

St Thomas More Catholic Academy

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

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2017

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	Good
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

- The headteacher has led significant improvements in the quality of education the school provides. With the support of an effective leadership team, he is changing the culture of the school to enhance the life chances of pupils.
- The school governors and the directors of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate have also been relentless in their drive to improve the school. They have demonstrated their ability to support leaders and hold them to account for their performance.
- The quality of teaching and learning is improving steadily. The school has a strong focus on staff professional development and accountability. This has led to a greater focus on pupils' progress.
- Leaders are clear about their responsibility to ensure that all pupils are supported to fulfil their potential. Disadvantaged pupils, as well as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points. There is also a sharper focus on the most able pupils, who historically did not consistently achieve the standards they were capable of.
- Leaders have taken strong actions to improve attendance and have successfully reduced the number of pupils who miss school.
- The school provides an inclusive environment in which pupils are supported in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, pupils understand the importance of respecting other cultures and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The provision for students enrolled in the 16 to 19 study programmes is good because it offers them a wide range of options and effective support to fulfil their aspirations. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- The school has appointed new, effective middle leaders who play a crucial part in improving standards. While there is early evidence of their positive impact, they still have, as a team, to eliminate the variations in the quality of teaching and learning that exist between and within subject areas
- Behaviour is improving rapidly, thanks to new policies and decisive actions taken by leaders. However, pupils are still adjusting to the higher expectations required by the school and a small minority need intervention from staff to comply with school rules.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that practice in the strongest subjects is replicated and embedded across all subject areas
 - embedding the culture of high expectations for progress and behaviour senior leaders are currently developing.
- Strengthen further the development and impact of subject leaders to secure sustained improvement of outcomes for all groups of pupils, especially the most able, across the curriculum, including in the sixth form.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear vision of what the school needs to do to improve and he is implementing it with a great deal of rigour and determination. By raising expectations and supporting staff development, he is transforming the school. As a result, standards at St Thomas More Catholic Academy are rising.
- The senior leadership team also plays an important role in changing the culture of the school. Senior leaders gather and analyse a wealth of information to monitor pupils' progress and target interventions when required. This approach is producing increasingly good outcomes for pupils.
- The headteacher has been uncompromising in leading the improvement of teaching and learning. He has dealt effectively with poor practice and appointed a large number of new teachers to create the conditions for continuous improvement. A large majority of staff and pupils appreciate the changes that have taken place and there is a positive atmosphere in the school.
- As part of its plan for sustained improvement, the school provides effective professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders. Through close collaboration with a local teaching school, the schools within the All Saints Catholic Collegiate and the local authority network, staff are encouraged to take part in a wide range of initiatives and training activities. This focus on training effectively supports the development of teaching and learning and gives new members of staff the confidence to take on greater responsibility.
- The performance management of staff supports both professional development and accountability. As a result, the vast majority of staff have a strong sense of responsibility towards the progress and welfare of pupils.
- Leaders pay particular attention to ensuring that there is a smooth transition from primary to secondary education. They are developing closer links with the primary schools that send pupils to St Thomas More. As a result of a better knowledge of pupils' development when they join the school, leaders are targeting more effectively the use of the additional funding the school receives. This enables pupils who need support to catch up with their peers in English and mathematics.
- Leaders have a strong focus on the development of literacy in Years 7 and 8. They deploy substantial resources to ensure that pupils who start school below their reading age are given every opportunity to improve by the end of Year 8. There is strong evidence that this initiative is producing positive results. Leaders are now also focusing their attention on developing writing across the curriculum, as they have identified this as an area that needs to improve.
- The school also makes effective use of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders do a detailed analysis of the issues that prevent pupils from fulfilling their potential and draw up plans to ensure that the funding is spent to address these issues successfully. The school monitors closely the impact of these plans and records show that disadvantaged pupils benefit from them, both in terms of progress and personal development.

- Funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is increasingly well targeted. A new focus on the deployment and impact of teaching assistants is improving the quality of education these pupils receive. For example, closer collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants, coordinated by pastoral leaders, is proving very effective in supporting pupils' progress.
- The headteacher and his team have carefully reviewed the curriculum to ensure that it provides pupils with the opportunities to progress to the next stage of education or training that best suits them. The leaders' aim is also to raise aspirations. To this end, pupils are offered pathways that match both their abilities and aspirations and allow them to continue to train or study towards a career that appeals to them. Collaboration with the local college for vocational subjects for key stage 4 pupils, and Trinity Sixth Form Consortium for post-16 studies, allows the school to offer a wide range of options.
- Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are also effective in raising pupils' aspirations. By offering activities that range from business and enterprise competitions to robotics and engineering and art, as well as outdoor pursuits, the school encourages pupils to develop skills that can equip them for their future life. The take-up for these activities and the enthusiasm with which pupils talk about them reflect both the popularity and impact of the enrichment programme.
- The headteacher and governors are developing the capacity for improvement of the school. By appointing new subject leaders last academic year and this year, they have been addressing the need to ensure consistently strong practice across the curriculum. These new leaders have already proved that they are effective practitioners and are developing teaching and learning in their areas. However, they are not yet having sufficient impact on reducing some of the variations in practice that pupils experience in some subjects in key stage 3 and key stage 4, as well as post-16. It is still the case, for example, that practice is consistently stronger in English than it is in mathematics or in geography.

