

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas More Catholic High School

Dane Bank Avenue, Crewe, Cheshire CW2 8AE

Inspection dates:

4–5 March 2020

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

At St Thomas More Catholic High School, relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils are kind to, and supportive of, each other in this welcoming school. The pupils that we spoke with praised the quality of education that the school provides.

Pupils cherish the school's reputation in the community. Many spoke of feeling privileged to belong to the school which they described as being like a family. They are proud to wear the uniform. Pupils would recommend this school without hesitation.

Teachers' expectations of all pupils are high. Pupils respond well to their teachers and behave sensibly. They work hard, listen carefully and discuss their work confidently. All pupils are encouraged to do the best that they can. Those pupils with whom we spoke said that they are taught well. As a result, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well in their GCSE examinations.

Pupils told us that their teachers really care about them. Pupils' individuality is celebrated, for example through 'This is me' days. Discrimination is not tolerated, and pupils feel safe. Pupils who met with us do not perceive bullying to be an issue. If it does occur, pupils are confident that teachers will deal with it.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils at this school. Outcomes are strong. By the end of Year 11, in many subjects, pupils have made better progress between key stages 2 and 4 than their peers nationally. Current pupils also learn well across most subjects.

Building pupils' aspirations is a priority for leaders. For example, the headteacher strongly believes that all pupils should study at least one modern foreign language. A significant proportion of pupils study the English Baccalaureate. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum offer is successful in preparing pupils for their next stage of education or training. All pupils go on to further education or apprenticeships.

At key stage 3, pupils study the full suite of national curriculum subjects. In many subjects, leaders have planned the curriculum well so that pupils have deep, rich learning experiences. Teachers have thought carefully about what to teach and in which order. This is so that pupils can effectively build on their previous learning. The content and knowledge to be taught is precisely chosen, relevant and demanding. Where this is not the case, leaders are addressing this earnestly.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge, and pupils appreciate this. In most subjects, teachers plan activities that give pupils opportunities to recall prior knowledge and strengthen learning. As a result, pupils develop a secure understanding of the topics that they study and can make links between them. Where this occurs, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, can talk confidently about their learning, using subject-specific vocabulary. However, in a small number of subjects, leaders are aware that this is not fully developed. This means that pupils' learning in these subjects is sometimes superficial.

All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have access to the full curriculum offer. Pupils with SEND are supported well with their learning. However, outcomes for some of these pupils have not been as good as they should have been. Leaders are in the process of ensuring that all teachers understand how to plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

Pupils benefit from high expectations and consistent routines. Behaviour everywhere is calm and orderly. Leaders place great emphasis on the basics, such as uniform and manners. This is appreciated by staff and pupils alike.

Leaders' fundamental aim is to prepare pupils to be well-rounded, responsible citizens in modern society. Through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum, pupils learn about social and environmental issues. They know how to stay safe and healthy, both mentally and physically. Pupils who are disadvantaged, and those with SEND, have a strong voice within the school community. Leaders have implemented the 'Building the Kingdom' programme during form time to develop pupils' character and resilience. Extra-curricular opportunities are wide and varied.

Leaders, including governors, know the school well. They are relentless in their work to ensure that the quality of education is good for all pupils. They are aware of what needs to be done to improve the school further. Most staff feel supported by leaders, particularly in terms of their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Most pupils said that they know who to go to if they have any concerns. Leaders ensure that all staff are well trained in keeping pupils safe. This enables them to identify vulnerable pupils or those at risk. Referrals are timely and effective. Where intervention is necessary, leaders take appropriate action to safeguard pupils.

Pupils learn how to keep safe through the school's PSHE curriculum. Regular assemblies delivered by various agencies, such as the local police, ensure that pupils are aware of safeguarding risks in the local community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In many subjects, teachers have planned carefully for the retention of knowledge through retrieval and recall activities. Where this is embedded, pupils have deep, secure knowledge, and teachers help them to make schematic links across their learning. However, this is not happening in a small number of subjects. Where this is the case, pupils' learning is sometimes superficial and disjointed. Leaders should ensure that, in all subjects, teachers plan effectively for the retention of knowledge to help pupils remember more over time.
- Leaders are ambitious for pupils with SEND. They have made sure that they benefit from the same curriculum offer as other pupils. They also ensure that teachers have the same high expectations of pupils with SEND as for others. There are strategies in place to help teachers to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. However, currently, not all teachers are doing this effectively. This means that some pupils with SEND do not learn as well as they could in some subjects. Leaders should ensure that teachers in all subjects understand how to adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND.

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 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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St. Thomas More Catholic High School, A Specialist School for Mathematics and ICT, to be good on 19–20 April 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

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

If you are the school and 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	139764
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10110978
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	648
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Joan Evans
Headteacher	Clare Hogg
Website	www.st-thomasmore.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 January 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Thomas More Catholic High School converted to become an academy on 1 June 2016. When its predecessor school, St. Thomas More Catholic High School, A Specialist School for mathematics and ICT, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- St Thomas More Catholic High School is part of the Diocese of Shrewsbury. The school's last section 48 inspection was in February 2017.
- The school uses alternative provision for a small number of pupils at Reaseheath College.

Information about this inspection

- During this inspection, we met with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, middle leaders and a range of teaching and support staff. We spoke with the school improvement partner, a representative of the Diocese of Shrewsbury, five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the executive chair of the trust.
- We met with pupils from key stages 3 and 4.

- We reviewed a range of documentation, including curriculum plans, behaviour and attendance records, bullying logs and safeguarding documents. We checked arrangements for pupils attending alternative provision.
- We considered the 19 responses to Ofsted’s pupils’ questionnaire and 65 responses to Ofsted’s online survey for staff. We also checked the views of the 168 parents in their responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View. This included the comments received via the free-text facility.
- We carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, history and mathematics. We met with subject leaders, visited some lessons, looked at pupils’ work and spoke with pupils and teachers. We also considered other subjects, such as modern foreign languages, technology, drama, art and design, and geography.

Inspection team

Rachel Goodwin, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Tuesday Humby

Ofsted Inspector

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