

# Inspection of a good school: St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

Wychall Lane, Kings Norton, Birmingham, West Midlands B38 8AP

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Inspection dates:

1 and 2 May 2024

## **Outcome**

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School continues to be a good school.

The principal of this school is Chris Martin. This school is part of Lumen Christi Catholic Multi Academy Company, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul Collins-Smith, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Peter Vince.

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

The school's motto 'committed learners, exceptional people' permeates everything that happens here. This inclusive school has unapologetically high ambitions for every pupil, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All adults want pupils to be the best they can be. Pupils overcome many barriers to success which is reflected in the positive outcomes they achieve.

Pupils enjoy learning and attending school. They are welcoming, friendly and polite. Respectful relationships between staff and pupils are commonplace. Behaviour is generally strong. The school is a calm and purposeful learning environment. Staff deal with issues quickly and effectively.

The school utilises its Catholic ethos and values highly effectively to support pupils' personal development. Pupils benefit from a carefully constructed curriculum that develops their personalities and furthers their interests. For example, the Aquinas Experience ensures that pupils have opportunities to go on trips, residential and visits.

The school's extra-curricular offer includes a plethora of sporting and creative clubs. There is a choir and numerous productions for all pupils throughout the year. Pupils receive effective advice about possible career paths and next steps in education. The wider curriculum effectively promotes equality of opportunity and diversity. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

The school has a rigorous curriculum that sets high expectations for pupils in every subject. The school has taken the national curriculum as the minimum starting point for its key stage 3 curriculum. All pupils in key stage 3, including those with SEND, learn across a wide range of subjects. Currently, pupils make their option choices at the end of Year 8. They start GCSE work alongside the extensive wider curriculum offer. Consequently, not all pupils in Year 9 study the full range of subjects that they might. This means that for a few pupils, the school's very high ambitions are not always realised.

The school ensures that the provision for pupils with SEND helps them to be successful. Staff spot anyone who needs extra help quickly. Teachers receive a range of information about pupils. This includes how best to support them in lessons. Interventions are swift and effective. As a result, pupils overcome challenges and do well.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and implement the school's curriculum effectively. They use assessment well to know when pupils have fallen behind or need further support. They adapt their teaching to ensure that pupils can achieve.

The provision to support pupils who need help with reading is a strength. Adults provide targeted support to pupils who require extra assistance in improving their reading accuracy and fluency. Pupils read widely and often across the curriculum. All pupils in key stage 3 read books to broaden their literary repertoire. As a result of this work, the vast majority of pupils enjoy reading and do so at a level appropriate for their age.

Currently, the sixth form is rightly a focus area for the school. In the recent past, students did not achieve as well as they could have. Now, students in the sixth form benefit from strong teaching. They receive support and feedback to improve their learning. However, recent staffing issues have resulted in some popular courses not being on offer. The school has resolved these issues for the next academic year. Students get impartial advice about possible future career pathways. As a result, almost all students go on to appropriate destinations.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour. These expectations are understood by staff and pupils. Generally, pupils meet these high expectations of conduct. Positive relationships further promote positive behaviour. The pastoral care for pupils is very strong. However, there remains a small number of pupils who fall short of these expectations. This then means that some of these pupils are repeatedly suspended from school and miss valuable learning time.

The school's Catholic ethos and values support pupils' personal development effectively. This work is further underpinned by an impressive wider curriculum. Pupils have many varied opportunities to grow as people. They learn valuable life lessons about personal safety and positive relationships. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Staff enjoy working here and say that leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being. Trust executives, senior leaders and those responsible for governance have a

strong understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They act swiftly and with precision when they identify aspects of the school's performance that fall short of their high expectations.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- Currently, pupils make their option choices at the end of Year 8. This means that for a few pupils, the school's very high ambitions are not always realised. The school should consider how best to refine the structure of their curriculum and their tracking of pupils' take up of the wider curriculum offer in order to ensure that the curriculum fully meets the school's ambitious vision for all its pupils.
- There are a small number of pupils who find it challenging to meet leaders' high behaviour expectations. Some of these pupils are then repeatedly suspended from school and miss valuable learning time. The school should ensure that pupils who find it difficult to meet the school's high behaviour expectations are effectively supported to do so.

## **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 November 2018.

## **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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	141835
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10322870
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<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>	1,158
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	122
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Peter Vince
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Paul Collins-Smith
<b>Principal</b>	Chris Martin
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stacs.org">www.stacs.org</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	7 and 8 November 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average-size secondary school.
- The school is part of the Lumen Christi Catholic Multi Academy Company which also includes seven Catholic primary schools.
- The school is a Catholic school, it's last section 48 Catholic school inspection took place in December 2022.
- The school uses nine registered alternative providers for 13 of its pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, vice-principal and other senior leaders. The lead inspector held a meeting with the local governing body, including the chair. Meetings were held with representatives from the multi-academy company, including the chair of the board and chief executive officer. The lead inspector held a telephone meeting with a representative from the diocese. Inspectors met with curriculum leaders, the literacy coordinator and early career teachers.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, history, languages and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors visited the sixth form for each of the deep dives where available.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and interactions during lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes and spoke to many pupils during the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of the parent free-text comments and the responses on Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.

## Inspection team

Bianka Zemke, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Dan Robinson

Ofsted Inspector

Geoff Renwick

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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