

St Thomas More Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102161
Local Authority	Haringey
Inspection number	286296
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Ann Berger HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1131
6th form	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr I Phillips
Headteacher	Dr C F Hickey
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	Glendale Avenue Wood Green London N22 5HN
Telephone number	020 8888 7122
Fax number	020 8826 9370

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Thomas More Catholic School serves the Catholic community of Wood Green, Tottenham, Edmonton and Hackney. Attainment on entry is low. Many pupils come from areas where there are high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. One third of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. English is not the first language for a significant majority.

The pupils come from a very wide range of different cultures though predominately African and Black-British Caribbean. Over two thirds of pupils have reading ages of below 9.5 at the start of Year 7 and the average attainment on entry is low. When pupils enter the sixth form, standards are also below average because of the legacy of underachievement. The school was judged to have serious weaknesses in February 2005 and received a monitoring visit in October 2005 where it was judged to have made satisfactory progress overall in addressing the areas for improvement.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This school has overcome many challenges and provides a good quality of education for its pupils. The outstanding self-evaluation has enabled the senior leadership team to focus on the key priorities systematically. The outcome of this rigorous work has been a significant improvement in standards across the whole school. The exceptional team work has brought out the best in staff.

Creative and innovative approaches to solving problems have been developed and this is particularly evident in the very wide range of strategies to improve behaviour. As a result, behaviour in classes is good. Pupils are ready and keen to learn and enjoy their lessons. The sanctuary provision for pupils in need of additional support has a very positive impact on the pupils' personal development and the Leadership in Training programme is particularly effective at improving self-esteem and confidence. However, these strategies take time to impact and inappropriate behaviour is still evident on occasion and exclusions remain too high. Pupils develop good workplace skills including group work, communication, research and team building. Good attention is paid to pupils' safety and issues are acted on swiftly.

Overall, the pupils' achievements are good. The good teaching has accelerated the progress the pupils make and examination and test results show a consistently upward trend. There are good systems to ensure the pupils' progress is monitored and challenging targets are set and usually met. There is some very good practice in marking and setting homework which ensures that the pupils and their parents know what they need to do to improve but this is not consistent across all subjects.

The attention paid to improving the teaching in Key Stage 3 and 4 has more recently moved to the sixth form where the provision is satisfactory and improving. Teaching and learning in many areas such as history and English literature and in vocational subjects, including media studies and sport are good, although even in these subjects, achievement is not as good as it could be.

The recent rapid improvements and accurate, insightful evaluation, point to an outstanding capacity to make the further improvements suggested.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Sixth form provision is improving. Though standards are not high enough overall, the achievement is satisfactory given the pupils' low starting points and the legacy of underachievement at Key Stage 4.

Pupils feel well supported by their tutors and are appreciative of the guidance they receive when applying for university. There are significant strengths in pupils' personal development and well-being. These include the positive role models that many sixth formers provide through mentoring and support for school activities. Through this work and many other initiatives, the pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community. There is a high rate of participation in a range of leadership courses including Leaders in Training and Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme. These enhance their self-esteem and their confidence in taking on responsibilities within the community.

The personal development of pupils is well managed and suitable systems for evaluating and monitoring the progress of individual pupils are beginning to have an impact on raising standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the standards achieved and the quality of provision in the sixth form.
- Ensure that the best practice in marking and setting homework is disseminated and used across the school.
- Continue to develop further strategies to prevent inappropriate behaviour.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils achieve well regardless of their gender or cultural background. Effective strategies for raising performance and standards are in place. However, there is still ground to make up because pupils of average and below average ability enter school with weak literacy skills which affect their performance in tests and examinations. Nevertheless there are areas of high achievement in media and sports BTEC courses, performing arts, drama and history due to the particularly good teaching in these subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Much work has been focused on improving the pupils' self esteem, social skills and behaviour. The emphasis on sport, arising from the schools specialist status has helped to enhance their confidence. Behaviour is satisfactory and improves as pupils grow older and they develop a greater allegiance to the school and its strong, caring ethos.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Three quarters of pupils benefit from sports coaching and a high number have gone on to become nationally recognised champions.

Mentors, mediators and the safer schools partnership with the police enable pupils to mature. Pupils are very active in school productions and enjoy entertaining. Success in performances such as 'Grease' and 'West Side Story' has enhanced the confidence of all who take part. St Thomas More is an inclusive school with an active commitment to racial equality evident in all its work. Attendance and punctuality have improved significantly and are now good.

The school takes positive action to promote community cohesion and relationships are harmonious. Pupils are friendly and social opportunities are greatly valued.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and classrooms are well organised and managed. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored very effectively

and support is well focused where necessary. Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies, particularly in marking and feedback to pupils, and it is not always clear to pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The library is increasingly well used to support learning and there has been a marked upturn in the number of books borrowed. Teaching assistants provide good support in lessons and help ensure that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school offers a good range of vocational courses to older pupils, some taught in the school, some in partnership with a local college. There is a suitable focus on improving the pupils' basic skills and, as a result, many of the pupils with low reading ages on arrival make swift progress and catch up missed learning. The school's success in sport spreads to other areas too. Older pupils train as leaders and coaches to help younger ones improve and provide support in literacy and numeracy to some of the most vulnerable pupils. All pupils have the opportunity to undertake work experience locally. This, together with the strong focus on raising standards, ensures that they are well prepared for the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Data about learning and readiness for school have ensured support can be focused carefully and efficiently. Heads of year have established clear strategies to support pupils who find it difficult to conform to the school's good behaviour policy. The school has robust and secure procedures that address the area of safeguarding pupils.

Joint working with external agencies, such as the education welfare service and the pupil and family mediation officer, is good. Pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 have good careers guidance and are aware of many possible pathways to college, further training and employment. The school has developed increasingly innovative ways to strengthen parent partnerships. For example, the parent teacher association funds a leadership course for parents, which is highly valued. Nevertheless, there is further to go to ensure all parents are fully involved in their children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has recently increased the levels of ambition within its targets, having exceeded those previously set. This is a testament to the outstanding senior leadership as well as the high levels of commitment through the school to ensuring improvements in standards and provision.

Leadership across the school is good. The staff have benefited from the close support of the headteacher, deputy headteachers, consultants from the leadership centre and London Challenge. The impact of this work has been very good planning, monitoring and evaluation as well as

secure systems and procedures to hold staff to account for the progress made by the pupils. This is summarised by a pupil who commented, 'This school allows me both to have dreams and make them a reality'.

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Annex A

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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

16 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School, Glendale Avenue, Wood Green, London, N22 5HN

It was a pleasure to meet you at our recent visit to your school. We found your friendly and open disposition very helpful. You talked to us about the improvements over the last two years and we concluded, after looking at lessons, your work and talking to staff, that your school provides a good quality of education.

Behaviour has improved though there are still pupils who do wrong particularly during break and lunchtime and we have asked the staff to look at yet more ways of helping those involved.

Lessons are now much calmer and most of you are doing much better in class and in your examinations. Your headteacher and other staff know where things can be improved and they take swift action to deal with any problems.

Teachers have been asked to review the arrangements for marking and setting homework to make sure you know what you need to do to improve your work. Those of you in the sixth form are also receiving a better education but there is still more to do to ensure you all do as well as you could.

We were particularly impressed with the contribution you make to your community and the excellent way you try to adopt a healthy lifestyle. You have fantastic opportunities for sport and we saw how these improve all aspects of school life.

Thank you again for helping us during the inspection.

Ann Berger HMI