

St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall

Darlaston Lane, Bilston, West Midlands WV14 7BL

Inspection dates 23–24 February 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management have been completely transformed since the last inspection. The new headteacher has provided renewed focus and energy to build on improvements.
- Pupils in school now are making good progress in English and mathematics. Progress in other subjects too is improving.
- Pupils enjoy teaching that is good or better. This is because leaders have carefully identified suitable training which has been very effective in developing the quality of teachers' work.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, know their pupils, check their work effectively and plan interesting lessons that motivate pupils now in school to learn and succeed.
- Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are improving securely at Key Stages 3 and 4 because of well-planned provision across all subjects.
- The quality of the sixth form is good. Learners enjoy their studies and achieve well from their starting points.
- Pupils and learners in the main school and sixth form behave very well around the school and interact with each other and adults in a mature and responsible way. They speak to visitors courteously and with confidence.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are well cared for. They feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations.
- The school provides many opportunities to develop pupils' personal development, and they engage enthusiastically in these.
- The governing body knows the school well and has played a considerable part in supporting the school to improve standards.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Outcomes require improvement because, in recent years, too many pupils have not made the progress expected in English, mathematics and science by Year 11.
- Improvements in science are not as rapid as in other subject areas.
- Historically, the most-able pupils, pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability have not made the progress they should have by Year 11.
- Attendance, although improving, is still too low.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement for pupils in Years 7 to 11 so that they all make rapid progress, particularly the most able, disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- Improve teaching in science, including in the sixth form, so that pupils and learners reach the same standards as other subjects.
- Ensure that leaders strengthen strategies to improve attendance, so that their impact secures attendance levels that reach at least the national average.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The new headteacher took up her post in February 2015 after a period of considerable change and instability in the school. She has quickly won the trust of colleagues, pupils and parents.
- There has been a particular focus on improving pupils' behaviour for learning and the quality of teaching in school. In a short space of time, this focus has had a strong impact on improving standards in school.
- Leaders ensure that there are regular checks on the quality of teaching, with appropriate support and training given when standards are not good enough. Teaching is now good and senior leaders challenge underperformance robustly.
- There is a real sense of trust between leaders and teachers in school. Teachers say they welcome the clarity about the school's expectations and have embraced the changes fully, because it has renewed their enthusiasm and confidence to ensure that pupils do well.
- Performance management is being used effectively to hold leaders and teachers to account, and targets include objectives for teaching linked to the progress being made by all groups of pupils.
- Subject leaders are clear about their roles in improving the quality of teaching and how they are raising standards. They know how to monitor pupils' progress information so that learning is improved, and they help their colleagues to develop their skills also. Changes to the leadership of science are contributing to this improvement.
- Leaders check regularly on the attendance, behaviour and work of pupils to see if any are falling behind and need more help. Pastoral leaders feel well supported by the work undertaken by the local authority to review behaviour and attendance. Pupils, too, value the way the school does its best to make sure they do not miss out on anything that makes them learn better.
- Subject leaders and pastoral leaders work closely together to make sure that academic progress, behaviour, care and guidance go hand in hand, so that all pupils have the best chance to do well.
- Leaders have developed good links with local primary schools to support the move to secondary education. This is particularly valued by pupils, as it helps them to settle quickly, make new friends and become effective learners.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and includes a good range of subjects at Key Stage 4. Pupils receive effective guidance so that they choose subjects that interest them and help them to make progress. The school is currently reviewing its provision to ensure that it meets the national requirements and the changing needs and abilities of pupils.
- The development of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is strongly underpinned by the school's distinctive Christian ethos and the values which permeate school life. Inspirational quotations on display in the corridors remind pupils of the richness of diversity. Pupils had even explored the customs and cultures of all countries taking part in the Rugby World Cup.
- Pupils explore British values through the curriculum and enrichment days. A British values celebration last year included an analysis of poems by Benjamin Zephaniah. Each year group worked on a British values tree on display in each form room to reinforce these values in practice.
- Extra-curricular opportunities in school are extensive and participation is good. Pupils take part in a range of sporting activities, music, drama and opportunities for foreign visits.
- The support given to disadvantaged pupils is now effective in increasing their rates of progress. and the gap in achievement between these pupils and others is closing for those in school now. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make increased rates of progress too. Both groups of pupils are making progress because clear targets and priorities are identified by the school. They are also given specific careers and work-related experience which helps them to access wider opportunities.
- Pupils in Year 7 who receive additional funding to catch up to the expected level of literacy and numeracy are given extra help in small groups. Pupils were very enthusiastic about this help, with some so motivated that they now attend literacy sessions voluntarily at lunchtimes. This work contributes well to the improving progress being made by pupils in Year 7 and 8.
- Pupils who attend the off-site provision make good progress. Their progress and attendance are monitored carefully by the school and their participation in courses is tracked robustly. Pupils move successfully on to the next stage of their learning.
- Staff and pupils work well together to promote strong relationships and to prevent any kind of discriminatory behaviour. The school's behaviour policy has a very positive impact on pupils' attitudes and

