

# INSPECTION REPORT

**ST.THOMAS MORE RC COMPREHENSIVE  
SCHOOL**

Footscray Road, Eltham

LEA area: Greenwich

Unique reference number: 100196

Headteacher: Mr P G Murray

Reporting inspector: Akram Khan OBE  
27296

Dates of inspection: 1 - 3 May 2001

Inspection number: 188379

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Footscray Road Eltham London
Postcode:	SE9 2SU
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr G Peters
Date of previous inspection:	20 May 1996

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St. Thomas More Roman Catholic is a voluntary aided mixed 11-16 comprehensive school. There are 583 pupils on the roll. The percentage of pupils eligible for free meals is broadly in line with the national average. Whilst a slightly higher than average proportion of pupils have English as an additional language, only 13 are in the early stages of learning English. Pupil turnover is average compared with that found in similar schools. The pupils' attainment on entry is above the national average. The percentage of children on the school's register of special educational needs (SEN) and of those with Statements of Special Educational Need is below the national average. The range of special needs includes dyslexia, emotional and behavioural, moderate learning difficulties and some physical disabilities.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

St. Thomas More Roman Catholic is a very effective school, with many excellent features. It has a strong commitment to its mission statement. Through excellent leadership and very effective teaching it enables 14 and 16-year-old pupils to reach high standards. There is a most positive ethos and teachers inspire pupils to develop very positive attitudes to their learning, both in lessons and beyond the classroom. The school provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards are consistently high, particularly in English, mathematics, science, art, drama, food technology, geography, modern foreign languages, music and physical education.
- Highly effective leadership from the headteacher, senior management team and governors sets a clear direction for the school to enable pupils to achieve high standards.
- The learning environment is excellent. Pupils' attitudes and motivation are exceptionally strong and contribute significantly to their very good learning.
- Teachers' high expectations and very good teaching promote high standards.
- The school provides a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities; it makes excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The educational provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and they achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
- There is a high standard of care for pupils.
- Parents' views of the school are very positive and parental support for the school is very good.

#### **What could be improved**

- The provision of information and communications technology (ICT) in Years 10 and 11.
- Precision in defining priorities for school improvement.
- The external audit of school's accounts.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has maintained the many strengths identified in the May 1996 report, tackled vigorously all issues and addressed other areas for development. Very focused and effective measures have been taken to continue to raise standards and high standards have been sustained. Line management structures have been strengthened and daily organisational arrangements are highly effective and efficient. The detailed analysis of performance data on entry provides a very well founded basis for setting realistic and challenging targets. Systematic monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress enables them to reach their potential in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Development planning has improved considerably at all levels, though it still requires precision and clearly agreed priorities. The learning mentor, the chaplain/counsellor and learning support unit make a major contribution in enhancing social inclusion. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. The Excellence in Cities, Pilot Key Stage 3 Project and a clearer focus on effective teaching and learning have raised standards, particularly in areas of literacy, numeracy and improved provision for gifted and talented pupils. Pupils' ICT skills have improved significantly, reflecting improved access to

modern computers and the much enhanced staff expertise, but not all key elements of ICT are taught and assessed in Years 10 and 11. Financial control is good and budget implications are fully integrated into school planning though the accounts have not been audited externally for the last four years. There is effective and efficient management of finances and external grants. The school's capacity to improve is very good given the strong commitment to maintaining high standards by all in positions of responsibility and the very active involvement of governors and the chaplaincy.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A*	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Results in the National Curriculum tests for fourteen-year-olds have been consistently well above average. In 2000, National Curriculum test results in English and mathematics were well above both the national average and the average for similar schools, and above these averages in science. Since the last inspection in 1996, GCSE results have remained consistently well above the national average and very high in comparison with similar schools. In 2000, the 66.4 per cent of pupils gaining five or more higher A\*-C grades was well above the national average of 47.4 per cent and very high in comparison with schools with similar socio-economic circumstances. The results include the high number of pupils with SEN who achieve at least one GCSE grade. In 2000, pupils achieved well above the national average in several subjects, including mathematics, art and design, drama, French, geography and Spanish and attained above the national average in English, English literature and science. Pupils performed less well in design and technology and history, although still close to the national average. They performed much less well in religious education.

These standards are matched by the quality of work seen during the inspection. There were examples of high attainment in most subjects including English, mathematics, science, art, drama, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and food technology. The progress of gifted and talented pupils and those with SEN is particularly good in relation to their prior attainment. The school sets realistic and challenging targets which are well founded on the detailed analysis of performance data and the regular monitoring of the progress of individual pupils.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to school and work are excellent. Motivation is high and it contributes to very good learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour is very good. They are polite, respectful and respond very well. The atmosphere in the school is friendly and hardworking.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils take responsibility for their own learning. They have a good understanding of the importance of citizenship. Relationships are exceptionally good at all levels.
Attendance	Attendance is well above the national average and unauthorised absence is very low.

The school expects all pupils to show respect for each other and for all staff. The pupils are keen to learn and succeed. They appreciate and thrive on the opportunities offered to them. They actively care for others both in school and beyond.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very good	n/a

*Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.*

Teaching is very good overall and makes a major contribution to effective learning and to the standards achieved. Teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons seen: it was good in 26 per cent and very good in 53 per cent and excellent in a further 12 per cent of lessons. Pupils are well supported and 'Teaching and Learning' is at the heart of the school. Teachers' expectations are high, helping pupils to understand new knowledge quickly. In English and mathematics rigorous and demanding teaching promotes critical thought and high standards. In modern languages, drama, art, music, geography and physical education throughout the school, teachers adopt varied and interesting methods to encourage thinking and consolidate pupils' understanding. In most subjects teachers' very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm help pupils to learn at a very good rate. In Years 10 and 11, close attention to the GCSE requirements concentrates both teachers' and pupils' minds in a very positive way. Pupils' individual progress is enhanced by helpful marking, evaluation and target setting. Numeracy skills are taught across all subjects, particularly well in science and geography. Similarly the teaching of literacy skills is very good. Most pupils are articulate and respond well to opportunities to write for different purposes and improve their listening and speaking skills for example in science, modern foreign languages, music and geography. Information and communication skills across some subjects enhance pupils' learning. Planning for pupils with SEN is very good; they learn effectively in all subjects. Extra tasks are set for high attaining pupils, for example in mathematics, English, modern foreign languages and art, and they benefit from a wide-range of out of school learning opportunities. Pupils work independently and collaborate very well.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum which meets all its stated aims. There are well-managed initiatives, innovative projects and a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The quality of provision is very good. The identification of needs, support and planning for progress are very thorough. Targets in individual plans are precise and review procedures are very good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few pupils who need additional support benefit from work in English and from subject teachers' careful attention to literacy skills.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development is excellent. Provision for pupils' social and cultural development is very good. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme contributes strongly to moral and social development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a very safe environment and the quality of pastoral support is very good. The school has good systems for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic and personal development.



