

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas More Catholic Academy

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

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 October 2022

Outcome

St Thomas More Catholic Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe at St Thomas More Catholic Academy because staff provide them with excellent care. Staff make time for pupils' welfare and no problem is too great. Pupils trust their teachers and talk openly with them.

Parents and carers can approach school staff about any matter. Trained staff listen to them and take any concerns seriously.

Pupils relish involvement in the school's wider curriculum. They have opportunities to work with local employers and can attend masterclasses about forensic science and marine biology. The school helps pupils to learn life skills, for example while camping when working towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award. These, and other experiences, bolster their self-confidence and resilience.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) thrive in the school's inclusive provision. Careers advice is effective, and a few older students have secured places at Oxford University. Others are members of the school's leadership team and act as positive role models for younger pupils.

Pupils talk positively about their learning. Their teachers enjoy teaching them. If any pupils find tasks difficult, then they receive effective help. Pupils behave well and strive to meet their teachers' expectations.

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

School leaders have designed an ambitious and well-planned curriculum. In key stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form, pupils study a wide and relevant range of subjects. Throughout the school, the structured approach to curriculum design helps pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, to learn key knowledge. However, in key stage 3 mathematics, the curriculum does not ensure pupils practise and remember all that they should, for example the relationship between the sides and angles of triangles.

Leaders have an ambition to increase the proportion of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). As part of their plans, they have started to improve provision for modern foreign languages. Subject leaders have adjusted the French curriculum in key stage 3. Furthermore, careers advisers now guide more pupils to consider the benefits of taking a language as a GCSE option. As a result, EBacc entry rates are beginning to rise.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge, which they use with positive effect. They plan learning in clear and logical sequences. They regularly check pupils' understanding of recent learning before starting new material. These ongoing assessments help teachers to spot any misconceptions, and support pupils to make progress.

Pupils with SEND, including those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, receive effective support. Pupils can access a dedicated suite of rooms and a garden area to support their well-being. When necessary, trained staff adapt resources to meet pupils' needs and to help them work with independence. As a result, pupils with SEND have full access to the school's curriculum. Indeed, teachers' adaptation of tasks strengthens their progress. Leaders provide staff with detailed guidance about pupils' needs, and staff use this effectively. They know when to give these pupils extra time to understand new information. These, and other adaptations, mean that all pupils can work towards the same ambitious curriculum goals.

Leaders know the importance of supporting those who struggle with reading. These pupils receive appropriate help to improve their reading skills. This support is effective and results in some marked improvements.

Pupils maintain very positive attitudes and behaviour in school. They participate in high-quality opportunities that develop their character and equip them with life skills and a sense of responsibility. For instance, Year 9 pupils recently learned about the dangers of knife crime. During the inspection, they spoke with maturity about the powerful messages they had taken from this. These aspects of the school's work provide pupils with worthwhile information about the risks they may face in the wider world. Staff also equip pupils with a strengthened awareness of how to avoid these risks.

Sixth-form students achieve well and contribute with enthusiasm to school life. They help younger pupils and people in the local community. Staff provide students with impartial and well-crafted careers advice. This enables them to make informed choices about their next steps. Recently, some students experienced life as an undergraduate, for a week, at an Oxford College. These experiences enable students to learn more about university, apprenticeships or employment.

Staff praise senior leaders' support for their work and well-being. School leaders listen to, and act upon, staff feedback and views. In addition, staff have immediate access to an independent counselling service, should they need it. Staff say that leaders' actions and the supportive workplace culture reduce stress and make the school a happy place to work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

School leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture. Designated safeguarding leaders understand the local context and priorities, which inform their safeguarding practice.

Staff receive regular safeguarding updates and training. Staff know who to speak to if they have a concern and how to record these concerns. When necessary, staff act promptly to keep pupils safe. They follow up any absences immediately. If needed, specialist staff undertake home visits.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. This includes sessions about appropriate internet use and the risks posed by knife crime. Staff and pupils value the school's extensive investment in their mental health and well-being.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not checked carefully enough on the impact of some aspects of the key stage 3 mathematics curriculum. Currently, some pupils in key stage 3 have gaps in what they know. Leaders should do more to check that pupils have covered all that they should and have sufficient practice so that they remember what they need to know in mathematics.
- Over time, leaders have not ensured that enough pupils study a language in key stage 4. Consequently, not enough pupils finish Year 11 having completed the EBacc. Leaders should continue to support and encourage more pupils to study a language through key stage 4.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2017.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	140304
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10240210
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1141
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	120
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair of trustees	Anne Middleton-Hill
Headteacher	Mark Rayner
Website	http://www.stmca.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 May 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up post in January 2015. A small number of pupils attend alternative provision off site at five providers. Three providers are registered with the Department for Education (DfE). Two providers are not registered with the DfE.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school is a member of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate multi-academy trust.
- A section 48 inspection to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Thomas More Catholic Academy as a Catholic school took place in November 2016.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, trust directors and the chief executive officer of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate Trust.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, art and physical education. In each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders and visited lessons. They spoke with all subject teachers and met with a selection of pupils.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for personal development. Inspectors talked with pupils in key stages 3 and 4 and sixth-form students. During their discussions, they asked pupils about relationships education, careers guidance, safety and other matters related to personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked school policies and the single central record of checks on adults in school. They spoke with the designated safeguarding leader about safeguarding and child protection procedures. They spoke with a broad range of pupils and discussed safeguarding with staff and governors.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who completed Ofsted's online survey. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including records pertaining to self-evaluation and school improvement. They also considered records relating to bullying, behaviour, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. They took account of a range of curriculum planning documents, including those related to relationships, sex and health education.

Inspection team

Antony Edkins, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

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