Governance of the school

- The governors, supported by the directors of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate, with whom they work closely, have a highly effective impact on the strategic development of the school. They have a thorough understanding of the strengths of the school and the issues it faces. They show great determination in addressing these issues to ensure that pupils receive the best possible education.
- Governors and directors provide strong support to the headteacher, but also hold him rigorously to account. They monitor progress against the school improvement plan and have a clear focus on the progress of key groups of pupils. They analyse data and other information presented to them and follow up issues. They commission external evaluation reviews of subject areas. They also gather information through visits to the school, discussions with staff and surveys of pupils and staff.
- Governors also fulfil their duties effectively in terms of overseeing safeguarding and the financial management of the school. They are fully involved in the recruitment of senior staff, the headteacher's performance management and the review of key policies. They monitor the impact of additional funding well, especially the pupil premium grant. They

also ensure that the staff's pay progression is fair and linked to their performance management.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All aspects of safeguarding in the school are effective and well managed. The senior leader in charge of safeguarding, supported by two assistants, ensures that not only are legal requirements met in terms of record-keeping and staff training, but that a culture of safeguarding prevails in the school. The school works effectively with families and external agencies to ensure that pupils who may be at risk are closely monitored and supported. As a result, clear procedures, with which members of staff are familiar, are in place to intervene and protect vulnerable pupils. Policies are reviewed and updated regularly. School records show that issues are dealt with swiftly and rigorously.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the time of the previous inspection. Teachers are fully accountable for the progress of their pupils. As a result, pupils are increasingly well taught and the quality of their work is improving.
- The large turnover of staff over the last two years has opened the way for leaders to drive innovation. The school's involvement in initial teacher training provided opportunities to develop teaching and learning and to recruit effective and committed new teachers. As a result, several subject leaders have sharpened their practice and are developing effective strategies to engage pupils.
- The large majority of teachers have good subject knowledge. They prepare lessons thoroughly and devise activities that encourage pupils to develop their knowledge and skills.
- In the most effective lessons, pupils learn from their mistakes and are able to articulate precisely what they need to do to improve. This is the case, in particular, in English, where pupils, regardless of their ability, benefit from lessons which are both enjoyable and challenging.
- Teachers set homework regularly to provide pupils with opportunities to apply and develop their knowledge independently. A majority of pupils complete homework conscientiously and are positive about how this supports their progress.
- Pupils generally take pride in their work. Exercise books and folders are well presented.
- The school is successfully developing pupils' reading ability in Years 7 and 8, so that they are not falling behind as they progress towards qualifications at the end of key stage 4. While this aspect of literacy development is successful, leaders are developing writing and numeracy across the curriculum and enhancing the support provided to pupils who had a difficult start to their secondary education.
- The school's drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning is having a positive impact in the large majority of lessons, but there are still variations between subject

areas and within subjects. Leaders, at all levels, are addressing this issue and there is improvement. However, the full impact of leaders' actions is still not evident across the school. While there is no weak teaching, good practice is not yet consistent across all subjects. For example, while in many lessons teachers plan work that challenges pupils of all abilities, in a minority of lessons, the most able pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to extend their knowledge and skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Through its motto 'Aspire to be More', the school conveys its strong emphasis on the personal development of pupils. Although the school has a strong Catholic ethos, it serves a diverse community. Consequently, leaders and governors promote a very inclusive approach which caters for all backgrounds. This is evident throughout the school.
- The pastoral team provides strong support to pupils in different aspects of their school life. For example, pupils experiencing difficulties have access to a 'reconciliation room' where personalised support is available.
- The school implements effective anti-bullying policies. In assemblies, form periods and in some lessons, pupils are made aware of all types of bullying, whether it involves derogatory comments about race or sexual orientation, physical abuse or online harassment. There are also pupils who are anti-bullying ambassadors. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying and why it is unacceptable. They trust teachers to intervene if bullying occurs. School records show that bullying incidents are dealt with effectively.
- The vast majority of pupils say that they feel safe at the school. They are taught how to keep safe in a range of situations, both in school and outside school. There are many activities in lessons, as well as during assemblies and form periods, dedicated to the potential risks of using the internet and social media. In discussions with inspectors, pupils showed clear awareness of issues such as the risks of radicalisation and sexual exploitation.
- The school provides pupils with effective impartial careers advice. In addition to the regular visits from the local authority careers advisers, the school organises careers fairs with representatives of a wide range of companies, colleges and universities.
- The personal development and welfare of pupils not educated in the school are closely monitored by a senior member of staff. Frequent contact with the external providers, including regular meetings and visits, allows the school to monitor closely the progress and well-being of pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The headteacher and his team have made behaviour one of the key priorities of the

school. A new behaviour policy has been introduced and is being implemented. It sets clear boundaries and spells out consequences. As a result, pupils are clear about how they are expected to behave.

- In discussions with inspectors, pupils expressed positive opinions about the policy for rewards and sanctions. They are aware that good behaviour is crucial for them to be able to learn.
- Movement between lessons is orderly and pupils are punctual. The vast majority of pupils arrive in lessons with their books, exercise books and other equipment they may need and are ready to learn. As a result, lesson time is used productively.
- Behaviour around the school is well managed. The large school site is well supervised at breaktime, lunchtime and at the start and end of the school day. Consequently, boisterous behaviour is swiftly challenged when it occurs. Pupils show respect to staff.
- Attendance has improved, thanks to the rigorous monitoring and strong actions taken by leaders to tackle absences.
- The number of exclusions is decreasing. The new behaviour policy has set higher expectations for pupils. However, school records show that a few pupils still fail to comply with the rules.
- While a large majority of pupils display positive attitudes to learning, challenging behaviour in lessons still occurs occasionally, especially when teaching is less effective in engaging pupils. Leaders are aware of this issue and are taking appropriate action to ensure that pupils comply with expectations.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils showed a marked improvement in 2016 compared to previous years. GCSE results showed good overall progress for pupils and larger numbers gaining good grades in a range of subjects.
- Evidence gathered during the inspection and the school's own records of pupils' progress confirm that there is an upward trend of improvement. This demonstrates that the school is increasingly effective in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education or training.
- Assessment information gathered by the school for current pupils indicates that, at key stage 4, pupils are making good progress. Differences that existed between progress and attainment in English and in mathematics still exist, but pupils are starting to make better progress in mathematics this year and differences are diminishing.
- Progress across the curriculum continues to improve as the quality of teaching in subjects such as science and humanities, where there were issues historically, is improving. The rigorous tracking of progress and intervention strategies used is having a positive impact on the overall progress of pupils at key stages 3 and 4.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, like that of other pupils, is improving. The trends for current pupils in key stages 3 and 4 show that the support the school provides for disadvantaged pupils allows them to make progress that is increasingly in line with other pupils. The overall progress of disadvantaged pupils in 2016 was good.

- There is a high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language at the school. They make as much, or sometimes better, progress than other pupils in the school. In 2016, their attainment and progress were better than other pupils nationally.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was not as good in 2016, from their starting points, as that of other pupils, especially in science and humanities. As a result of more focused actions taken by the school, assessment information for current pupils shows that they are now more in line with their peers across the curriculum.
- One of the key priorities for leaders is to ensure that the most able pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, make at least as much progress as other pupils from their starting points. There is increasing support for them and current assessment information shows that this support is having an impact. Historically, the most able pupils have not made as much progress from their starting points as other pupils. However, there was an improvement in 2016, and this improvement is being sustained for current pupils.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students make good progress from their starting points in the sixth form. They are given effective guidance and support to choose the courses that best suit their abilities and aspirations. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Students benefit from the sixth form being part of a consortium. Arrangements between the schools that are members of the consortium are very well managed, providing students with a wide range of options and well-structured programmes of study.
- The leadership of the sixth form is effective. The sixth-form leader sets high expectations and students' progress is carefully monitored. Students who are not on track to meet their targets receive additional support. Consequently, the vast majority of students are positive about their experience of the sixth form.
- Students who failed to achieve a grade C in English and mathematics in their GCSE are very well supported to do so while they are studying for other subjects. As a result, most students make good progress.
- Poor behaviour in the sixth form is never an issue. The vast majority of students are focused on their studies and welcome the opportunities offered to them. There is a strong sense of community among the students.
- Students have access to careers advice provided by the local authority. They also do work experience in order to develop their employability skills.
- The school offers a range of enrichment opportunities, including residential and university visits, as well as financial and independent living guidance. There are also many opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills within the school community as members of the school council or as anti-bullying ambassadors.
- Students are well supported to apply to university courses, including those in the Russell Group, or to find suitable apprenticeships or employment. Almost all students

who leave school after the sixth form gain a university place, an apprenticeship or find employment.

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School details

Unique reference number	140304
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10032611

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1040
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Knight
Principal	Mark Rayner
Telephone number	01782 882 900
Website	www.stmca.org.uk
Email address	office@stmca.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than the average secondary school and has a sixth form. It has held academy status since 2013 and is part of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is above average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school places pupils who require additional support and alternative provision at Reach Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Merit Medical PRU. Both PRUs are run by the local authority. The school also places pupils at Stoke-on-Trent College for vocational courses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 60 lessons, some of which were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work from a variety of subjects in key stages 3 and 4, as well as in the sixth form.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and groups of pupils from across all years. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body, two directors of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate, two representatives of St Joseph's Teaching School and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime, between lessons and after school.
- Inspectors took into account 50 parent responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 81 members of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a variety of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation of its provision and its development plan. Inspectors also considered information relating to achievement, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance, safeguarding and governance.

Inspection team

Patrick Amieli, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Jupp	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Godden	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector

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