The curriculum is successful in enabling pupils of all abilities to achieve high standards. The school makes commendable efforts to cater for the aptitudes of all by making good use of disapplication from the National Curriculum in Years 10 to allow pupils to study music, drama, two modern foreign languages and humanities subjects. The school chaplain/counsellor has strengthened greatly pastoral support and care for all pupils. Pupils feel that they are valued as individuals and that teachers genuinely care about them.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, ably supported by the senior management team, staff and governors, provides highly effective, purposeful and perceptive leadership. The leadership of SEN is very effective. Most middle managers provide very good leadership of their areas.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	They provide excellent support to the school. They are highly effective in monitoring, challenging and supporting departments assigned to them.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good: there is rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and pupils' progress. This includes senior and middle managers, governors and external LEA officers.
The strategic use of resources	The school's development plan provides a clear framework for spending priorities. Efficient use is made of the school's existing resources. Valuable support is provided by non-teaching staff.

There is a shared understanding of the school's mission statement, aims and values and a strong commitment to learning and to high achievement for all. The school is a self-evaluating organisation. It has a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses and has the very good capacity to make further improvements. The school's financial management and the way it approaches 'best value' are very good.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school.</li> <li>• The school has high expectations of pupils and expects them to work hard and achieve their best.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>• They find the school easy to approach.</li> <li>• The teaching is good.</li> <li>• The maturity the school develops in pupils.</li> <li>• The pupils' good behaviour and respect for the individual.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pupils being given the right amount of homework.</li> <li>• The range of extra-curricular activities.</li> </ul>

Parents' positive views of the school are well supported by the inspection evidence. This is a school with strengths in all the significant areas of school effectiveness - standards, leadership, teaching and personal development. Strong partnership between the school and the parents and carers of the pupils makes a very positive impact on pupils' education. The provision of homework is more consistent than in many schools but not all teachers set tasks which provide sufficient extension to the pupils' learning. A wide range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. Physical education, music, drama and dance provide excellent opportunities for pupils to display their talents and to enable them to raise the standards of their work.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**Standards are consistently high, particularly in English, mathematics, science, art, drama, food technology, geography, modern foreign languages, music and physical education.**

1. There is the full ability range in each year group. The school maintains a good attainment record on each pupil and it is clear from the data that, overall, pupils have a higher than average attainment on entry to St. Thomas More Roman Catholic Comprehensive School. Their attainment is above average in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science and in the standardised reading and non-verbal tests administered on entry. There has been an improvement in the ability profile of pupils in Year 7 as confirmed by the attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in the National Curriculum Tests in English, mathematics and science. The school carries out extensive screening each year, using verbal and non-verbal NFER standardised tests to identify pupils with special educational needs and to provide staff with useful information on individual pupils and class groups. Most subjects make excellent use of these performance indicators to identify and challenge talented and gifted pupils and to support the individual needs of all pupils. Effective literacy and numeracy initiatives across the curriculum and very good planning in most subjects enable teachers to meet these needs. Pupils respond exceptionally well to this very good provision and make very good progress in Years 7-9. The value added analysis shows that the school adds very good value to pupils' attainment.
2. The standards achieved by pupils at the school are high, and are well above the national average for 14-year-olds and in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results. In 2000, pupils' attainment, at the age of 14, was well above the national average: it was well above the national average in English and mathematics and above average in science. The percentage of pupils reaching the higher Level 6 was well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Over the last four years pupils' attainment in the National Curriculum tests has been consistently well above the national averages in English and mathematics and above the national average in science. In 1998-2000, in comparison with similar schools, pupils' performance was high in mathematics, well above average in English and above average in science. Overall, there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in mathematics and science but girls, in line with national trends, perform better than boys in English. The school's analysis indicates that pupils with English as an additional language perform as well as others.
3. The school has sustained the high standards recognised in the last inspection. Over the last four years, based on the average GCSE points scored per pupil, the school has consistently achieved results well above the national average and very high in comparison with similar schools. Pupils achieve well above average results in the GCSE examinations at the age of 16. Overall, in the last three years, 1998-2000, pupils' results have remained well above the national average and high in comparison with the average for similar schools. In March 2001, the school was awarded by the Secretary of State, a 'School Achievement Award' for excellence. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grades A\*-C (66.4 per cent) and A\*-G, (100 per cent), was above the national averages of 47.4 and 90.9 per cent respectively. The proportion of A\*/As, the highest grades, achieved in art, drama, English literature, geography, French and Spanish, was more than twice the national average, as a result of effective approaches focused on higher attaining pupils. Girls' results have improved considerably over this period. The boys, however, while achieving results that are well above the national average for boys, have under-performed relative to the girls in the context of this school. These differences were markedly significant in 2000, with 80 per cent of girls achieving 5+ A\*- C, GCSE grades compared with 54.4 per cent of boys. Detailed analysis of the performance of minority ethnic pupils indicates that they are achieving as well as other pupils. All pupils with special educational needs achieved 5+ A\*-G, GCSE grades.
4. Analysis of the performance of individual subjects since 1998 indicates consistently well above average attainment in mathematics, art, drama, French, Spanish, geography and food technology, average attainment in history and graphic products but below average performance in religious

education. In English, English literature, science, history and music, pupils' results have varied. In English, English literature and music, their attainment was well above the national average in 1998 and in 1999 but was close to the national average in 2000. In science pupils achieved well above the national average in 1999 but their results were close to the national average in 1998 and 2000. In history, pupils achieved well above the national average in 1998 but in line with the national averages in 1999 and 2000. Pupils entered for the short GCSE course in physical education, achieved a well above percentage of A\*-C grades. In 2000, girls achieved better results than boys in most subjects but they outperformed boys in English, English literature, French, Spanish and religious education\*\*, significantly above the national trends. Boys achieved significantly better results than girls in music.