behaviour, and pupils speak confidently about the way this has improved the quality of learning in school.

- The local authority and the diocese have given the school focused support which has helped leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Links with other local schools to support improvement in mathematics and science also contribute to the good progress now being made by most pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are highly effective. They have supported the school through significant changes in leadership since the last inspection. Governors are well trained, informed and come from wide and experienced educational backgrounds. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that still need more work.
 - Governors ask insightful questions about the information provided by the school, particularly in relation to the outcomes for pupils. These they rightly regard as the central focus and purpose of the school. Link governors for academic subjects and pastoral year groups visit the school frequently and check that improvement priorities are acted upon quickly.
 - Governors fulfil their statutory duties and have robust systems in place to review the headteacher's performance. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent and challenge leaders on the impact it has on eligible pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree. Procedures are rigorous in ensuring that all checks follow the correct guidance regarding child protection and safer recruitment. Staff training is comprehensive and covers a range of risks. All staff and governors are aware of the published requirements for keeping children safe in education, as well as the 'Prevent' duty training, which focuses on dealing with extremism. Safety is well promoted throughout the curriculum, with significant issues covered also in religious education and personal, social and health education lessons.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Leaders' work to strengthen teaching is having a positive impact on its quality. The school's programme of training for teachers and teaching assistants has resulted in consistently good teaching, and this is improving the progress of pupils.
- The school's own checks on teaching and information on the progress being made by current pupils confirm that teaching has improved strongly and is now good. Positive, harmonious relationships between staff and pupils also make a direct contribution to pupils' learning and the good progress they make.
- Some aspects of teaching are outstanding, including in the sixth form. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and teachers use their knowledge well to ask questions that check if pupils understand what they are learning. Pupils are encouraged to discuss issues around their learning and this deepens their understanding and challenges them even further. This challenge helps pupils to master the knowledge they need to help them improve their progress.
- Pupils learn well because teachers plan lessons that stimulate and engage them. This happens in most lessons and when it does, pupils make good progress. In a small number of lessons, teaching does not motivate pupils enough for them to make the best possible progress in line with their abilities.
- When teachers ensure that the work given is matched to pupils' abilities and that it is not too easy, pupils respond well because they want to be challenged. This is particularly so for the most-able pupils. In a history lesson, pupils discussed confidently the social and political context during the Russian civil war in a way which showed deep understanding of the issues. However, inspectors did observe a few occasions where most-able pupils could have been stretched even further because the work that was set for them was too easy.
- Pupils' exercise books and files are well maintained, with neatly presented work that shows good coverage of the curriculum over time. Resources are also well designed and effectively support pupils' progress as they move forward with their work.
- Learning is effective because in the vast majority of cases pupils know how well they have done and what they have to do make their work even better. Pupils are often encouraged to plan their own learning, assess their own work and that of others, and this supports them to be independent learners.
- Teaching assistants are effective, as most challenge and support pupils without doing the work for them. Their support encourages deeper thinking and independence.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good nearly all the time because adults manage pupils' behaviour very

