

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall

Darlaston Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands WV14 7BL

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 October 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils know when they walk into school that they are part of a warm, welcoming community. There is a clear celebration of Catholic values in displays around the building, but staff ensure the school is inclusive for all pupils. The headteacher sets the tone for the caring ethos. She knows the names of all pupils and has a greeting for everyone as she passes them in corridors. Pupils are happy, enjoy going to school and feel safe.

The behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils understand the expectations placed upon them. They are respectful towards staff and each other. However, some pupils do not attend school regularly enough and too many pupils are late for school at the start of the day. Bullying is rare. Pupils have confidence that staff will deal with any concerns raised.

Leaders and staff are ambitious for their pupils and are implementing strategies to help pupils to know and remember more. This means that pupils usually make good progress with their learning, although this is not consistent across all classes.

Pupils get involved with a wide variety of clubs and trips. Sixth-form students participate fully in the life of the school, and they help to run a number of clubs for younger pupils.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders have worked closely with heads of department to successfully develop a curriculum that is suitably ambitious for all pupils. The curriculum builds effectively on pupils' experiences at primary school. At key stage 4, leaders are working to encourage more pupils to study a wider curriculum that includes a modern foreign language. They recognise there is more to do on this. The sixth form has three pathways for students, linked to their abilities and interests. This supports students of all abilities in continuing their studies at the school.

In the last year, the school has developed a new approach to teaching and learning. Subject leaders and teachers enthusiastically embrace the new ways of working. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use this to clearly explain new ideas to pupils. In many lessons, teachers' questions and planned activities help pupils to remember earlier learning. Teachers use a number of activities to help them identify gaps in understanding. Where the new approaches are confidently delivered, pupils make good progress over time. However, this is not consistently the case across the school.

Teachers adapt the learning effectively to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils value and benefit from the additional support they receive from teaching assistants in many lessons.

Leaders are working closely with subject staff to develop pupils' reading skills. Reading takes place in form time and every department has a 'Literacy Ambassador'. Pupils' reading ability is checked on entry to the school and weaker readers are identified. However, this work is at an early stage and leaders have not carefully reviewed the impact of actions to support reading. As a result, interventions are not yet focused enough on specific needs.

Pupils behave well in lessons. They settle quickly to their learning and are usually keen to participate in their lessons, answering questions and completing written tasks. There is a positive and respectful school culture.

Leaders have introduced a number of strategies to try to improve attendance and punctuality, including for students in the sixth form. However, leaders have not reviewed the impact of these, so do not have the information they need to improve attendance and punctuality further.

Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their spiritual beliefs through engaging with school displays and activities in form time and assemblies. Pupils have frequent opportunities to engage with different views, beliefs and opinions. They show tolerance towards all members of their diverse school community.

Governors understand their role. They share the headteacher's vision for the school and value the strong caring ethos. Governors understand the steps the school is taking to improve pupils' progress. They carry out their statutory duties and have dedicated governors with specific responsibilities who visit school regularly.

Pupils receive unbiased information, advice and guidance about their next steps. They begin to develop an understanding of different jobs through form time activities in key stage 3. Students in the sixth form are well supported in preparing for university or training by a caring and professional team of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff have regular safeguarding training and updates. This enables them to identify pupils who may need early help. Staff use a wide range of external agencies to secure the support that families need to keep pupils safe.

There are effective procedures in place to safely recruit new staff.

There is also regular work done with pupils that reflects topical issues. For example, the pastoral programme in form time has covered issues such as domestic violence and knife crime. Pupils know who to speak to if they have any worries or concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not systemically monitor the impact of some of their actions and interventions, for example the actions taken to develop reading or improve attendance. As a result, leaders do not put in place the timely adaptations that would ensure the work has a positive impact on pupils. Leaders need to review their strategic approach to monitoring and review.
- Pupils do not attend school regularly enough and too many pupils are late to school in the morning. Leaders know that if pupils do not regularly attend, they will not make the progress that is expected of them. Leaders need to continue to develop strategies to improve attendance and punctuality and embed those actions that are already having an impact.
- Some teaching does not consistently address gaps in knowledge or help pupils to remember what they have learned. This means that pupils are not always learning as well as they could. Senior leaders should sustain their work in helping teachers to embed the school's new approach to teaching and learning.

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	104259
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10241039
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
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	1499
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	269
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	5 and 6 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses full-time alternative provision at three registered providers.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 lead inspector met with the members of the school's governing committee, representatives of Walsall local authority and the diocese, the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, geography, and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum and visited a sample of lessons. Inspectors met with teachers and spoke with pupils about their learning. Inspectors also scrutinised samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders and staff working in pastoral roles. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their wider development and other aspects of school life.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation, including the school's single central record. They scrutinised other documentation, including leaders' records of staff training.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and the responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Deborah James, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Gail Peyton	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Geoff Renwick	Ofsted Inspector

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