5. In lessons seen and in the work of the pupils examined, there were examples of high standards of attainment that reflect the high achievement in public examinations. Examples of high attainment were seen in most subjects including English, mathematics, science, art, drama, geography, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and food technology. In virtually all lessons seen standards were at least appropriate to pupils' ability; in 65 per cent of 43 lessons they were above and in 40 per cent well above the national expectations. Overall, therefore, the school is challenging pupils whatever their level of prior attainment and they are responding successfully.
6. Standards of literacy are above average and most pupils are articulate. Most pupils speak clearly and use language effectively to help them to learn. They talk well in a range of settings, for example in drama and modern languages - pairs, group and role-plays. In English and drama, pupils listen reflectively and are able to discuss persuasively their own experiences and the text they are reading. They show above average comprehension skills and offer good analysis and response to literature. In drama pupils work well to prepare improvisation and role-plays. They understand and use specialist vocabulary in mathematics, science and design and technology. For example in science, they are good at presenting their findings, clearly and interestingly to their peers. Most pupils in all years read fluently, accurately and with understanding. Most read for pleasure and undertake voluntary reading: in this they are well supported by the school's library. The high attaining pupils have well-developed research skills which are used to good effect, for example in English, mathematics, science and geography. In history, pupils are able to analyse and use evidence. Pupils with special educational needs read fluently to reflect their level of attainment and use appropriate strategies to pronounce words and develop meaning. A good range of writing was found in a number of subjects. Most pupils write confidently in a range of styles and forms and their writing is well sustained and developed. Most subjects offer good opportunities for pupils to write personal accounts. Work in English includes imaginative stories, articles, reviews and essays and encourages pupils to retain a personal touch in their writing. Note-making skills are used well throughout the curriculum, as is the drafting and planning of work in English. In design and technology reports and evaluations are required and in mathematics and science GCSE course investigations are described and recorded. Pupils with difficulties benefit from teaching methods such as the encouragement to use dictionaries.
7. Standards of numeracy are well above the national expectations. In mathematics, the development of knowledge, skills and understanding across all Programmes of Study, is very good in all years with particular strengths in the use of algebra and spatial awareness. By the age of 14, most pupils use competently various methods to represent data, solve equations, understand the relationship between fractions, decimals and percentages and can find the area and volume of cubes and cuboids. In Years 10 and 11, high attaining pupils can sketch the graphs of functions derived from other functions, circle geometry and solve problems using trigonometrical functions. Evidence from across the curriculum shows pupils can handle competently number and measurement, whether mentally, orally and in writing. They construct and interpret a variety of graphs to analyse numerical and statistical data in a variety of forms, for example in science and geography. They successfully manipulate formulae and perform calculations in science, making sensible use of calculators as necessary.
8. Standards of achievement in science are above average. Investigative skills are well developed, and most pupils think scientifically. They show a good grasp of scientific ideas. Pupils, throughout the school, show accurate knowledge and understanding across all Programmes of Study and high attaining pupils quickly demonstrate accurate use of scientific ideas such as: the transfer of energy, refraction and total internal reflection, gravitational potential energy,

electrolysis and different rocks and their characteristics and factors affecting rates of chemical reaction. Most pupils use their observations intelligently to hypothesise and explain experimental data.

9. By the end of Year 9, most pupils in art experiment with visual images in their sketchbooks. They show a very good appreciation of, and interpretation of, the style of the artist they are studying and their drawing skills are developed sufficiently to record accurately from observation and to make careful designs for their artwork. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils have good knowledge of the work of the artists they study. They reach a high standard in researching and developing project work to show how their ideas are created and developed.
10. Pupils' standards of attainment in drama are well above the national expectations. By the end of Year 9, pupils engage in lively discussions and critically evaluate their work and use very good drama skills to explore controversial topics, as seen in their interpretation of Vance's 'Walkabout'. As early as Year 8 pupils have learned to work together and to sustain very well their focus over an extended piece of work. They have a competent grasp of basic techniques of expression and presentation, as demonstrated in their work on 'Metamorphosis'.
11. In food technology, most pupils demonstrate strong designing and making skills. Pupils in a Year 9 class showed very good knowledge and understanding of different processes and techniques while preparing a snack for a long sponsored walk. However, in general, pupils have a satisfactory awareness of designing and making processes. In Years 10 and 11, the higher attaining pupils demonstrate good research skills with an increasing use of Internet resources. In graphic products, for example, they present their design ideas well.
12. In geography pupils achieve well above average standards in their lessons. Most pupils in Year 9 demonstrate a firm grasp of geographical skills and very good knowledge and understanding, as illustrated in informed discussions on the link between fragile ecosystems and economic development. Pupils in a Year 10 class, similarly displayed higher order investigational skills to evaluate the differences between developed and less economically developed countries. In history, pupils have a sound grasp of historical knowledge and they demonstrate increasing depth of knowledge to make comments about features of the period they are studying. Pupils in Year 9, for example, working on the history of USA in the 1920s, researched extensively evidence to make group presentations on Al Capone and gangsterism, the history of jazz and Charlie Chaplin.
13. Standards of achievement in modern foreign languages are well above the national expectations at all levels. In both French and Spanish, pupils understand a wide range of spoken and written language with ease. They communicate their ideas confidently in the spoken language, and express themselves with confidence. Pronunciation and intonation are good. Written work is generally accurate and is well presented, and pupils employ appropriately an impressive range of vocabulary and expressions.
14. Standards achieved in curricular music are high. Most pupils in Year 9 can use a computer based sequencing programme very effectively and improvise melodies against pre-recorded material. Older pupils in a Year 11 class, could think for themselves and evaluated confidently pieces of operatic music, including Romantic, Baroque and modern extracts by commenting intelligently on the use of voices and instruments. In physical education most pupils display games skills above the national expectations and they acquire a good grasp of appropriate vocabulary, such as 'pitch', 'crease', 'seam' and 'wicket' in cricket and understand the importance of warm-up exercises on the muscle groups involved in games. Pupils in a Year 11 class, discussed with knowledge and understanding the sensitive issue of drugs in sports to improve performance.
15. Since the last inspection, the school has taken positive action to raise pupils' standards and achievement, including a strong commitment to inclusive education, enthusiastic participation in the pilot Key Stage 3 and Excellence in Cities Projects and active involvement in literacy and teaching and learning initiatives in Years 7-9. Value added analysis and whole-school target setting is beginning in all years. Pupils are given opportunities to consult teachers and the school employs a learning mentor who is effective in supporting many pupils. The work done with gifted

and talented pupils is beginning to have a positive impact on the learning experiences of many pupils.

**Highly effective leadership from the headteacher, senior management team and governors sets a clear direction for the school to enable pupils to achieve high standards.**

16. The headteacher, very ably supported by the senior management and the governing body, provides vigorous, confident and highly effective leadership. Informed by current national initiatives, the headteacher has a far-sighted vision and an enterprising agenda for the future development of the school. Achieving the best possible academic performance whilst at the same time in its daily work 'living' the Christian tenets, which underpin its mission, are central to this vision. All parents, staff and pupils understand and share this goal. The headteacher's excellent management, high expectations and sensitive relationships with staff, parents and pupils set the standards for all within the school community to follow. The school has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and a number of successful initiatives have included:
- establishment of clear policies to promote effective teaching and learning and social inclusion
  - far reaching review of staffing, notably the appointments of heads of year
  - strengthening line management and the roles of senior management teams to support pastoral and academic teams
  - rigorous self-evaluation by all departments, with the support of LEA's inspectors
  - reviewing and updating schemes of work
  - rigorous scrutiny and evaluation of GCSE results of individual teachers
  - enthusiastic participation in the national projects such as Excellence in Cities and the Key Stage 3 Pilot
  - realistic and challenging target setting, including target minimum grades in Years 10 and 11

These initiatives have helped to create a learning environment in which staff and pupils can succeed. The excellent ethos and family atmosphere contribute to the high standards achieved.

17. The leadership is securely based and there are effective procedures for consultation, planning and review. The senior management team has changed since the last inspection due to a combination of promotion, retirement and pregnancy. The senior management team, consisting of the headteacher, deputy head and assistant, has complementary skills and experience and forms a cohesive and highly effective team. It is highly successful in creating a climate of innovative change and initiatives in all areas of the school. The management of the school is a corporate enterprise in which all share a common purpose and commitment to sustain and raise pupils' attainment. The new deputy headteacher spends considerable time and effort in analysing public examination results to evaluate the comparative performance of subjects and has helped to embed processes of data analysis and value added target setting by heads of departments. Members of the senior management team take responsibility for oversight of subject departments and participate with staff in monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and pupils' attainment and personal development. The visible presence around the school of members of the senior management team is a positive example of their accessibility and 'hands-on' approach.
18. Most heads of subject departments provide very good professional leadership. The delegation of responsibilities is well managed and the line management structure provides an effective communication system between middle managers and the senior management team. Most subjects are well managed. They are now clear about their accountability for standards within their subjects and about their role in action planning, monitoring and evaluation in the drive to sustain and raise standards. Leadership is very good in English, mathematics, art, drama, geography, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. The quality of curricular planning has improved and departmental schemes of work are detailed and provide an effective framework for teaching. The best departments are scrutinising pupils' work, analysing National Curriculum tests and GCSE performance and raising the level of discussion and action. External evaluation and support by the LEA's advisory service have played an important part in raising standards. The English, mathematics and science departments have completed a thorough evaluation of teaching and learning and this is being extended to other departments. A climate of

critical scrutiny and mutual trust has been established and there is a climate of openness in which achievements are celebrated and areas for improvement readily acknowledged.

19. The in-service training programme is well planned and is driven by issues arising from the school's development plan. Through strategic staff reviews and the in-service training programme, teachers are well supported in raising pupils' attainment. The system of monitoring classroom practice, means that this approach to training is based on identified teachers' individual needs and to improve the quality of their work. Whole-school training, for example, on teaching and learning has proved very successful in raising pupils' attainment and progress. There are clear and well managed systems for the induction of newly qualified teachers.
20. The governing body is very supportive and it fulfills all its responsibilities as required under law. The support of the governors for the Catholic character of the school and all its varied work is seen by the senior management team as crucial. Six governors are parents of pupils in the school. Positive relationships and mutual trust exist between the governing body and the senior management team. Governors receive a wealth of information about the school's performance. They use this well to account for strategic planning and improvement. They are involved actively in overseeing the work of the school and make a major contribution to the quality of education. They use their expertise in supporting and challenging existing provision in finances, curriculum and behaviour management and monitoring the work of their assigned departments. Their active involvement in the school reviews and requested written reports from individual departments ensure that there is good accountability for standards of attainment. Searching questions are asked of staff and performance data are carefully analysed.
21. The day-to-day administration is highly effective and efficient and there are clear lines of communication both within the school, between the school and parents, and with the wider community. There is a well-established cycle of meetings for the whole staff and for pastoral and academic teams. This enables senior management to be well informed of issues arising in all areas of the school's organisation. Moreover, staff feel their views are taken into account and opportunities for comments are good. The headteacher and senior staff are approachable and approached. Since the last inspection there have been substantial improvements in management procedures and staffing at the school is exceptionally stable. An extensive building programme has created new accommodation for science, drama, design and technology and enhanced facilities for staff and pupils. The supportive role of the governors is complemented by the support of the chaplaincy and vast majority of parents for the school's ethos and improvement. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher and the excellent support of the governors and parents, the school is well placed for, and is capable of, maintaining high standards and achieving further improvement.

**The learning environment is excellent. Pupils' attitudes and motivation are exceptionally strong and contribute significantly to their very good learning.**

22. The school sets high expectations in terms of work and behaviour, and learning takes place in an orderly, calm and supportive environment. The school's ethos provides a secure, supportive, moral and respectful working atmosphere. Pupils' attitudes are excellent. They are very positive in their approach to the school generally and to their work in particular. They are well motivated and attentive. They are concerned to do well, work productively in small groups and are mutually supportive. In science, design and technology, information and communications technology and physical education they show respect for equipment and work competently, with proper regard to safety. They respond enthusiastically when given opportunities to show initiative, can adapt easily to a more independent learning environment and persevere with demanding tasks. Pupils are fully engaged by the work of their lessons. In mathematics, modern foreign languages and music, they recognise the value of work prepared for them and they seek to rise to the challenge. When there is an appropriate challenge and activities are varied and stimulating, pupils display enjoyment in their work and take pride in their achievements.
23. Behaviour in and around the school is very good. Parents confirm this and say that it helps to establish an excellent learning environment. There are excellent relationships between staff and

pupils, they relate well to each other and they are courteous and welcoming to visitors. Pupils feel that they are valued as individuals and that teachers genuinely care about them. The school is an orderly community and conduct around the school is well managed despite the congestion that occurs in some corridors and shared spaces due to the design and layout of the school buildings. Pupils queue patiently near the dining room, make their way to assemblies in a calm manner, respect others in the learning resource centre and work quietly and purposefully. The school, parents and their children voluntarily enter into a contract, which is implemented consistently with beneficial effect. Incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with effectively by staff. Temporary exclusions are low and in the last year only one pupil has been excluded permanently.

24. The personal and social development of pupils has been addressed in a careful manner. It clearly maps all aspects of pupils' personal and social development throughout their school career. There is an effective anti-bullying policy. In reviewing this aspect of school life, a peer mediation scheme, specifically supporting anti-bullying practices, was initiated and training in counselling undertaken by Year 11 pupils. The school council is an established part of school life and pupils who represent their tutor groups take a mature and responsible attitude to the issues concerning them. Pupils are given sufficient opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility both for themselves and the school community as a whole. They are also encouraged to take part in various duties within the school including helping in the school office, assisting with paired reading and assisting younger pupils through the prefect system.
25. Pupils show a conspicuous and generous concern for the needs of others through a wide variety of fund-raising events for charity. Money is raised through major events and pupils influence the charities chosen for support which range from Catholic Aid for Overseas Development and support for local charities, such as the local hospice and Children in Need.
26. Attendance, at 93.6 per cent is well above the national average of 91.3 per cent. The rate of unauthorised absence at zero per cent is very low in comparison with the national average of 1.1 per cent. The punctuality of the pupils to school and to lessons is very good.

### **Teachers' high expectations and very good teaching promote high standards.**

27. Teaching is a strength and makes a major contribution to effective learning and to the standards achieved. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons seen: it was good in 26 per cent and very good in 53 per cent and excellent in a further 12 per cent of lessons. Very good and excellent teaching challenges and motivates pupils to learn at a very good rate. Teachers have worked hard since the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They received well-planned professional support to develop effective methods to improve the quality of teaching in all areas of the curriculum. The commitment, scholarship and enthusiasm of the teachers contribute importantly to the pupils' progress and attainment. Teachers work hard, love teaching and want all pupils to realise their full potential. They create a climate where most pupils enjoy learning and succeed.
28. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects is a strength and they use this to plan lessons effectively and present work clearly. In many lessons good planning with clear objectives, often shared with pupils, enables pupils to build successfully on previous learning. Lessons are usually well organised and well structured; pupils know what they are learning and as a result make good progress. For example, in English, teachers use their very good knowledge and understanding to plan and teach lessons, which provide good challenge at several levels. In many mathematics lessons detailed lesson planning usually includes an effective warm up of mental arithmetic sessions and a review at the end, which clarifies the main points and consolidates learning. There is effective use of both teacher demonstrations and class investigations in science and design and technology. In physical education, careful preparation, effective teacher demonstrations and opportunities for peer evaluation ensure that pupils learn new sporting skills and techniques. In a Year 9 art lesson planning allowed pupils to research other cultures and with higher attaining pupils in Year 11 use ICT skills to explore different ideas. They made very good progress in developing their techniques and expressing their ideas in making their own masks. When given the opportunity to work collaboratively whilst planning their ideas for the discursive

assignment on 'living in the city or the country,' pupils in a Year 7 English class, made rapid progress and developed very good communication skills. In a Year 9 geography lesson good planning of group work using information technology enabled pupils to work together and take responsibility for their own learning, increasing their understanding of the impact of human activity on the environment. In design and technology teachers strike an effective balance between designing and making, with focused practical tasks, which enable pupils to develop sound skills and knowledge.

29. Lessons are conducted at brisk pace and teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils are constantly challenged through demanding and interesting activities. In English and mathematics rigorous and demanding teaching promotes critical thought and high standards. In the vast majority of lessons teachers display good subject knowledge and they use this well to give clear demonstrations and explanations and engage pupils with their confidence and own enthusiasm for their subject. In music, the teacher uses her extensive knowledge and teaching skills to encourage pupils to evaluate and understand the historical context of operatic music. In Spanish and French the teachers' good command of the languages enables them to conduct effectively activities in the language being learned thus developing pupils' listening skills and reinforcing previous learning. In science, class investigations are used to develop pupils' understanding of the links between what they observe happening in experiments and the scientific ideas, which are used to provide explanations. There is a clear focus on helping pupils to understand scientific ideas within the appropriate context. On the rare occasions when teaching has shortcomings, it is usually caused by content or method not matching precisely the needs of pupils. In these lessons activities are not challenging for some or all of the pupils. Pupils are given limited opportunities to share and explore ideas.
30. A very significant strength is the use teachers make of questioning to encourage thinking and test out understanding. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson clear explanations and focused questioning enabled pupils to make rapid progress in exploring special features of functions and to solve complex problems. Questioning used in a Year 9 drama lesson on 'Walkabout' provoked very deep thinking and gave pupils the opportunity to explore a provocative topic on racial prejudice. Planning recognised the needs of gifted and talented pupils and helped to raise the self-esteem of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils discussed the issues sensitively and evaluated learning outcomes using clear assessment criteria.
31. In the most effective lessons teachers use a good variety of strategies to promote learning and maintain interest. In modern foreign languages, food technology, drama, art, music, geography and physical education throughout the school, teachers adopt varied and interesting methods to encourage thinking and consolidate pupils' understanding. In modern languages teachers make good use of the tape recorder and overhead projector to present new language and to enable pupils to identify pattern. In science, mathematics and modern foreign languages, pupils are given frequent opportunities to work independently or in pairs to carry out extended investigations or to rehearse spoken language to gain confidence and to evaluate their work. In physical education, pupils are encouraged to research and present their projects. In art and music, teachers are very good at using discussion within groups to extend their knowledge and understanding. They enable pupils to gain confidence to discuss ideas two of 'Of Mice and Men,' listened to each other's interpretation and feedback on the key characters, with excellent commentary from the teacher to reinforce pupils' understanding of the text.
32. In most subjects, teachers encourage the development of basic skills and practise new techniques to acquire knowledge and understanding of concepts and ideas. In English, pupils draft and redraft their information into successful individual and extended written work. In history and PSHE in all years considerable attention is given to the teaching of literacy skills, which pupils use effectively to structure their writing so that they express and develop their ideas. Many mathematics lessons begin with practice in numeracy skills; this provides a good stimulus to learning, ensures that the pupils are quickly involved in the lesson, provides an opportunity for competition in the speed of answering and develops the pupils' basic skills well. In history and English good use is made of plenary sessions to draw out the main points and increase understanding. Sensitive intervention with individuals by the teacher in art complements work done in class and is effective in raising standards. In design and technology, teachers encourage



use of computers to support graphics skills and to illustrate their design ideas using computer aided design applications. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are well supported to prepare for the GCSE examinations. Pupils' individual progress is enhanced through helpful marking and evaluation and target setting.

33. The needs of pupils with varying levels of attainment are generally well provided for. In some subjects pupils are grouped according to their prior attainment, which helps teachers to match work accurately. Teachers have good control and management skills and good relationships with pupils and in the vast majority of lessons this ensures a purposeful and effective atmosphere for learning. All teachers work hard to build constructive relationships with their pupils so that they can learn in a supportive environment.
34. Teachers make good use of resources. In mathematics teachers ensure that pupils use calculators, textbooks and other resources competently to enhance pupils' learning opportunities. The staff in the learning resource centre provide excellent support to make available to staff and pupils a good range of books, periodicals and CD-Roms. In English pupils are encouraged to use library resources to extend the range of reading of fiction and non-fiction to broaden their horizon and individual pleasure. In history, pupils make good use of library resources to select, synthesise and compare sources of evidence.
35. Homework is set in all subjects and the provision is more consistent than in many schools. Homework is usually used effectively to consolidate and extend learning. In English, mathematics, geography, history and food technology teachers set extended tasks which require a great deal of research skills but in some subjects, there are not enough examples of challenging and imaginative tasks being set to promote and extend learning. There were also occasions when pupils were requested to complete, for homework, the topics on which they were working in class which means that those who make less progress in the lesson have a higher workload than their quicker peers. Homework journals are a well established and effectively monitored by teachers and pupils' parents.
36. Pupils make very good gains in their learning. They learn new skills quickly and develop good understanding of new ideas as a result of the interesting and demanding work given to them. High attaining pupils, for example, are able to research in geography, handle evidence in history and solve complex problems in mathematics. Pupils are usually good at applying knowledge gained to the knowledge and skills they already have, thereby steadily increasing their competence and understanding. Very good examples of this incremental learning were seen in science, mathematics, physical education and food technology.

