. Marking is not always as precise enough to help students improve their work quickly. This variation was also seen within departments.
- The impact of teaching over time shows that, overall, students attain broadly in line with national averages. The progress they make from their starting points is variable across a range of subjects, for example, teaching over time in mathematics is less effective than it is in English. Boys make better progress than girls overall. In 2013, the attainment of girls was broadly in line with national averages.
- The school's data for 2014 show that the progress made by groups of students across a range of subjects is inconsistent. Students make less progress in subjects such as humanities and modern foreign languages, than in English or mathematics.

- From their starting points, too few more-able students make enough progress in mathematics. In 2014 examinations, approximately one in four more-able students did not make expected progress in this group. Work in their books across a number of subjects shows that they are not challenged enough to produce work at the highest levels. As a consequence, they do not make the progress they should. The overall proportion of A* and A grades fell in 2014 compared with 2013. The school is more successful, however, in ensuring that students from ethnic minority groups achieve as well as others in the school. However, the achievement of White British students lags behind that of their peers.
- The gap between the achievement of students eligible for support through the pupil premium and others is not closing rapidly. On average, this group of students in 2013 attained approximately half a grade below their school peers in English. This gap widened slightly from 2012. In 2013, the gap in attainment in mathematics closed to about one third of a grade below their school peers. In 2012 the gap had been half a grade below. Compared with disadvantaged students nationally, in 2013, those eligible for additional support attained in line with the national average in English. Against their peers nationally, in 2013 in mathematics, disadvantaged students attained less than quarter of a grade below. In 2012 the gap had been half a grade below.
- The performance of some students with special educational needs varies across subjects. Those who were supported at 'school action' under the previous system of identification achieved well. However, students supported at 'school action plus' are not making as much progress in mathematics as other students in the school or other students nationally.
- The school's work to integrate new arrivals to the school and other vulnerable students, especially those who have little English, is effective. Interventions and support lead them to develop social skills to help them access the wider curriculum. Carefully planned provision enables them to develop rapidly the language skills they need. This makes a successful contribution to the school's work to improve basic literacy skills. However the support provided for students who need to accelerate their learning in mathematics is less secure.
- The opportunities provided through a range of subjects and through tutor time and assemblies to discuss a range of topics and issues help students to develop their oracy skills. They read frequently and make good use of additional opportunities provided, for example through the flexible learning centre. However, teachers provide too few opportunities for students to write frequently at length across a range of subjects. The school's agreed practices for improving spelling and grammar are applied inconsistently when teachers mark students' work.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Leaders are ambitious for their students to achieve well. However, in 2013 there was too much variability between the performance of subjects. The overall progress made by students following academic courses was well below the national average. The progress made by disadvantaged students and others was similar for these courses. In 2013, both disadvantaged students and others following vocational courses made better than average progress. Performance in 2014 shows that progress made across academic subjects has improved and is now in line with the national average. The progress made by students following vocational courses is also in line with the national average this year. In a small number of subjects, for example in mathematics, students made significantly more progress than was the case nationally.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning throughout the year is planned. However sixth form and subject leaders do not collaborate enough to ensure that this improves teaching and outcomes for students as well as it should.
- Students have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safer and manage risks, because the school provides a range of opportunities to consider them, including the use of outside speakers. Students told inspectors that they have a good understanding of bullying and different types of discrimination. They show respect for each other and value the contribution to the school that its diverse nature provides. They recognise and accept differences of lifestyles, cultural heritage and those of other faiths and no faith.
- The curriculum provides a good balance between academic and non-academic courses. Students confirmed that they receive independent and clear advice about which courses will suit their needs best. They told inspectors that they have a good understanding of the variety of places where they can study at sixth form level, before deciding to enter the school's sixth form. Similarly, the school provides good opportunities to learn about the range of options available to them when they leave school. An increasing number of students go on to study at top universities.

- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is variable. As in the main school, teachers do not always plan sufficiently well to challenge students of different abilities to progress as well as they should. As a consequence, more-able students do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Students receive feedback on their work, but the quality and usefulness of this in driving forward progress strongly is inconsistent.

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	101821
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	447738

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary Aided School
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	875
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	141
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Peter McFall
Headteacher	Margaret Mulchrone
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2012
Telephone number	020 8668 6251
Fax number	020 8660 9003
Email address	schooloffice@tmore.org.uk

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