

Thomas More Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101821
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	307826
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor-Bennett 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 (total)	832
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Denis O'Donnell
Headteacher	Mr John Casey
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2005
School address	Russell Hill Road Purley CR8 2XP
Telephone number	020 8668 6251
Fax number	020 8660 9003

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Thomas More Catholic School is a smaller than average school. It has specialist status in science. The majority ethnic group is White British and a significant number of students are of Black African, Black Caribbean and Asian British heritages. About a third of the school's intake comes from homes where English is not the main language spoken, but only a minority are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students who have free school meals is above average. The school has the International School Award. It has a relatively new and developing sixth form which, because it operates under a franchise arrangement from another local secondary school, is not reported on in this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thomas More Catholic School provides a satisfactory education for its students. It is an improving school and it demonstrates a good sense of care and support for its students' welfare and progress in all aspects of its work. Both in lessons and around the site the behaviour and demeanour of students are calm, pleasant and positive. The school's ethos of striving 'to care, to learn, to achieve' is evident in all aspects of its work and in its involvement with the local community. The school uses its science specialism to very good effect in improving performance in the specialist subjects, more generally across the school, and in extra-curricular provision. It also works effectively to promote and support science education in several local primary schools, where a high level of enthusiasm for the subject has been generated - especially for the Murder Mystery Forensic Science project! The school has recently become a centre for Leading Space Education because of its success in interesting students in astronomy and rocket design.

Since it was last inspected, the headteacher and his leadership team have raised the standards attained by students appreciably by improving behaviour and levels of personal ambition. Through the quality of their leadership, they provide the school with a good capacity to improve further. Standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics are still below the national average, but the school has made significant improvements in the progress students make in these important areas, except in mathematics in Key Stage 4 where progress is still inadequate. Teaching is satisfactory in nearly all lessons, and good in some, but there is a lack of outstanding teaching in many areas. The school provides a curriculum that suits learners' needs well. For example, the new Year 7 curriculum is innovative and stimulating, and there is a good range of vocational provision higher up in the school that meets the needs of a wide range of learners. The leadership of the school has improved attendance through a variety of imaginative strategies to the point where it is now satisfactory.

The headteacher and senior staff have developed systems that promote and enforce good standards of behaviour in the school, and this results in consistently good attitudes towards learning in lessons. This sometimes leads to learners making better progress in lessons than may otherwise be expected. The students are very proud of their school and recognise how well it supports them. One said, 'I was shy when I arrived, but the school and the staff here have built up my confidence massively.' Another explained, 'Teachers are happy to help you outside of lessons and after school.' The vast majority of parents are supportive of the school and one remarked 'The school has a great vibe... I recommend it to everyone I know.' Students have a good awareness of the importance of adopting healthy and safe practices, and they are prepared satisfactorily by the school for the next stages of their education and the world of work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards attained in mathematics and English.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching across all subjects, to improve the progress that students make.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is variable but is satisfactory overall. The overall standards achieved by the majority of students, in relation to their capability and starting points, have improved noticeably over recent years. Standards are now broadly in line with national averages in many subjects. In particular, the percentage of students achieving five or more C grades at GCSE has increased dramatically over the last few years to above the proportion achieved nationally. This is due to improvements in the appropriateness of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and a successful leadership focus on improving attitudes to learning. Students' progress over their time at the school in English is now satisfactory. The progress of learners over Key Stage 3 in mathematics is satisfactory but it is inadequate at Key Stage 4. Students make good progress in science at both key stages, and the proportion obtaining two science C grades at GCSE is above the national average. The progress made by boys and girls of different ethnic origins, and of different abilities, is in line with that seen in the school generally. The school enables those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make progress that is at least satisfactory, and good in some cases.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as a result of the school's strong Christian ethos. There is a great sense of 'one community' in the school despite its wide cultural mix. Students are happy, friendly and get on well with each other and with adults. They are proud of their school and very pleased with the opportunities it gives them. Behaviour is good throughout the school and makes a strong contribution to students' learning. Any bullying is swiftly dealt with. One student said 'I feel safe and well cared for in school' and this reflects the view of many. Students know that they need a healthy diet and they are pleased that school lunches are now healthy. They are enthusiastic about the amount and variety of sport on offer and a high proportion participate. Some girls are particularly pleased that there is a good range of activities for them to choose from. The majority of students enjoy school very much. Older ones are very positive about the recent changes made by the headteacher and senior staff to make the Key Stage 4 curriculum more work-related. This has been a factor in the markedly improved attendance, which is now at the national average for secondary schools. Students are very appreciative of the efforts of their teachers to improve their achievements.