**The school provides a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities; it makes excellent provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development.**

37. The school aims to promote, "the distinctive Catholic ethos and key Christian beliefs and values identified in the school mission statement," and the highest possible quality of education for all pupils in a supportive and encouraging environment. The school provides all pupils with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum which fulfils its aims and provides appropriate opportunities to learn, to experience achievement and success. All subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious education and drama, are taught. Information technology is taught as a discrete subject in Years 7-9. All pupils in Year 9 study one lesson per week of a personal, social and health education (PSHE) which includes careers, health and sex education, education for citizenship, environmental education and economic and industrial understanding. Grouping arrangements in English, mathematics and science in Year 7 and in modern foreign languages in Year 8, enable staff to meet the intellectual needs of all pupils.
38. In Years 10 and 11, the school offers a broad, relevant and demanding curriculum. All pupils in Year 11, study an extended core of English, mathematics, a double award science, a modern foreign language, physical education, a design and technology course, religious education and the PSHE programme which includes careers and health education. Almost all pupils study ten GCSE subjects. The curriculum is successful in enabling pupils of all abilities to achieve high standards. The school makes commendable efforts to cater for the aptitudes of all by making good use of disapplication from the National Curriculum in Years 10 to allow pupils to study two modern foreign languages, music, drama, dance and humanities subjects. Parents are very pleased with these arrangements. The curriculum is planned effectively in most subjects and provides continuity and progression both within and across years.
39. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities including school productions and varied sporting, dramatic, musical and dance activities enrich the curriculum and enable pupils to raise the standard of their work. Additionally subject departments make facilities available to meet the needs and interests of pupils at lunchtimes and after school. Teachers give generously of their time. These extra-curricular activities, including visits and excursions at home and abroad, are well planned across the academic and pastoral curriculum and are well supported by the vast majority of pupils.
40. Many of the additional activities are part of a coherent and effective strategy to promote educational inclusion and greater equality of opportunity. The learning mentor focuses on particular pupils who need academic and personal help and support. The school is also involved in the Excellence in Cities initiative and has used additional funding to provide enrichment for those pupils identified as gifted and talented. There are well-managed initiatives and innovative projects which are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. For example, the school's literacy management group coordinates effectively the literacy programme. Subject teams have produced their own literacy policies as a result of staff training workshops. These are implemented consistently and make a significant contribution to pupils' learning.
41. The school has focused very effectively on the needs of its gifted and talented pupils. Both performance data and teacher assessment are used to identify these pupils. A policy for gifted and talented has been developed and some departments have evolved their own policies to support and challenge these pupils. During the inspection, the teaching of most of the top sets was challenging and learning was very good. Work done with gifted and talented pupils is beginning to have a positive impact on the learning experiences of many pupils. Their achievements are reflected twice the national average of A\*/A grades overall achieved at GCSE in most subjects. The school's English, music, mathematics and modern foreign languages departments, for example, provide interesting opportunities to challenge high attainers. The music department organises workshops for able musicians. The mathematics department organises a 'mathematics challenge' and encourages pupils to attend mathematics enrichment days organised by the LEA. The English department supports reading enrichment texts and writing reviews for others to read. In Spanish and French additional resources are provided for independent listeners. Some gifted and talented pupils benefit from participation in various clubs,

such as news and media club, chess and history clubs. The evidence gathered during the inspection week highlighted pupils' appreciation of the range of opportunities offered. The learning resource centre is freely available for the homework club and provides a valuable opportunity for pupils to do personal study and research.

42. Preparation for the next stage of education is excellent. There is a coherent, well-organised, well-ordered and well-led careers education programme which enables pupils to develop knowledge, skills and good attitudes to higher education and employment. The LEA's careers advisers work closely with the careers teacher. Pupils are well prepared for option choices in Year 9. In Year 10, all pupils undertake work experience which is well planned and monitored effectively. They benefit a great deal from a programme of outside speakers, a careers guidance programme and visits to sixth form colleges and local businesses. The careers' library is well organised and stocked appropriately with resources which pupils use extensively to obtain information.
43. The school's ethos is enhanced by the excellent overall provision made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is highly successful in promoting the spiritual development of its pupils through its distinctive Catholic teaching which permeates all aspects of its tradition and daily routine. Opportunities for spiritual reflection occur in many subjects. In English and drama religious issues are explored through literature and role-play. The implications of the school's mission statement are considered progressively each year in personal and social education, while in physical education the value of health and personal well-being is taught. In art there are good opportunities for the appreciation of beauty and creativity. In a series of retreats, some of which are residential and take place at various times throughout the pupils' lives in the school, there are opportunities to reflect on the Christian life and consider its opportunities and challenges.
44. A strong moral code permeates the school - there is a clear understanding of moral behaviour and the school community operates within clear moral principles. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong. They consider moral implications seriously, for example environmental issues in geography and science. Pupils show real empathy and understanding when exploring conflict and other issues through literature in English. Morality and ethics in world trade are thoroughly treated in geography lessons. In drama, pupils met with a playwright who has written a comedy on breast cancer and dying and debated sensitively moral issues. The trustworthiness of pupils and their sense of responsibility greatly assist the smooth running of the school. Moral aspects of relationships and citizenship are taught in personal and social education. Teachers and support staff provide very good role models for pupils. Visiting speakers make positive contributions to a varied programme of workshops on such topics as race relations, refugees and overseas aid.
45. Provision for social development is also very good. The school encourages pupils to take responsibility and develop social understanding. Planned opportunities for social development are in the PSHE programme and include topics on health and hygiene, rights and responsibilities, the family, personal safety and relationships. The school provides many opportunities for cultural development. The school takes full advantage of the great range of opportunities offered in and around the City of London. Pupils attend plays and concerts and visit museums and art galleries. World cultures impinge on the curriculum in many areas, such as drama, history, geography, music, and food and fabric technology. In drama, theatre visits have included "Stones in their Pockets," and "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" followed by discussion on underlying cultural issues. The history curriculum reflects cultural richness and offers opportunities to discuss holocaust, human rights and Islamic culture. The cultural diversity represented amongst its pupils is valued as a rich resource. There are language links with various European countries.

