

St Thomas More Catholic Academy

Longton Hall Road, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST3 2NJ

Inspection dates 13–14 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Good		2
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. It is not good because

- Boys, the most-able students and disadvantaged students do not always achieve the standards they are capable of in English and mathematics.
- The tasks set by teachers are not always sufficiently challenging, so the most-able students do not always achieve the highest standards.
- Teaching does not consistently engage the interest and enthusiasm of boys and disadvantaged students so they can progress further and faster.
- Too many students are persistently absent from the academy and so are not able to learn consistently well.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students' achievement, especially at A-level, is not high enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders, academy committee members, directors of the multi academy company and managers have taken effective steps to improve teaching, so more students are being taught increasingly well and beginning to make better progress as a result.
- Some newly appointed leaders' actions, including those of the leader of the sixth form, are now beginning to increase students' achievement and improve the quality of teaching.
- Teachers plan tasks carefully, so students understand technical terms in their subject, spell them accurately and use the terms with increasing confidence in their work.
- Students feel safe in and around the academy and understand how to keep themselves safe.
- Students behave well. They treat each other, and their academy building, with respect and consideration.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong as a result of the good range of experiences offered to students. They develop a clear understanding of modern British values.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students taught in a wide range of subjects across all year groups. Five lessons were seen jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of students' writing completed over time, and talked to students about the work in their books. They observed students around the academy at changes of lessons, at breaks and at lunchtimes and talked to students informally on these occasions.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, with groups of teachers and middle leaders, and formally with a number of groups of students. An inspector also met with the Chair of the Academy Committee and directors of the company, including the company's school improvement officer. An inspector also spoke on the telephone with a parent.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents about the academy's work, including its plans to develop further, its evaluation of the impact of actions taken to improve, and information about assessments and students' progress. Information about attendance and behaviour, and documents and records about safety and safeguarding were also reviewed. Inspectors also looked closely at the academy's records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, of how the academy manages the performance of teachers, and inspectors also looked at minutes of the meetings of the academy committee.
- Inspectors looked at the 30 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and also the academy's surveys of parents' views of the academy.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Catherine Davies	Additional Inspector
Tim Long	Additional Inspector
David Woodhouse	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas More Catholic Academy is a larger than average-sized secondary academy with a sixth form. It is part of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate Multi Academy Company.
- The school converted to become an academy school in November 2013. When its predecessor school, St Thomas More Catholic College, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be requiring improvement.
- The current headteacher took up his post in January 2015. There have been several staff changes overall, with a number of new leaders appointed in the last 18 months. A new leader for mathematics has been appointed very recently.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is similar to the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by pupil premium funding (additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority), is similar to the national average, but has risen in the last two years. A small proportion of students is looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to that found nationally. Few are at the early stages of learning English.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A very small number of students from Years 10 and 11 attend courses away from the academy site, for some or all of their time, at Merit, Reach, Innovation School, TimeOut (Groundworks) and PM Training.
- Academy leaders work closely with Saint John Plessington Catholic College to make sure its school improvement work is effective.
- The academy is part of the Trinity Sixth Form which is a partnership with three other schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve teaching so all students, including students in the sixth form, make rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - teaching is planned so all students, and particularly boys and disadvantaged students, make faster progress from their starting points
 - teachers plan teaching so the most-able students work on tasks and activities that enable them to reach the highest standards.
- Reduce the numbers of students who are persistently absent from the academy by implementing rigorously the recently planned additional actions to increase the attendance of this group of students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders, managers, committee members and the company have worked together well to establish a culture of high expectations. Since the academy opened, leaders have worked hard to develop a productive climate for learning. Slow progress for some groups of students, particularly in mathematics, and the underperformance of boys, disadvantaged students and the most-able students are now much reduced. The academy's most recent assessments, checked by external partners and senior leaders from St John Plessington Catholic Academy, are showing that the standards of written work are higher, especially for current Year 11 students, and students' progress is accelerating across the academy.
- A new headteacher, a re-structured leadership team and new subject leaders are in place. More challenging targets are set for students to reach, especially in English and mathematics. Staff talk with optimism about the improvements taking place, and students themselves say they are confident they are making faster progress.
- Middle leaders are supported well in improving teaching in their subject. They have been helped by improved assessments of students' progress. As a result, teachers are clear which students are falling behind and are able to guide them swiftly to support and to catch-up sessions so students can improve.
- The academy's evaluation of its work to improve is accurate and realistic. Leaders, managers and staff recognise the need to improve further and faster in the future. The academy's plans to ensure that these improvements take place are clear and comprehensive. The regular measuring of students' progress is thorough and makes sure the academy knows what is going well and where it needs to review and adjust its plans.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Staff have access to good quality training and development opportunities, enhanced by the partnerships within the company and with other highly performing schools. They have formal and informal opportunities to discuss ideas about teaching, and good practice is shared effectively. Staff expressed positive views about being part of the academy's future.
- The curriculum has been developed carefully in the last 12 months to meet the full range of students' needs and talents and is therefore increasingly providing equality of opportunity. Separate science subjects and challenging enrichment events have been introduced, so the most-able students can be prepared well for A-level and the Sixth Form after their Key Stage 4 studies. Sports, music and art subjects ensure that students' talents are harnessed fully and choices have been thought through carefully so students can study either, or both, history and geography.
- The very few students who follow courses away from the academy site for some, or all, of their time are guided towards appropriate vocational courses which lead to useful accreditation, closely linked to the standards they should be achieving. The school monitors closely the progress, behaviour and attendance of students attending the alternative provision.
- Students state that the advice, support and guidance provided for them from Year 8, through to choosing sixth form courses, is helpful, and increasingly ensures that students follow suitable courses where they achieve increasingly well.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is closely woven through all studies and wider experiences, including assemblies and faith-based reflection opportunities. The curriculum also includes opportunities to reflect on personal responsibility, including supporting the rule of law and exploring how adult roles in society maintain our democracy.
- The many experiences and discussions in lessons, and in form times, have led to students demonstrating extraordinarily respectful and tolerant behaviour to each other. Students are clear about how British values of tolerance and respect help to ensure and sustain harmonious relations; these are fostered effectively in the academy, so examples of discriminatory and derogatory name-calling are rare.
- Leaders use the additional pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding well to provide additional teaching, revision and catch-up sessions to provide a range of well-structured reading practice sessions, and to provide additional support to improve attendance. These activities have been instrumental in beginning to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged students in particular.
- Leaders, managers, committee members and the company have worked together effectively to establish a framework which ensures that the performance of teachers is linked clearly to the progress of students. High levels of accountability are balanced well by the good opportunities for coaching and support.
- Relationships with parents are good and have improved over time. Parents express positive views of how well their child is taught and how effectively the academy makes sure students are supported to be, and feel, safe. A small minority of parents and staff expressed a view that behaviour was not securely good, but this was not evident from the academy's records or in discussion with students.

- The academy's partnerships, both within the company, and with high achieving schools, are helping leaders and managers to raise standards and improve progress effectively.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students and staff meet statutory requirements and are secure and effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The academy committee has a very clear view of the academy's strengths and the areas that still need to improve. Members have a good range of expertise and experience which they use well to effectively challenge the academy's leaders.
 - The committee and the company work well with academy leaders and there is a shared sense of purpose in moving the academy forward. Effective and successful steps have been taken to improve teaching. Information about students' progress and the standards they are reaching, is regularly shared with committee members and company directors, so they know actions taken to improve are having impact.
 - The committee monitors finances well, including the impact of additional pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, so they are sure it they are being used successfully.
 - The committee also ensures that safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are keen to learn and, when teaching engages them, they are enthusiastic and energised by their learning. They contribute well to answering questions and to explaining what they know, even when the tasks set are too easy.
- Students say that most teachers use the new systems to manage any distracting behaviour from a very small minority of students effectively, and that, as a result, students who are involved in their work are able to continue. Students also say that behaviour has improved over time; however, a few parents and some staff felt there were occasions when behaviour was not managed well.
- Behaviour around the academy is calm and well ordered. Students take pride in their uniform and in their surroundings. They are polite to adults and get on well with their peers. Any conflicts are infrequent; students say they are supervised well and feel confident in going to staff if they are worried or concerned.
- Students with behavioural difficulties are supported very well and the academy has developed additional provision to extend the support students are given, so they can return to their learning.
- A very small number attend courses away from the academy site to follow their interests in a vocational or work setting. The behaviour and safety of these students are monitored closely and frequent communication takes place between academy leaders and the staff in the alternative placements.
- The academy is vigilant in supporting families to improve their child's attendance, but despite this there remain too many students who are persistently absent. Additional support and staffing have been appointed to ensure students can be supported to return. The academy has identified further additional actions and provision to increase the number of students who attend the academy regularly. Overall attendance, including attendance in the sixth form, is just below average

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Parents and staff agree that students are safe in and around academy. The personal development sessions within the curriculum ensure students are clear about how to manage the risks inherent in use of mobile phones and social networking sites and how these technologies can be used to bully and intimidate others. The academy takes effective steps to make sure students are aware of how exploitation can result in unsafe behaviour.
- Students say bullying is very rare and they know about the different forms bullying can take. They would have no hesitation in turning to an adult if they or a friend were being bullied. They could cite one or two occasions when staff had intervened swiftly and effectively to deal with any potential bullying behaviour.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Leaders' monitoring of teaching and of students' progress indicates that teaching is increasingly effective. However, there remain some inconsistencies across subjects and year groups.
- Teachers do not always notice quickly enough when students have finished before others. They do not

take steps to ensure that students can move on to increasingly challenging tasks or apply what they have learnt to more complex problems, which especially limits the progress of the most-able students.

- Teachers are now fully aware, as a result of the improved assessment systems, of which students are not making sufficient progress. However, teachers do not always interest or engage them sufficiently in learning. They do not monitor students' progress closely in lessons and intervene quickly enough to make sure learning, particularly that of boys or disadvantaged students, is effective.
- Teachers in most subjects mark students' work regularly, and make suggestions about how they can improve or set a brief task so students can practise something they have not fully understood in the lesson. Marking and feedback in some subjects are detailed and personal so students are very much aware that the teacher knows exactly where they are doing well and where they might be struggling.
- Where students are making faster progress, teachers use effective structures to engage students in explaining what they know, such as in a geography lesson, where students had to identify and explain geographical features in a 'speed dating' session. As a result, they had to think quickly and explain succinctly what they had found out. This excited and energised students, including boys, in their learning.
- Many lessons have a strong focus on literacy and a number of teachers make sure students use the correct technical vocabulary in their answers and explanations. Students have opportunities to read widely and several said they read for pleasure at home. There has not been the same focus on mathematical development across subjects and mathematics teaching is only now becoming stronger.
- Relationships between students and staff are good; students trust their teachers to help them to achieve well and this is increasingly becoming the case.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Most students join the academy with standards close to those of most students nationally. However, over the last two years, more students are entering the academy with standards lower than these. The proportion of students who gained five or more Grade C passes, including in English and mathematics, in 2014 was above the national average.
- Most students made the progress expected of them in English in 2014, and many made faster progress than this. Fewer students, including boys and disadvantaged students, made the progress expected of them in mathematics than students nationally, and very few made faster progress than this. The most-able students did not achieve as well as they could in English or in mathematics in 2014.
- The academy's assessments indicate that more students, including more boys and more disadvantaged students, are on track to achieve five or more Grade C passes, including in English and mathematics, than in 2014. The most-able students are also making faster progress and some are working at the highest levels in English and in mathematics. However, there are still differences between the achievement of boys and girls, and between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students attained standards half a grade lower than their peers in the academy and other students nationally in English. Disadvantaged students attained almost a full grade lower than other students in the academy and more than a grade lower than other students nationally in mathematics.
- The improvement in students' progress in Year 11 is replicated in other year groups. Students' written work in Key Stage 3 indicated increasing numbers of students who are making faster progress. This is because teaching is increasingly effective in promoting their progress. There is no significant difference between the achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds, or students who speak English as an additional language, and other students in the academy. The academy's work to improve the achievement of all groups, so they achieve equally well, is evidence of the increasingly positive impact of its commitment to equality of opportunity to succeed and achieve.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs has improved. They are supported well by the special educational needs coordinator and by learning support assistants, who make sure they learn effectively but do not become too dependent on their support. Teaching in larger groups is planned carefully to take them through smaller steps in their learning, so their understanding and knowledge are secure.
- The academy has included additional challenge sessions in the curriculum for the most-able students and has raised the expectations for the targets they are to achieve. More are making good progress towards these higher targets. Some need sustained and additional support to achieve these higher standards in mathematics, because teaching has not been strong enough in the past. The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Students' reading skills, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9, are well developed because of the systematic and

regular practice with reading material well matched to their literacy levels. Students' written work is generally well presented and shows development of more extended writing and more complex, and accurately written, sentences and paragraphs. However, this is more the case with girls than boys.

- Students who follow courses away from the academy site make good progress. They follow courses that lead to useful accreditation and show progress from their starting points. Over half of students are on track to achieve the targeted standard in their course.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Sixth form students are benefiting from improving teaching. The impact of this is evident in the progress of students in Year 12. However, as in the main part of the academy, there remain some inconsistencies in teaching, so not all students are improving their progress.
- The leader of the sixth form has tracked and monitored students' progress closely, and support has been provided for those who fall behind. Students' personal study time is now monitored and supported more closely. Students use this time more consistently to work on areas where they need to make faster progress.
- The sixth form leader has also established higher expectations for students' achievements by setting higher targets for eventual attainment. She checks that the quality of teaching is enabling students to make better progress and this is increasingly the case in Year 12. The academy's assessments indicate some improvement in some subjects in Year 13, but this is not the case for all subjects.
- Students following work-based courses attain higher standards and this has been the case over time.
- A small number of students follow Level 2 GCSE courses in English and in mathematics. In 2014, over half of students attained Grade C in mathematics and in English.
- There is no significant difference between the standards reached by the small number of disabled students and students who have special educational needs, or disadvantaged students, and their peers.
- Students in the sixth form speak highly of the support and guidance they receive. All students continue to university, college, employment, apprenticeships or other training. Guidance to suitable courses has not always been helpful, and so some students have not continued through to Year 13. This is set to improve, because there is now an extensive range of individual interviews, assemblies, open evening sessions, sessions in the personal development curriculum, and events which ensure that students are fully aware of the range of opportunities and how they lead to varying pathways, both at the end of Year 12 and Year 13. No students finished Year 12 or Year 13 in 2014 without a course or pathway in place for them.
- Behaviour is good in the sixth form. Attendance is improving and is now closer to national averages. Students feel safe and well supported and would have no hesitation in sharing their concerns with staff. Students act as role models for younger students and benefit from a wider range of enrichment activities put in place by the new leader of the sixth form.
- Students spoke warmly of the sense of community they feel, and how they feel exceptionally well supported. They are proud to be in the academy sixth form. They all have the opportunity to follow a two-week work placement and they feel this prepares them well for the future.

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	140304
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	462547

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	1,017
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	C Knight
Headteacher	Mark Rayner
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01782 882900
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Email address	office@stmca.org.uk

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