

# Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School

Croftdale Road, Blaydon-on-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE21 4BQ

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Inspection dates: 1 and 2 March 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Leaders, with the support of the trust, have created a climate of high ambition at the school. The headteacher has overseen well-considered changes that have built on the traditions of the school. Pupils aspire to meet the high expectations leaders have for all.

Pupils follow a well-thought-out curriculum. The important knowledge that pupils need to remember is clearly identified. The curriculum is aspirational for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Support for pupils with SEND is strong.

The school is calm and orderly. In lessons and at social times, pupils behave well. Pupils are polite and well mannered. Strong relationships exist between staff and pupils.

Pastoral support is a strength. The house system is a core feature of the school. Pupils feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. Bullying is rare. Pupils say that staff would quickly sort out problems should they occur.

The school prepares pupils to become respectful and active citizens. Pupils take on leadership roles, including those in the sixth form. This allows pupils to live the school's motto of doing 'the right things for the right reasons', which applies to all members of the school.

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

Leaders have developed a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum. In the different subjects, teaching is considered and builds knowledge over time. Staff routinely use common vocabulary when teaching. They refer to 'key concepts' and 'crucial learning'. For example, in geography, staff know that pupils need a strong understanding of place and location before moving on to sustainability issues in Antarctica.

When pupils progress to key stage 4, they have the option to study a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. Leaders encourage pupils to study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. Leaders meet and get support from a local languages centre of excellence. As a result, the number of pupils opting to study a modern foreign language in Year 10 has increased noticeably.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use their knowledge and appropriate activities to explain new concepts to pupils effectively. Subject content is revisited and linked to new learning. Regular 'make it stick' activities are used to ensure pupils do not forget what they have learned. Most teachers use effective strategies to check on individual pupil's learning. However, in a small number of subjects, the use of assessment to inform next steps by some teachers is less well developed.

This means that, for some pupils, opportunities are missed to address misconceptions.

Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school. In lessons, most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have responsibility for behaviour management in class. Inconsistencies in approaches to managing classroom behaviour is causing frustration for some pupils. Pupils attend well. This is supported by the systems leaders have put in place to track trends and to ensure that good attendance is a priority for all. When needed, leaders work effectively with individual pupils and their families to improve attendance.

Pupils with SEND are well supported in the school. Their needs are quickly identified and planned for. Teachers and support staff know how to meet the needs and remove barriers to learning for pupils they teach because of the precise and helpful systems leaders have put in place, such as class profiles. For example, in a Year 11 science lesson, teaching assistant support and the breaking down of important content by the teacher allows pupils with SEND to learn and remember more.

Leaders have put in place a new programme of support for pupils who are at the early stages of reading. This includes bespoke phonics interventions and additional support linked to reading fluency and comprehensions. As a result, pupils are helped to improve their reading ability.

Students in the sixth form achieve well. They move on successfully to the next stage of their education or into employment. Students are given the opportunity to discuss and debate cultural issues through the 'Horizons' programme. Leaders have designed a new personal development curriculum for the sixth form. Leaders are aware that, at present, the curriculum is not yet fully implemented, and further work is required to ensure it builds on what pupils learn in Year 11.

Pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities. These include sport, music and drama, as well as new clubs such as sign language, which was suggested through pupil voice. The new personal development curriculum ensures that pupils are well prepared to succeed in modern Britain. Leaders have ensured that pupils learn about important issues, such as online safety and mental and physical health. Pupils experience high-quality, independent careers advice and guidance.

Leaders, including trust leaders, are focused on further improving the school. They have high standards and want the very best for all pupils and students. Those responsible for governance know the school well. Staff, including early careers teachers, feel well supported. Leaders are considerate of staff well-being and workload.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a culture of safeguarding at the school. Staff are trained well to recognise signs that indicate a child may be at risk of harm or neglect.

Staff training is appropriate. Leaders ensure that staff are kept up to date with potential local safeguarding risks, such as the dangers of knife crime. Inspectors considered safeguarding records. These show that leaders respond swiftly to concerns. Where necessary, leaders engage with external agencies to ensure pupils and families get the help they need.

The personal development curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe. For example, pupils know the importance of healthy relationships and online safety. The school's recruitment processes are robust and well recorded.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In a few subjects, assessment is not used effectively. Gaps in pupils' knowledge are not always identified and addressed. As a result, some pupils are not remembering the identified important knowledge. Leaders should continue to refine assessment strategies so that all teachers identify what pupils do not know and adapt teaching appropriately to make sure pupils remember more.
- Some pupils experience inconsistencies in the way different teachers manage behaviour. As a result, some pupils feel frustrated and confused by the behaviour policy. Leaders should review their behaviour policy implemented by teachers to ensure pupils' experiences in school are consistent.
- The personal development curriculum is not clearly aligned between Year 11 and the sixth form. As a result, opportunities to consolidate pupils' knowledge are missed. Leaders should continue to review and refine the personal development curriculum for sixth-form students so that it builds coherently on the work in Year 11. This will ensure that opportunities to consolidate pupils' knowledge are not missed.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137851
<b>Local authority</b>	Gateshead
<b>Inspection number</b>	10266135
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,470
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	245
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Martin Gannon
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jillian Turner
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stthomasmore.org.uk">www.stthomasmore.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 and 10 October 2013

## Information about this school

- The school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- There have been recent, significant changes to the school's senior leadership team. The headteacher assumed post in September 2022. The two deputy headteachers started their posts in September 2022 and four assistant headteachers started their roles in January 2023.

## 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 this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, modern foreign languages, mathematics, science and geography. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, looked at samples of pupils' work, spoke to pupils about their learning and spoke to teachers.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer, a trust executive leader, the headteacher, other senior leaders and members of the local governance committee. Inspectors met with leaders with responsibility for SEND, behaviour, the sixth form, early reading, personal development, careers, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and looked at documentation relating to safeguarding. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record.
- Inspectors gathered the views of pupils, parents and staff through discussions and responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

## Inspection team

Julian Appleyard, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Clark	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Hassack	Ofsted Inspector
John Downs	Ofsted Inspector
Jessica McKay	His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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