**The educational provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and they achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.**

46. Provision for special educational needs is a strength of the school. The learning support department makes very good provision for pupils with special educational needs. The identification is very thorough, involving cognitive ability test (CATs), which are taken by all and National Curriculum test results in English, mathematics and science for eleven-year-olds. Most of the pupils on Stages 3 to 5 of the Code of Practice of SEN have moderate learning difficulties or dyslexia or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The philosophy, policy, planning and management of the provision are highly effective. The quality of the pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) is very good. Pupils' progress is carefully chartered against the IEPs. Apart from the withdrawal of a small number of pupils for intensive support, most of the provision for special needs pupils is through subjects of the National Curriculum.
47. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress throughout the school. Most have targets which are related to either reading and writing skills or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The emphasis on reading development at an early stage helps pupils to learn effectively in all their subjects. By the end of Year 9, their reading skills have improved significantly and they are able to read for meaning in the majority of lessons. Pupils' listening skills are well promoted in English, modern foreign languages, geography and history. They have learned to work co-operatively when developing ideas through discussion. These skills serve them well in Years 10 and 11, when they embark upon examination courses and they continue to make progress in developing and using them. In science and design and technology, they enjoy practical activities and acquire sound manipulative skills but their understanding of scientific and technical vocabulary is weak. By the age of 16, all pupils with statements achieve five or more A\*- G grades in GCSE examinations, and their average grade in the core subjects is between a D and an E.
48. The teaching of pupils with statements of special needs is good. High expectations and the use of a wide range of resources and teaching strategies challenge the pupils to achieve success. Pupils are well managed in a calm, supportive atmosphere in the learning support area, where pupils are encouraged to learn. The management of special educational needs is very good. The arrangements for supporting and monitoring pupils' progress across all subject departments through link teachers, are generally effective. A link governor supports effectively the work of the special needs department. The school values close partnership with parents in setting specific targets for work to be completed at home. The funding received by the school for special educational needs is used fully.

**There is a high standard of care for pupils.**

49. The school provides pastoral support for pupils in a carefully structured and friendly environment. The Catholic ethos of the school places strong emphasis on pupils as individuals and this informs the approach taken by staff in their dealing with the pupils. The senior management team, assisted by year heads and form tutors, is highly successful in promoting an environment in which pupils feel personally valued and respected. The appointment of a chaplain/counsellor has greatly strengthened the pastoral support. The pastoral team sets high standards for the care, welfare and guidance of all pupils. The team balances successfully rigour and high expectations with a sensitivity to each individual's circumstances and needs thus enhancing the standards of attainment which they can achieve. Parents are confident that their children are well treated while they are in the school's care.
50. Genuinely warm relationships between staff and pupils are tempered with a mutual respect and professional distance so that pupils are confident about sharing their problems or concerns, knowing that they will be dealt with fairly. Pupils value the rewards system which has been extended since the last inspection and which is implemented consistently. Staff provide good role models for the pupils to emulate. They work hard to ensure that there is no oppressive behaviour and that pupils are not harassed by others. Pupils are encouraged to think of the impact of their actions on others and this has a positive effect on reducing oppressive behaviour.

51. Pupils, parents and staff confirm that bullying is rare. Members of the anti-bullying group have received training in counselling and dealing sensitively with reported incidents. The school's firm and fair handling of any incidents of bullying gives pupils and parents confidence in the safe and secure environments it provides. The sensitive and judicious use of the learning support unit and the learning mentor provides well targeted support to a few disaffected pupils. Support from the learning mentors is given to those who need it and on occasion a revised timetable is instituted to encourage a return to school.
52. Highly effective systems are in place to monitor pupils' academic performance. Form tutors monitor the pupils' academic, personal development, behaviour and attendance and the year heads are well attuned to the individual pupils in their year and keep a close record of their progress. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. Subject teachers liaise effectively with the pastoral team to track pupils' academic and personal development. The registers are completed efficiently. Registers examined during the inspection week were accurate and complied fully with legislation. Pupils' academic performance is reviewed effectively by form tutors, year heads and members of the senior management team. Individual cases are discussed and realistic targets are set to inspire effort and improvement. Recently the school has set up a pupil tracking system which should enable school to identify pupils who require additional support and challenge.
53. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment, progress and personal development are good. Information is collected and analysed on pupils' academic achievement from a range of tests on entry to the school. These assessments and information from primary schools are used to build a profile on each pupil and to set targets. The more able are categorized as needing more demanding work and those with learning or behaviour difficulties are well supported.
54. Assessment is used well in most subjects to inform planning though the quality of marking varies. Most pupils receive valuable information about how to improve, while for others it is less useful. Some subjects, such as English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and geography, give much helpful advice and feedback on how to improve. Teachers monitor pupils' progress rigorously and intervene appropriately. Most subjects do use assessment effectively to improve standards, for example in physical education pupils are encouraged to evaluate one another's performance and give guidance on how they might improve.
55. The ethos of the school is one of respect and self-discipline which is very successful in promoting good behaviour. The procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good. The school's procedures for child protection and the promotion of pupils' well being, health and safety are excellent. All teachers are fully aware of how to handle any issues that arise and members of the senior management team are trained appropriately to enable them to carry out the role of child protection co-ordinator.

**Parents' views of the school are very positive and parental support for the school is very good.**

56. Parents are very supportive of the school and the school's governors and staff rightly see the extent of their cooperation and interest in their children's education as a strength of the school. Staff and parents of the school have, over many years, developed a constructive partnership which is used effectively for the benefit of the pupils. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and gave evidence of this in their overwhelming responses, 421 returns from 450 families, to the inspection questionnaire. A very high proportion of parents feel that the school's expectations of their children are high and that the staff expect pupils to work hard and achieve their best. Almost all also feel that teachers are approachable and that their children like school. Statements in the questionnaire about leadership and management and positive impact of the school's ethos on pupils' personal development gained universal support.
57. In the parents' meeting, shortly before the inspection, attended by 150 parents, the views expressed were predominantly positive and affirmed parents' overall very good opinion of the school and what it offers to their children. Virtually all parents present praised the school's caring

ethos and were pleased that their children were attending St. Thomas More RC School. The strong partnership between the school and parents makes a significant contribution to pupils' attainment and progress.