effectively and supportively. This means that teachers can make sure that lessons stay interesting and enjoyable, engage pupils and help them to learn well. This has a big influence on the good progress pupils are now making.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The supportive culture in school promotes pupils' well-being, including their emotional, physical and spiritual welfare.
- The school's chaplaincy is a strength and visible reminders around the school help pupils to focus on this important aspect of school life and its application in their daily lives.
- Pupils know the importance of keeping safe and say that they feel very safe in school. Their parents agree. The school teaches pupils how to stay safe in many respects, including online safety, the dangers of substance abuse and the importance of sexual health. Pupils know who they should go to if they have any worries or concerns.
- The school anticipates and manages any risk that pupils may be exposed to, including radicalisation, and monitors this carefully.
- The high profile of staff, including senior leaders around the school, supports pupils' confidence and knowledge that the school cares for them. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare and if it happens, it is dealt with quickly. Pupils' own anti-bullying group, Friends against Bullying, 'FABs', is very active in ensuring that bullying of any kind is not tolerated.
- Year 7 pupils were overwhelmingly positive about the school's work to help them get used to the school on arrival. They say that they were well prepared to begin their courses at school.
- Pupils are confident learners and are keen to discuss the many opportunities they have to enrich their experience in school. Pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 talked about the 'rapid improvement' in behaviour and teaching which has happened in school.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities, such as the school council. Pupils are keen to demonstrate their capacity for leadership. Sixth-form students understand that they are role models for younger students and also speak confidently about the improvements in school under its new leadership

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There have been significant improvements to the management of behaviour and the evidence of its impact is very clear to the visitor. The behaviour policy is understood and appreciated by pupils. The school's information on managing behaviour shows that incidents of misbehaviour are reducing.
- The school is calm and orderly, both during and between lessons, break and lunchtime. Pupils interact well with each other and with adults. Around the school, pupils are polite and courteous.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are consistently good across all years and all subjects, they settle quickly in lessons and they approach their work with enthusiasm.
- The school has high expectations for social behaviour among pupils and staff, so that respect and courtesy are seen as integral to the school's mission as a Christian community. 'Good Samaritan' weeks and a regular slot in the weekly newsletter feature exemplary actions by pupils. The school's high expectations also have a positive impact on the work carried out in the school's own behaviour centre.
- Pupils arrive to lessons usually on time and bring the right equipment with them. They look smart and the presentation of their work in books is mostly neat and tidy.
- Pupils know how to behave safely in practical subjects such as science, technology and physical education lessons.
- The attendance and behaviour of pupils who attend the alternative provision is checked carefully by senior leaders.
- Attendance and punctuality are improving and the school uses increasingly effective strategies to make sure that everyone understands the importance of regular attendance and its link with good progress. Attendance remains, however, too low.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Following two years of disappointing GCSE results, pupils' outcomes are improving as a result of improvements in teaching. Inspection evidence from the school's assessment information, pupils' written work and observations in lessons confirm the school's view that many pupils, but not all, are now making good and rapid progress.
- Pupils who left the school in 2015 started with attainment that was average, and left with attainment that was below average. This is because they had not been sufficiently challenged in the past by the work set in lessons.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils who made expected progress in mathematics, science and languages were below national averages, while progress rates for pupils in English and humanities were in line with the national figures.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability have not done as well, historically, as they could have. In the past, expectations were not always high enough for this group of learners to ensure good outcomes for them. Currently, their rates of progress are improving.
- Historically, the progress made by the most-able pupils in school was usually lower than that of similar pupils nationally. However, during this inspection, inspectors saw some most-able pupils responding well in lessons when they were expected to explain their understanding of ideas rather than just accept information being given by the teacher. The rates of progress made by this group are improving but still lag behind those of others.
- Despite a slight improvement in the 2015 GCSE performance of disadvantaged pupils compared to others in the school, their overall outcomes against others nationally were still below the national average for this group of pupils. Disadvantaged pupils in the current Year 11 are making better progress than before in both English and mathematics. The gap between their attainment and that of others in the school and nationally is closing. Disadvantaged pupils in other year groups also make better progress.
- Some groups of pupils in school now entered with attainment significantly below the national average, but are attaining standards at least in line with and, for some, better than that expected for their age.
- During the inspection, inspectors saw pupils making good progress in all subjects. This was particularly true in English, mathematics, geography, history, languages and physical education.
- Pupils who attend the alternative provision make good progress from their different starting points. This is monitored carefully by senior leaders in school.
- Some pupils join the school with skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are well below those expected for their age. These pupils receive extra help through the Year 7 catch-up funding and this is helping them to build up those skills and improve their progress. The school's own information shows the improvement that these pupils make, but it has yet to impact on improving outcomes at the end of Year 11.
- Pupils receive good careers advice and guidance to help them make the right choices. Activities in school help pupils to develop their personal skills and extend their learning, raising their aspirations and ambitions to proceed to the next stage of their education.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Learners in the school's sixth form achieve well. Information shows that, from their starting points in Year 11, they make good progress overall in their chosen study pathways in AS, A level and vocational subjects. The school's data for 2015 show that learners do well in subjects such as media, history, geography, performance studies, business studies, health and social care, psychology and further mathematics, but outcomes in science are less secure.
- Learners in the sixth form retake English or mathematics at GCSE if they have not already achieved a grade C in Year 11. Pass rates in these resits are getting better, and the school has strategies to improve this provision further.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good and has improved since the last inspection. Leaders have high expectations of learners. All teachers are accountable for monitoring the progress of learners and this is achieved within a rigorous process which is managed well.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good and learners are very positive about the learning experiences, which they say they enjoy. They are expected to attend lessons regularly and be proactive in

independent study so they are well prepared for further study or employment. This is carefully monitored by senior leaders.

- Study programmes in the sixth form are matched through personalised pathways, so that learners can choose courses which suit their individual interests, needs and aspirations. As well as academic and vocational courses, programmes include a range of other learning opportunities and qualifications which are supported by tutorials, mentoring and visits to places of work, personalised interventions and support.
- Careers advice and guidance is valued by learners, and although most of them follow a higher education route, a small number pursue opportunities for apprenticeship. The numbers of learners staying on to complete their courses are high.
- Learners' personal development and welfare in the sixth form is good and is supported by a well-structured programme. Leaders have implemented the expectations of the 16–19 study programmes, including opportunities for work experience and the development of skills for employment, charity work and community projects.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. Learners are dressed smartly in a business style and undertake leadership roles with younger pupils. They show maturity and confidence in their work in lessons and other private study areas. Their independence as learners is developed well through self-study and mentoring. Learners relish the extra-curricular opportunities they have, such as sport and drama, to develop their personal skills.

School details

Unique reference number	104259
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10002530

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,482
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	282
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Dalton
Headteacher	Sarah Hatfield
Telephone number	01902 368798
Website	www.st-thomasmore.walsall.sch.uk
Email address	postbox@st-thomasmore.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 January 2014

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school, and has a sixth form.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is extra funding given to schools to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- A small number of pupils are enrolled on alternative programmes of study at Walsall College, Rodbaston College and Wolverhampton local authority's "Re-entry" provision.
- The school receives support from Walsall local authority and the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes at various levels of leadership. A new headteacher took up her post in February 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching across 50 lessons in order to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Many of these lessons were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Pupil's work was sampled informally in lessons.
- Inspectors also reviewed a range of documents, including the school's own information on the progress of current pupils, planning and monitoring documentation, minutes of the governing body, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to keeping pupils safe.
- Meetings were held with pupils across Years 7 to 13, as well as informal meetings at break and lunchtime, and with members of the local authority and governing body. Discussions also took place with senior leaders, subject leaders and staff responsible for the pastoral care and guidance of pupils.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading as part of their lessons and an inspector listened particularly to pupils reading in Years 7 and 8.
- Inspectors evaluated the responses of 51 parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. They also took account of the views of pupils and members of the school's staff through the online inspection questionnaires they returned.

Inspection team

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