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Miss Janet Burns  
Headteacher  
St Thomas More RC College Specialising in Mathematics and Computing  
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Dear Miss Burns

### **Short inspection of St Thomas More RC College Specialising in Mathematics and Computing**

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 with Philippa Darley, Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in December 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has continued to improve since then and this continued journey of improvement is a result of senior leaders' commitment to pupils and the high expectations you have of pupils and for pupils. Leaders, all staff and pupils work harmoniously together to create a calm, purposeful and warm atmosphere. The vast majority of parents feel that the school is very caring and feel that 'this school is invested heavily in each and every pupil'.

The school's inclusive and Catholic ethos permeates every facet of school life. The mission statement of recognising the worth and dignity of all people is seen through leaders' actions with vulnerable pupils, through pupils' attitudes of respect and tolerance to others, and through the care and consideration shown between pupils and staff alike. Leaders' work on inclusion is rightly recognised as a beacon of good practice across the local authority.

You and your team have a very strong understanding of the school's many strengths and what needs to be improved further. You have effectively addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection, for example in raising outcomes in modern foreign languages, geography, and design and technology. In response, you provided additional support from external consultants, made changes in staffing and carefully considered the curriculum time made available to each subject. The

intensive monitoring and support from senior leaders and governors has also been a contributory factor in ensuring that improved and secure progress is now being made in each of these subjects. Indeed, modern foreign languages is now a highly successful department with many more pupils now opting to continue studying a language to GCSE level and beyond.

Leaders have also secured improvements to the quality of teaching across the school and leadership of this area is strong. Leaders have developed a vibrant teaching and learning culture through creating leaders of teaching and learning, peer coaching of staff and through the innovative use of technology to enable staff to fully reflect on and improve their practice. Robust procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching over time are in place and support is effective. All teaching staff are ambitious to improve and determined to deliver high-quality teaching for the benefit of pupils.

In response to improving progress for the most able pupils, you have created additional opportunities for pupils to attend lectures from a local sixth form college and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses. You are working hard to raise the aspirations of pupils, particularly of disadvantaged pupils. We agreed that there is still work to do in this area to ensure that the progress of the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils is rapid and sustained across the curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership of safeguarding is very strong. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. Procedures for recruiting staff are robust and meet statutory requirements. Staff have completed all relevant and recent training and they know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils. Staff liaise effectively with external agencies and are proactive in referring any concerns to the appropriate professionals. Some staff are trained to lead multi-agency safeguarding meetings and are highly effective in ensuring that pupils receive help as early as possible. Leaders ensure that the school is responsive to meeting pupils' needs, for example in the area of mental health, and pupils and families benefit greatly from personalised support.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, particularly online, as they have been well taught. Pupils spoken to during the inspection say that they feel safe in school and that they have a number of ways to raise any concerns they may have. This includes talking to designated staff and using an online referral system. Parents agree that their children are safe and happy in school. There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school.

## Inspection findings

- Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is significantly above the national average for some year groups and in line for other year groups. From their starting points, pupils make progress across the curriculum which is just in line with national averages, but their attainment is high.
- Disadvantaged pupils made slower progress across the curriculum in 2016. Leaders are aware of this and constantly review and track the progress of this group of pupils to ensure that effective interventions are swiftly put into place.
- The careful use of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils means that current learners are making progress more in line with their peers from similar starting points, as shown in the school's own assessment information.
- The school caters for a number of pupils who have complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. The support, both academically and emotionally, for these pupils is of the highest quality. As a result of this, pupils make good progress from their own starting points and all go on to secure destinations in further education, employment or training. Parents, pupils and the local authority speak very highly of the inclusive culture at St Thomas More.
- The attendance rate of all pupils is consistently above the national average and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving.
- Leaders are swift to respond to a pupil's absence and the detailed analysis of attendance means that any patterns are quickly identified and appropriate interventions are swiftly put in place. As a result of this, some vulnerable pupils have been closely monitored and referrals made to ensure that they are not at risk of harm or exploitation.
- Behaviour of pupils is good. The need for fixed-term exclusions has fallen significantly and internal procedures to improve behaviour are showing that both staff and systems are effective in dealing with the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils. Leaders' inclusive nature means that pupils at risk of exclusion from other schools are welcomed here and, indeed, thrive.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive, based on mutual respect and the high expectations for behaviour and learning set by teachers and leaders. Pupils' behaviour is largely self-regulated and there were very few instances seen where adults needed to intervene to correct any low-level disruption. This positive attitude to learning is evident in the depth, breadth and completion of work seen in pupils' books.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and this, combined with staff's in-depth knowledge of the pupils, ensures that learning is scaffolded well and that activities and tasks are appropriately pitched. Opportunities for pupils to extend their thinking, both through questioning and in writing, are regular and stretch some pupils.

- Teachers effectively manage learning through ongoing assessment strategies and oral feedback as learning occurs, but the marking policy of the school is not always consistently followed. As a result, there was less evidence of written feedback having as positive an impact on the progress of pupils.
- The development of literacy across the curriculum is strong. Pupils are presented with many opportunities to develop and improve their writing. Teachers give careful consideration to how they can improve pupils' technical literacy skills. Pupils' oracy skills are not as well developed, but leaders have comprehensive plans in place to address this issue.
- Governors are caring, committed professionals who actively support the ethos of the school and leaders. They are ambitious for all pupils and work closely with the headteacher and leaders to strive for continued improvements.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that they:

- develop a whole-school strategy of scholastic excellence which challenges pupils, including the most able, to excel across a range of subjects, and promotes their resilience, independence and thirst for learning
- continue the work on literacy across the curriculum to improve pupils' oracy skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection we met with you and other senior leaders, three governors, including the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. Accompanied by senior leaders, we visited lessons to observe learning and to look at pupils' work. One inspector also visited the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) resource base and spoke to pupils and staff. We met with a group of pupils and spoke to others in lessons and around school. Inspectors also heard pupils read.

We looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' attainment and progress, pupils' surveys, information about attendance and behaviour, and minutes of the governing body meetings. We considered the views expressed by parents in the 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as comments received via the free text facility. Inspectors took into account the 44 responses to a questionnaire for staff and the 64 responses to a questionnaire for pupils. We also undertook a review of the school's website.