58. The vast majority of the parents considers that they are well informed about school events and their children's progress and they are confident that they will be contacted by the school should any need arise. The school has a very detailed and well-presented brochure, which is parent friendly and gives parents full information about the organisation of the school and the school's ethos. Regular newsletters are sent home, giving full details and information regarding pupils' activities. Many parents make an excellent contribution to their children's learning by signing the homework journal regularly and attending the academic review evenings, as well as supporting concerts and funding overseas trips to France and Spain.
59. Transition arrangements for new pupils are very good. Prospective pupils attend a "taster" session for three days prior to their entry of the school. Parents of new pupils are invited to come to the school, prior to their admission, to meet their group tutors, year tutors and discuss any items of concern that they may have. The special educational needs' department has a very good partnership with parents. Careers and sixth form choices evening and consultation meetings on anti-bullying or behaviour management, are well attended. Minutes of the annual governing body's meeting with parents indicate direct and probing questions and carefully thought out responses.
60. Parents' meetings to review their children's progress are attended by nearly all. Parents help their children's work at home through encouragement and providing access to information; some would welcome more varied and consistent homework assignments and a structured approach to GCSE coursework assignments. Inspection evidence confirms the very positive views of parents about the quality of the information they receive about their children's progress. Pupils' annual reports are detailed, relate clearly to individuals and give good indications of their strengths, progress and areas for improvement.
61. The Parent Association is a lively body and aims to be involved in the life of the school. Parents are encouraged to come into school for help and many take the opportunity to do so. The association arranges social events to forge closer links between the home and the school. It raises funds to support educational initiatives. All parents sign a home school agreement and 99 per cent uphold it in every way. They offer help in supervision on school outings and holidays, help with reading and in other school activities. The positive links that the school has had with parents reported in the previous report has been maintained. Through its partnerships with many friends of the school and institutions beyond, St Thomas More RC School provides its pupils with educational opportunities which will equip them well to become full participants in the community.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **The provision of information and communications technology (ICT) in Years 10 and 11.**

62. While the overall standards of attainment in information and communications technology (ICT) are in line with national expectations, they are improving rapidly, particularly in Years 7-9. This is a good achievement in relation to the attainment of pupils on entry to the school. Since the last inspection resources have improved and there are very good facilities in the specialist rooms but in subjects such as science there is neither appropriate hardware nor software to teach relevant Programmes of Study. Specialist information technology teachers' knowledge of the new software has improved, as has the use of assessment data but some teachers need further in-service training to teach topics such as control, data logging and control and multi-media work.
63. Most pupils in Years 7-9 can use word processors, spreadsheets, databases, graphics and desktop publishing. They begin to access the Internet and e-mail but more work is needed in these areas to prepare pupils more adequately to undertake research in later years. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have only restricted opportunities to learn how to use information and

communications technology in other GCSE subjects. The progress in ICT is complemented by enrichment in other subjects. Whilst many of the applications in design and technology, humanities, mathematics and modern foreign languages are sound, they are largely the result of the interest and at the discretion of individual teachers and pupils and do not universally access all aspects of ICT. Weaknesses in ICT include lack of familiarity with data logging and simulation in subjects such as science, and using procedures that involve the use of variables in control work.

### **Precision in defining priorities for school improvement.**

64. The school's development plan is an effective document which is linked appropriately to its mission statement, aims and values but it lacks precision. There are appropriate criteria for success, a clear allocation of responsibilities and realistic timescales but all the school's precise priorities are not defined clearly. Departmental development plans are variable in quality. Subject plans are not linked specifically to the school's performance targets and do not set specific quantifiable targets in order to make an objective assessment of pupils' attainment and progress.

### **The external audit of the school's accounts.**

65. Effective and efficient procedures and systems are in place to ensure that financial decisions on spending are informed by the school's development needs. Governors with appropriate financial expertise are involved actively in scrutinising and agreeing the budget allocations. The allocation of funds to departments is open, fair and equitable and matches subject-specific needs. The site is well managed and the services provided by the technical, educational and administrative staff is of a high standard. Good and highly productive working relationships have been established with local primary schools and with a number of post-16 colleges.
66. Effective controls are now in place to monitor expenditure. Governors and senior managers seek continually to improve cost effectiveness and ensure that maximum resources are available for teaching and learning. The school's accounts were last audited by external auditors in January 1997. The auditors' report was detailed and contained 28 recommendations which have been acted upon. The school has plans to appoint a service manager to improve further the financial management of the school.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

67. The key issue is maintenance of existing high standards. No serious weaknesses were noted. In order to sustain and continue to develop the good work, the governors and senior management of St. Thomas More RC School, with the support of the local education authority, should now:
- **improve the quality of provision for information and communications technology in Years 10 and 11 by:**
    - monitoring pupils' information technology skills and ensuring effective applications across the curriculum;
    - providing extra resources in some subjects;
    - offering opportunities to all pupils and staff to extend their experiences in using information technology to communicate, such as control, data logging and multi-media work.
    - (Paragraphs 62 and 63)

- **Ensure that key priorities for school improvement are defined precisely by:**
  - including precise priorities in the school's development plan;
  - setting subject specific measurable targets to determine value added achievement between key stages.
  - (Paragraph 64)
  
- **Ensure that the school's accounts are audited externally.**
  - **(Paragraphs 65 and 66)**
  
- In addition, relative performance of boys and girls, paragraphs 3 and 4 and homework paragraph 35, homework, have not formed the basis of 'Key Issues' identified above; the school should consider including these in the governors' post-inspection action plan.



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	43
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
12	53	26	9	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
	Number of pupils on the school's roll	583
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	56	

Special educational needs	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
	Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	106	NA

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	13

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	93.6
National comparative data	91.3

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	63	55	118

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	47	52	41
	Girls	45	48	39
	Total	92	100	80
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (79)	85 (82)	68 (70)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (30)	58 (52)	37 (24)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	47	49	42
	Girls	46	47	41
	Total	93	96	83
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (84)	83 (86)	70 (76)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (40)	58 (61)	46 (36)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	57	50	107

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	31	57	57
	Girls	40	50	50
	Total	71	107	107
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	66.4 (68)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	96 (100)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	49.5
	National	38.4

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	5
Black – African heritage	7
Black – other	6
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	534
Any other minority ethnic group	28

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	3	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	3	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	33	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y 11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	35.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y 11**

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	174

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y 11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.0
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y 11**

Key Stage 3	26.1
Key Stage 4	23.5

### **Financial information**

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	1769169
Total expenditure	1869704
Expenditure per pupil	
Balance brought forward from previous year	260482
Balance carried forward to next year	159947

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	450
Number of questionnaires returned	421

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	45	8	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	53	44	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	45	47	5	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	36	52	10	1	1
The teaching is good.	48	47	4	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	44	44	10	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	33	4	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	73	26	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	47	42	7	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	67	27	2	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	59	38	2	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	45	10	2	6