Students make an outstanding contribution to their school community. The much-respected head students and senior prefects exercise responsibilities at breaks and lunchtimes effectively, run clubs and activities after school, and mentor younger students. There are many opportunities for other students to play a part as prefects for subjects or in activities such as choirs. They also act as buddies and peer mentors. The school council has effectively brought about changes in the school, for example in the canteen and in the level of provision of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. Students are satisfactorily prepared for life beyond school. There are effective work-related activities in all years and there is a strong work-related curriculum in Key Stage 4.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are improving. School leaders have implemented a well-developed system for monitoring the quality of lessons that is helping to enhance the quality of provision. The headteacher has an accurate picture of the quality of teaching in the school. The best lessons share a number of important strengths. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding, which they share effectively in lessons. Relationships between staff and students are very good and result in a pleasant working atmosphere where tasks are challenging and students behave very well. Praise for successful endeavour motivates students to try harder and strive for greater success. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects makes tasks interesting for the learners, as in a physics lesson on nuclear fusion and fission where the teacher's anecdotal commentary captured students' imagination. Digital projectors are often used to good effect, for example showing mathematical translations clearly, enabling an understanding of the role of vector notation. However, these important teaching characteristics are not universally applied in lessons, with the result that progress is satisfactory overall. Some teachers tend to talk for too long, giving students too few opportunities to review and discuss their learning individually or in groups. Students in these lessons often persevere and make progress, but develop into passive listeners rather than active learners who question what they do not understand. Sometimes teachers do not use questioning effectively to identify what students have and have not understood, so that work is insufficiently well matched to their needs. Teaching support staff do not always interact sufficiently with students. Books are marked regularly but do not always include clear and specific targets for improvement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those for whom English is an additional language, are given satisfactory guidance and support.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has a number of very good features. Progression routes are clear and helpful. The health, safety and well-being of all students are well catered for through subject teaching, tutor time and a well-structured citizenship programme. The integrated scheme of work written for Year 7 brings together topics from several subjects and is of high quality, focusing on learning skills that facilitate students' progress as they move through the school. A good range of subjects is taught in Years 7 to 9, although French is the only modern foreign language provided. In Years 10 and 11, a very effective curriculum is offered that meets the needs of the students well and is enjoyed. Students follow English, mathematics, science, ICT and physical education courses, and select from a good range of options. Those who might struggle with traditional GCSE subjects follow vocational and college courses in areas such as ICT, hospitality and science. These are relevant and interesting and result in good achievement. An excellent range of successful science courses is provided, with about a quarter of students each year opting to take physics, chemistry and biology. A recent initiative promoting literacy across the curriculum involving tutors and subject teachers is helping to increase reading and writing standards. Rigorous review of this provision by both staff and students is resulting in very effective improvements. Numeracy development, although satisfactory, has been a lower priority. A very wide and popular range of extra-curricular activities is provided, from girls' football to GCSE astronomy, and from steel pans to public speaking. Students also benefit from

many visits both in this country and abroad, including a very successful residential visit in Year 7 where 'Team Thomas More' is a valued experience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are highly committed to the well-being and achievement of students, who speak warmly of teachers' support and guidance given outside of lessons and after school. Pastoral care is very good. All safeguarding measures are in place and rigorously applied and updated. There is a good partnership with outside agencies for the benefit of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school shows its value for every individual. For example, it cares extremely well for vulnerable young people, including refugees and asylum seekers. All ethnic groups are given equal opportunities to succeed. All staff make themselves available as learning mentors to help underachievers and vulnerable students succeed. Teachers make students aware of their National Curriculum levels and GCSE potential grades. When marking work, however, they do not always provide sufficiently detailed guidance to help students to see specific ways to improve. They use academic mentoring days for setting new targets for improvement, and give careful guidance on how to reach higher levels. These targets have recently become more challenging. This is particularly the case in English, where they are contributing to better achievement so that GCSE standards have improved. Parents are also involved in the target-setting process, and the regular opportunities to discuss their children's progress mean that they are able to support their children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and he exercises determined leadership of the progress, care and well-being of all students. He and his senior team give a strong lead to the school's work. They have tackled weaknesses with determination and have been rewarded with success, which has been achieved in some difficult areas. Their work has ensured that the gap between the school's results and national figures has narrowed year-on-year since the previous inspection. Middle leaders are playing an increasingly strong part in driving improvements. For example, leadership of the English department has been revitalised and this has resulted in a clear rise in standards. There is still some variation in the quality of the work of middle leaders, however, and this means that students' progress is variable across subjects. The school's self-evaluation processes are thorough and there is a clear cycle of monitoring, review and development. The three-year strategic plan sets out a clear vision for the school's further development. The school's outstanding contribution to the promotion of community cohesion reflects its inclusive, Christian ethos. The school takes its responsibilities in this regard very seriously and reaches out in many ways into the local community and beyond. It nurtures and supports the students' development as global citizens and has good links with schools in several European countries, the United States and South Africa. In addition, the way the school's science specialism is led brings many positive benefits to the students at Thomas More and at many local primary and secondary schools. The headteacher and senior staff have a productive and close working relationship with the governing body, which enables it to play an effective part in the school's development, combining support with a good degree of challenge. It oversees

the effective and efficient use of resources, and the deployment of staff, to achieve the outcomes prioritised in the school's development plan.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

18 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas More Catholic School, Purley, CR8 2XP

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for your very significant and useful contributions to the recent inspection. We very much enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about your school. This letter is to inform you of our findings.

The inspection team judged that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Your headteacher wants you to be successful, confident and happy. He, with the support of his staff, is doing a good job of improving the school. The examination results improved again in 2008 and they are now in line with the national average in many respects. The curriculum is well matched to your needs generally and it supports you to achieve your best overall.

The care and support the school provides are good and result in your good personal development. Your behaviour is now good and we would hope that it continues to improve as it obviously helps you to learn. Your understanding of what it means to stay safe and lead a healthy lifestyle is good. Nearly everyone we met enjoys school and you make the best of the wide range of opportunities provided, especially extra-curricular activities. We were particularly impressed by your excellent contributions to the life of the school and to your community.

The senior staff, governors and teachers all want to improve the school further. They know how to do it and we believe that, with your help, they can achieve this. We have asked them to focus on the following:

- enabling more of you to obtain good grades in mathematics and English
- increasing the number of lessons that are exciting and interesting, so that you can make even better progress.

We wish you the very best of luck in the future.

Yours faithfully

Alan Taylor-Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector