



# St Thomas More Catholic School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 112971  
**LEA** DERBYSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 279068  
**Inspection dates** 14 June 2006 to 15 June 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr. Shaun Dillon HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Palace Fields
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		SK17 6AF
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01298 23167
<b>Number on roll</b>	390	<b>Fax number</b>	01298 25816
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Father.Dennis Higgins
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	30 October 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs. Kate Lamb

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	14 June 2006 - 15 June 2006	279068

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St. Thomas More is a popular Catholic school with a specialist status in science. It is a small school of about 400 pupils, many of whom come from a wide rural area. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals and few come from homes experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is low and most pupils speak English as a first language. Pupils' attainment when they join the school at age 11 is generally comparable with the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

St. Thomas More Catholic School is a good school with outstanding aspects. The school assesses itself as being good in all aspects. The headteacher, governors and managers at all levels have improved the school's provision since the previous inspection and they have a high capacity to continue this process. Much of the school's success relates to its strong Catholic ethos which permeates the school. This engenders high levels of respect between most staff and pupils. The school provides outstanding pastoral care, personal development and well-being for its pupils and this means that they are appreciative, very friendly, helpful and well behaved. They enjoy being in school and they feel very safe in such a harmonious environment. Pupils feel empowered through the school council to effect changes. On the academic side, pupils progress well throughout the school and attain high standards overall. Much of this is because of mostly good or outstanding teaching and learning. Learning is good because the pupils are keen and present a very positive attitude. Managers are aware of inconsistent lesson planning and an underdeveloped lesson observation process and are keen to improve them. They are also alert to the fact that pupils do not do as well in mathematics as they do in English and science. The school provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils. They receive good advice throughout the school, but especially on entry to the school and when they make their curriculum choices for their last two years. However, the use of data and assessment information to enable teachers to track pupils' progress is inconsistent. This means that not all pupils receive sufficient motivation to aim for higher standards. The school safeguards pupils' health and safety very effectively. It has established a family ethos and promotes moral and spiritual values very powerfully. St. Thomas More provides a creative and wide-ranging curriculum which meets the needs of all pupils very well and is outstanding for a small school. It is flexible enough to cater for the relatively high proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has a strong reputation for successfully integrating pupils who have had problems in other schools and for its support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The gaining of specialist science status enabled the school to improve its laboratory facilities and resources greatly. The science department liaises well with primary schools and with local employers. The features mentioned above are the results of good leadership and management. The governors, headteacher and senior managers set a clear strategy for improvement and communicate this effectively to staff. Senior managers are readily available to speak to pupils and staff. Managers and governors have, through prudent financial management, improved accommodation and resources since the previous inspection and are still striving to improve the inadequate sports accommodation. The school provides good value for money.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the consistency and rigour of lesson planning and the lesson observation process.
- Raise achievement and standards in mathematics.
- Continue to improve sports accommodation.
- Continue to improve the use of assessment information to track pupils' academic progress.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' achievement and standards are good, but they progress better in English and science than in mathematics. When pupils enter the school in Year 7 their standards are broadly average. In their first three years they make good progress in English and science and satisfactory progress in mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well. Standards in Year 9 have been consistently high and rising; those reached by pupils in 2005 in mathematics and science were the highest for five years. In Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to make good progress overall and especially in English. Again, their progress in mathematics is satisfactory. Girls make better progress than boys. In 2005, high proportions of pupils gained five or more GCSE higher grades (including English and mathematics) and at least one graded GCSE. The proportion gaining five or more graded GCSEs was below average. In general, in 2005 the standards attained by pupils in GCSE examinations were below those reached in 2004. A high proportion of boys achieved the highest GCSE grades. Pupils' standards are particularly good in art and design, design and technology and English literature. They are less successful in mathematics. The school met its targets in 2005 and has set challenging targets for pupils' progress and attainment in 2006.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

The personal development and well-being of all groups of pupils are outstanding. Attendance is well above the national average. Truancy and exclusions are very rare. The school is, however, rightly concerned about pupils' absences due to families taking holidays within the school term. Pupils contribute very well to school life through the highly effective school council and by acting as mentors for younger pupils. Older pupils act as 'Guardian Angels' for those joining the school from primary schools. Pupils also contribute outstandingly to charity work. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They respond very well to the many valuable opportunities the school provides for spiritual development. Pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. They are keen to adopt healthy lifestyles. In response, school meals include a range of healthier options. However, inadequate accommodation continues to restrict their opportunities for sport. The school provides a safe environment for its pupils, who in turn feel safe and unthreatened. Pupils make excellent progress in acquiring the skills that will equip them for work. Virtually all pupils go on to further education, training or employment when they leave the school at 16.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons observed were good or outstanding. The quality of learning is high in most lessons because of pupils' excellent behaviour

