

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic High School

Dane Bank Avenue, Crewe, Cheshire CW2 8AE

Inspection dates:	5 and 6 November 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Katherine Packham. This school is part of the South Cheshire Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. This is a single academy trust overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Father Nicholas Kern.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Thomas More Catholic High School is a friendly, caring and inclusive school. The school is ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils achieve well. Pupils and the community are proud of their school. There is a clear vision for continued school improvement.

Pupils feel safe and happy in school. They know that they have staff to talk to if they are worried about anything. Pupils are confident that staff resolve any problems, including occasional bullying issues when they occur. Pupils spoke highly of the support that they receive from pastoral staff.

The school is calm and orderly. Pupils typically behave well in lessons and around the school during unstructured times. Relationships between pupils, staff and visitors are courteous and respectful.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, healthy and aware of the world that they are growing up in. The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, interests and talents. There is a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including sports, music, drama and catch-up clubs. Pupils enjoy trips locally and to places further afield such as Wales, Germany and France.

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

Changes to the leadership of the school, including new senior leaders and governors, have ensured that the school remains ambitious to maintain and continue to improve standards. There has also been a renewed focus on the provision for pupils with SEND. Pupils with a wide range of needs across school are supported well.

The school has implemented a broad curriculum that makes clear what pupils need to learn and remember. In most subjects, teachers focus on delivering topics which improve pupils' knowledge and skills in a well-ordered way. The school makes sure that new learning builds on what pupils already know.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. Where teachers are new to the school or the subject they teach, they are well supported. Teachers use their expertise to enable pupils to make decisions and learn in the most effective way. For example, in science, pupils are encouraged to see science through the lens of real-life situations. In German, pupils think carefully about language misconceptions and how to overcome these. Additionally, in physical education (PE), pupils precisely adjust techniques to improve their serving quality when playing volleyball.

In most subjects, teachers check pupils' learning effectively to identify and address any misconceptions in lessons, and mistakes in their work. This ensures that pupils are ready for new learning. However, the school does not make sure that all teachers consistently check that pupils have learned the important knowledge they need before moving them

on. This means that some pupils develop gaps in their learning, which can hinder their achievement.

The school quickly identifies the needs of pupils with SEND. Teachers are provided with important information so that they can make appropriate adjustments to the delivery of the curriculum. Teachers benefit from high-quality SEND training. The school ensures that all pupils access the same ambitious curriculum.

Typically, the school is effective at identifying pupils who need support to read well. However, a small proportion of older pupils do not benefit from sustained interventions to improve their reading knowledge. This inhibits how well some pupils access the wider curriculum. The school has implemented a strategy to prioritise the teaching of reading. This includes pupils enjoying regular form-time reading from a diverse range of books and authors.

The school has a strong personal development offer for pupils. Pupils learn about their physical and mental health, healthy relationships, and how to respond to issues as they prepare for adulthood. Pupils have a good knowledge of life in modern-day Britain, including the fundamental British values. Careers information and guidance is comprehensive. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is positive. The school has established clear routines which support good behaviour. The school has high expectations for attendance. Attendance is typically high and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent are low. This includes disadvantaged pupils. Staff are determined in their efforts to help pupils to overcome barriers to attend school regularly.

The trust board and governing body has a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. It provides appropriate advice and challenge to support the school's improvement.

The school has prioritised the workload and well-being of all staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not ensured that all teachers use assessment strategies effectively to check on pupils' understanding in lessons or the accuracy of work in their books. This means that some pupils develop gaps in their learning which hinders their achievement. The school should ensure that all teachers systematically check pupils' learning so that misconceptions can be addressed before learning is moved on.

- The school has not ensured that it makes regular checks on all pupils' reading. This means that a small proportion of older pupils cannot access the full curriculum and do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure that all pupils' reading knowledge is assessed and effective interventions are put in place to improve pupils' reading skills.

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

Unique reference number	139764
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10348289
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	666
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Father Nicholas Kern
Headteacher	Katherine Packham
Website	www.st-thomasmore.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 and 5 March 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher has been appointed since the school was last inspected. There have also been several changes to other leadership roles in the school.
- The school is a single academy in the South Cheshire Catholic Multi-Academy Trust.
- This school is in the Diocese of Shrewsbury. The most recent section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, was in December 2023.
- The school uses two registered alternative education providers.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form

provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 headteacher and other leaders.
- The lead inspector met with members of the local governing body and the trust board. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority and of the diocese.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, history, PE, science, art and design and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders to discuss the curriculum, carried out lesson visits, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also met with the subject leader for science to discuss the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors considered the views of staff by speaking with them and reviewing the responses to the Ofsted survey for staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils and took account of their responses to the Ofsted survey for pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime, in lessons and around the school.

Inspection team

Gary Kelly, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sheldon Logue	Ofsted Inspector
Phil Lloyd	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Yarwood	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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