



St Thomas More Catholic School and Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 125758
LEA Warwickshire
Inspection number 281994
Inspection dates 1 February 2006 to 2 February 2006
Reporting inspector Ted Wheatley AI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Greenmoor Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Nuneaton
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Warwickshire CV10 7EX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	024 76642400
Number on roll	784	Fax number	024 76353545
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr James Ison
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr Martin Moore

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas More Catholic School and Technology College is a specialist 11–16 mixed below average size comprehensive school. There are broadly equal numbers of boys and girls from mainly Catholic backgrounds. Pupils come from a wide area and a very small number do not have English as their first language. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic groups. A few pupils are entitled to free school meals and pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is below average and attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. The headteacher provides very clear direction for improvement and for ensuring the learning needs of all pupils are met. The school has evaluated itself accurately and has good procedures to bring about improvements.

The great majority of pupils achieve well and some very well. Standards are above average. The very small amount of underachievement is mainly in mathematics in Years 10 and 11, due to some unsatisfactory teaching, which is now being dealt with effectively. The school provides a safe and secure environment with excellent care and support. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and pupils acquire good social skills. They learn to be very considerate and supportive of others. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives. They enjoy school and their attendance is good. They take on responsibilities well and have brought about several changes in the school through their involvement in the school council. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development is good.

Whilst teaching is good overall, some is outstanding, with challenging questioning, fast pace and activities that catch pupils' interest. The school's efforts to meet the needs of all of its pupils, whatever their prior attainment or ethnic or social backgrounds, are excellent. However, at times, pupils are not given enough opportunities to discuss or talk about the work they do.

Leadership and management are good. The school's specialist technology college status is having a good impact on the quality of teaching and on how well pupils gain skills in using computers.

The school has improved since its previous inspection and its capacity to improve further is good. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics so that pupils achieve according to their capabilities.
- Further improve the quality of teaching by including more opportunities for pupils to discuss their work with each other.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards and reach above average standards by the end of Year 9. Most pupils make good progress and many make exceptional progress.

In the end of Year 9 national tests, results were above the national average in English, mathematics and science and with a high proportion of pupils reaching very high standards. Pupils achieved well and many achieved very well. These standards have been maintained over recent years.

GCSE results were well above average in 2005, though in mathematics they were not as high as in other subjects. Overall, pupils made good progress and some made excellent progress. In mathematics, achievement was satisfactory overall; although many pupils achieved well some did not do as well as they could. Results were particularly good in English, science, design and technology, ICT, art, French and history. Currently, standards are above average and pupils make good and sometimes very good, progress. Progress is satisfactory in mathematics, where recent changes to teaching arrangements have started to have positive effects.

Overall, pupils make good progress as they move through the school, many make very good progress and all enjoy their learning. The very good use of computers in many lessons, due to technology college funding, plays a significant part in pupils' progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and those from minority ethnic groups make good, and often very good, progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good with some excellent features. The vast majority of pupils respond very positively to the school's clear expectations and values. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils are outstanding and behaviour is excellent. Pupils enjoy coming to school, as they demonstrate in their good attendance and commitment to learning. Daily life is underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos and provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and in some cases exceptional. The pupils learn to reflect, to distinguish right from wrong and to live in harmony. They are confident that the few incidents of unacceptable behaviour that occur will be dealt with promptly and effectively. They show respect for each other and their teachers. Many actively express their concern for others through a wide variety of charitable activities. Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility, for example, by serving on the school council. The school takes its views into account and has made some changes as a result. For example, pupils were closely involved in decisions about improving playground furniture.

Good vocational courses, careers guidance and work experience all help pupils to gain the knowledge and skills needed for the world of work. The school encourages pupils to eat healthily and participate in sports activities. Drugs and sex education programmes also provide them with valuable advice.

Pupils gain independence and self-confidence as they progress through the school and they are prepared well for the future in family life, employment and the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good quality of teaching is a major contributory factor to the fast progress pupils make. In outstanding lessons in English, science, history, ICT and technology, pupils respond enthusiastically to the high level of challenge presented. Pupils extend and develop complex ideas as a result of teachers' probing questioning. Pupils have a clear idea of how well they are doing and use this knowledge as a springboard for further improvement.

The majority of lessons are structured well, and have a sharp focus, which is clearly communicated to pupils. Effective planning, incorporating a range of learning styles, and brisk teaching, ensure that pupils learn successfully. Teachers are experts in their subjects and prepare pupils well for tests. As a consequence, examination results are good. Imaginative use is made of ICT to extend and develop pupils' creative, practical and communication skills. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and there is a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere in lessons. In many lessons, perceptive feedback from teachers and informative marking enable pupils to improve the quality of their work. However, this is not consistent in all subjects, for example, in modern foreign languages.

In the few less successful lessons, teaching does not consistently take account of individual learning needs. Occasionally, teaching is over-directed makes insufficient demands on pupils. This slows the pace of learning rather than challenging pupils to think for themselves.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a broad programme of interesting and challenging work for pupils of all abilities. This supports pupils in making good progress in their learning. Older pupils who choose to study vocational courses are successful in gaining qualifications at a local college, due to a productive partnership with the school.

Technology college funding has enabled pupils to benefit from better quality specialist rooms in science, mathematics and technology and to use ICT well in all subject areas. A well structured personal, health, social and citizenship programme raises pupils' awareness of how to lead a safe and healthy life. In addition, good careers education and guidance prepares them well for their future careers.

Attendance at the impressive range of extra-curricular sporting and cultural events provided by the school is high. Pupils also develop academic and social skills through numerous educational trips, and the contribution of visitors, such as poets, to lessons and assemblies.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's care for its pupils is outstanding. Support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and for those at an early stage of learning English is very good. Work with a wide range of outside agencies supports effectively the most needy pupils. Very strong links with parents are maintained through written reports and parents' evenings. The school's total commitment to providing equally for the well-being of all its pupils is excellent. The pastoral system is a major strength of the school and is highly valued by pupils. The house system is used very effectively to help pupils feel part of a community, to provide personal support and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school provides effective individual guidance and all pupils have an adult they can turn to to discuss problems in confidence if they need help or advice.

Good systems are in place to ensure pupils' health and safety, including effective child protection procedures. Links with the community and other schools are good; they contribute to smooth transition into Year 7 and then from Year 11 into continuing education. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are effective in identifying underachievement at an early stage and are used well to establish support to help pupils improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior managers set a very clear direction for the school's improvement, rooted in care for the achievement of pupils and the well-being of teachers. Resources and teaching expertise the school has acquired through technology college status are used effectively to benefit all teachers and pupils. As a result, all staff are highly motivated and pupils achieve well.

The senior managers provide clear direction for improvement whilst encouraging individuals and departments to develop their own strengths. Much of the work to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning is carried out effectively by the senior managers. They are now beginning to involve heads of department, with the result that good practice is being shared effectively. Development planning is good. A key strength is the way in which the school strives to include all pupils in all activities, meet the needs of all pupils through the curriculum and excellent personal and academic support. Most middle managers provide good leadership, with many of them providing strong role models for highly effective teaching.

The views of parents and pupils have influenced changes, for example, in the provision of more healthy lunch options. The fact that the school is oversubscribed is evidence of its good reputation locally. The governors work effectively to fulfil their responsibilities, and to provide good support. The school works well with partners, for example, feeder primary schools. There is a good capacity for further improvement.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ 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	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	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

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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 very much for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. You made our time most enjoyable and gave us a lot of information, all of it praising the school. Many of you spoke to us about the school and helped us when we needed it. We met with representatives of all year groups and others on particular courses. The information you gave us and the comments you made were very helpful.

The best things about your school are:

- Most of you achieve well and many of you achieve very well.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you work very hard.
- You take on responsibilities willingly and carry them out effectively.
- The headteacher and all other staff make sure that all of your learning needs are fully met. They check how well you do in school and help you to improve.
- The care and support the school provides for you is excellent. It is a safe, secure place to learn in.
- Most teaching is good and some is excellent.

We are suggesting to your school that governors and staff should now:

- Improve teaching and learning in mathematics so that you achieve better.
- Further improve the quality of teaching in some lessons by including more opportunities for you to discuss your work with each other.