and positive attitudes. Most pupils are keen to be involved and to improve their knowledge and understanding. The relationships between teachers and pupils in lessons are good. Many teachers praise pupils for their hard work and achievement and, by so doing, encourage further development. There is appropriate emphasis given to health and safety aspects in practical lessons. The identification of and the provision for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are strong. These learners benefit from highly effective additional support in many lessons. Since the last inspection, teachers have improved considerably their use of information and communication technology (ICT) to aid learning. Pupils are questioned and challenged well to extend their understanding. Much marking of pupils' work is helpful but not all assessment feedback identifies areas for improvement. The use of National Curriculum levels to set targets is underdeveloped. Lesson planning is inconsistent. This makes it difficult to check if teachers plan to use appropriate teaching and learning styles to meet the needs of all pupils. In a few lessons, opportunities for independent learning are insufficient.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding and meets the needs of all its pupils very well and helps them to make good progress. The deficiencies in ICT provision noted at the previous inspection have been remedied very effectively. The design of the Key Stage 3 curriculum allows for a wider range of subjects to be offered than is usual in such a small school. This broad curriculum is maintained in Key Stage 4. Strong links with other schools and colleges have enabled the school to extend the scope of its vocational provision and ensure that the needs of all its pupils are met. The school prepares pupils very well for the world of work. The specialist science status has helped the school to disseminate good practice to other parts of the curriculum and to work with primary schools on their science curriculum. Despite the difficulties posed by rural transport problems, large numbers of pupils benefit from a very wide range of enrichment activities, especially in music, and including trips, visits, drama, teams and clubs.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils. Pupils receive a very good and comprehensive programme of personal and social education, including a strong element of careers and enterprise education. Teachers give excellent guidance to pupils on their choice of courses at the end of key stages. The school makes very effective provision for gifted and talented pupils. Teachers know their pupils very well, but the school does not yet use assessment information effectively enough to track pupils' academic progress, raise their achievement, and keep parents fully informed.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The self-evaluation judgements are mostly accurate, but the self-evaluation report is very descriptive. School development planning is well considered and effective. Not all staff can yet use the new management information system to monitor pupils' performance. The lesson observation process is underdeveloped. Governors have a wide range of relevant expertise. They question and challenge senior managers rigorously through an effective sub-committee structure. Governors and senior managers do not monitor the progress of the race equality action plan. Governors and senior managers have a high capacity to continue to improve the school. Financial planning relates closely to school improvement priorities. The school's financial management and planning are prudent and pupils' achievement and standards are high. Consequently, value for money is good. Teaching staff are well qualified and benefit from staff development which meets the school's priorities. Managers have improved accommodation and ICT resources considerably since the last inspection. However, many classrooms are small and storage space is insufficient. Because of its science specialist status, laboratory accommodation and resources are good. The school meets the aims of its science specialist status. The accommodation for sports and physical education is inadequate. Pupils express their opinions well through the school council and they have worked with managers to effect improvements. Communication with parents is satisfactory. When the school reviews issues, it consults a sample of parents. However, the school does not communicate sufficiently frequently or fully with other parents. The school collaborates very effectively with a federation of schools, local employers, primary feeder schools and colleges.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for the exceptionally friendly welcome which many of you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you, seeing how well you worked with your teachers in lessons and finding out about the good progress you make at the school. We think you belong to a good school which has some outstanding features. Most of you told us that you enjoy school, you feel very safe there and you try hard in lessons and in out-of-school activities. You particularly like the opportunities to join in trips, visits, teams, clubs, music and drama. Your behaviour is very good and you treat each other and the adults in the school (including visitors) with respect and courtesy. We think much of this is due to the strong Catholic background of the school. We are pleased that you have made improvements to the school through your school council. Most of you progress well throughout the school and gain good results in Years 9 and 11. Most of your lessons are interesting and your teachers know their subjects. We think lessons could be even better if there were clear plans to ensure that all your different learning needs were included. Most of you know where you are up to in school and what you need to do to improve, but we think that the school could improve the way it monitors and tracks your progress. You would then have more frequent reviews and would know better the levels at which you were working and the levels for which you were aiming. We think that your school is well led and managed and that the governors and staff work hard to improve your education. In order to improve further, we suggest that the school should do the following things: continue to improve accommodation, especially for sports; use information better to track your progress; raise your achievement and standards in mathematics; plan lessons better and observe them more often and more thoroughly. Best wishes for your future.