

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall

Darlaston Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands WV14 7BL

Inspection dates:

5–6 November 2019

Outcome

St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are expected to reach their full potential academically, intellectually, morally and socially. This is a happy and welcoming school. Pupils, staff and parents agree that it feels like belonging to an extended family. Leaders promote a strong moral purpose and set of values. Consequently, pupils show respect for themselves, each other and for adults.

The school is calm and orderly, and pupils feel safe. Bullying is rare. Pupils say that staff quickly sort any bullying that might happen. They say that there is always an adult they can talk to if they have a concern.

Pupils generally work hard in lessons and want to do well. However, they are not doing as well as they could in all subjects. Not all teachers have the same expectations of what pupils can achieve.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Senior leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are ambitious for pupils. Leaders' actions have improved the quality of education in some subjects. Teachers in these subjects have clear guidance from leaders on what to teach and when. Subsequently, curriculum leaders have carefully planned what it is that they want pupils to know and understand. Pupils achieve well in these subjects. However, this is not consistent across all subjects.

In some subjects, pupils do not develop their knowledge and understanding as well as they might. Pupils' work is not routinely checked by teachers. As a result, too many pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Boys have significantly underperformed compared to girls. This is especially so in English. Leaders are aware of this and have looked to use resources and teaching methods that are suitable for all pupils. The positive effect of this approach is yet to be seen.

In the most successful subjects, such as creative media, the teaching of the curriculum is well developed. Tasks and activities are challenging and ambitious. This helps pupils to achieve well.

Some subject areas are improving, such as English and science. Pupils are beginning to remember more and apply their knowledge. In the past, weaker teaching in science led to gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers are now given useful training, so that science teaching is improving, although there is more work to do to raise achievement.

In other subjects, such as geography and French, pupils do not routinely and consistently build on what they already know and can do.

There are well-planned and sequenced schemes of learning in most subjects. However, leaders do not regularly monitor that these schemes are implemented effectively. Consequently, in some subjects, pupils do not have the knowledge they need to be successful in the next stage of their education.

Senior leaders are aware of the need to further develop curriculum leaders because of their analysis of assessment information and internal monitoring. Training and support have been planned to improve middle management of the school. The impact of this is yet to be seen.

The number of pupils who study French at GCSE has increased in Years 9 and 10. The proportion of pupils who study the full set of EBacc subjects is now higher than national levels, and this is a significant improvement.

Sixth-form students are confident young people. They are good role models for younger pupils and they contribute well to the school and the wider community. Students in the sixth-form enjoy their studies. Subject plans in the sixth form build on students' prior knowledge and deepen and extend their learning. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and share their enthusiasm for their subjects with students.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do well as most teachers plan appropriate learning experiences to support them effectively. Most staff use the personalised plans for pupils with SEND to make sure that the curriculum and individual lessons meet their needs.

The school has a strong ethos of respect and tolerance. Pupils are clear that everyone should be treated equally and with respect. Most pupils want to learn. They work hard in lessons. Low-level disruption is rare.

A strength of the school is the number of trips and activities offered to all pupils. These include skiing trips and visits to Lourdes and Poland. Pupils have the opportunity to experience theatre, dance and opera productions. Pupils spoke about how visits from the Anne Frank Trust and the Good Shepherd Team have helped them understand the past and their place in the world.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is clearly a high priority for staff. There is a well-established safeguarding culture throughout the school. Leaders regularly update staff on any changes in requirements or local safeguarding issues. Systems exist to identify and support pupils at risk. Pupils are safe and know how to stay safe in a range of situations. They are confident that trusted adults will help them if they are worried about something. The school involves outside agencies when it needs to and keeps careful records. Leaders check all staff's suitability to work with children. The checks are recorded accurately on the single central record.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Schemes of learning in all key stages in nearly all subjects are well planned, structured and sequenced. However, leaders need to check that they are being implemented effectively. They should ensure that topics are taught in a logical way so that pupils extend their knowledge and develop their skills.
- There is a need for greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school and within departments. Leaders need to take steps to improve the monitoring of teaching and learning and put appropriate support and training in place so that the curriculum is delivered effectively in all subjects.
- Boys perform less well than girls in nearly all subjects in key stages 3 and 4. Boys are less confident in situations where they are required to complete extended pieces of writing. The school needs to continue to develop and implement strategies to improve the educational outcomes of boys.
- Some subject leaders lack experience and the confidence to work with their staff to deliver the curriculum effectively. Senior leaders need to work closely with subject leaders to ensure they have sufficient training and support to work effectively with their teaching teams.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall to be good in February 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	104259
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10111735
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1512
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	294
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Richard Dalton
Headteacher	Siobhan Bowen
Website	www.st-thomasmore.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 February 2016

Information about this school

- This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the St Thomas More Catholic school to be good on 24 February 2016.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new headteacher.
- The school uses the following alternative provision: Walsall College and Shepwell Hospital School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, curriculum leaders, teachers, pupils and governors. An inspector spoke to the school improvement adviser and the diocesan support manager on the telephone. Inspectors scrutinised school documents, including curriculum plans and school development plans.

- An inspector checked the school's single central record and the procedures for the recruitment of staff. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and checked pupils' records. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils to find out how pupils are kept safe.
- Inspectors looked in detail at five subject areas. These were English, science, French, geography and creative media. Inspectors spoke to curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils about these subjects. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.

Inspection team

David Buckle, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Antony Edkins	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector

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