

# St Thomas More RC College Specialising in Mathematics and Computing

Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	106271
<b>Local Authority</b>	Tameside
<b>Inspection number</b>	309078
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Julie Price Grimshaw

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	784
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fr Cavey
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Janet Burns
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 October 2004
<b>School address</b>	Town Lane Denton Manchester Lancashire M34 6AF
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 3362743
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 3379701

---

<b>Age group</b>	11-16
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 January 2008
<b>Inspection number</b>	309078

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Thomas More RC College is a smaller than average school. It serves a wide catchment area that includes some pockets of social and economic disadvantage. Almost all of the students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is slightly below the national average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The school was awarded mathematics and computing specialist status in September 2004.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

'Everyone gets on well together in our school,' is a comment that typifies students' views at St Thomas More. The vast majority enjoy attending school and are proud to be students here. Most parents share these positive views; one comment, which reflects the opinions of many, is, 'The school is very highly regarded in the local area, and nurtures both academic and emotional development.' Specialist college status has had a positive impact on many aspects of the school's work, particularly in mathematics, where specialist college targets have been exceeded. Specialist status has also been successful in developing teachers' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and in improving students' performance in ICT. The school works well in partnership with its local community of primary schools and post-16 institutions, and the mathematics and ICT departments have carried out some successful work in disseminating good practice across other subject departments in school.

From a broadly average starting point in terms of standards, students make good progress, particularly during Key Stage 4. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average overall and in 2007 students' performance in mathematics was excellent; results in science also showed significant improvement compared to previous years. Recent modifications to the curriculum have contributed to improvements in pupils' achievement, by ensuring that students now have the opportunity to follow courses that meet their needs most effectively.

Students are polite, courteous and well-behaved. They have positive attitudes towards learning and are supportive and caring towards one another. They have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and are confident that any rare instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. The school has good systems for pastoral care. Students comment that 'there's always someone to talk to if you have any worries'. Individually tailored provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a strength of the school's work. Systems for academic guidance have recently been modified and are now good; students are involved in setting and reviewing their targets and staff are developing a greater understanding of the most effective use of performance data.

Pupils make good progress in most subject areas as a result of good quality teaching. Teachers routinely share their aims with students. The majority of lessons move along at an impressive pace, tasks are explained very clearly and teachers' enthusiasm is effectively communicated to students. However, there is significant variation in the quality of teachers' lesson planning. In a minority of cases, this results in work not always being sufficiently well matched to the needs of individual students. Similarly, inconsistencies in the quality of marking lead to students not always being fully aware of what they need to do in order to improve.

The good quality curriculum meets the needs of students, particularly at Key Stage 4, where recent developments have increased the number and nature of available options. Good liaison with local colleges for specialised vocational courses has enabled the school to cater more effectively for all students, including the gifted and talented as well as those with specific learning needs.

The school is well led and managed. Senior leaders are strongly committed to school improvement and some effective work is being carried out in developing the role of subject leaders. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored on a regular basis. However, recently modified systems for monitoring and evaluation are not yet fully effective in ensuring greater consistency in the quality of teaching. Resources, particularly in ICT, are used well to provide good value

for money. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and the school has good capacity for further improvement.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is all at least good, particularly in relation to teachers' planning and marking.
- Develop and refine systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

As a result of good quality teaching and effective guidance, students make good progress to reach standards in Year 11 that are generally above average. Students' standards when they enter the school are broadly in line with the national average. They make steady progress during Key Stage 3, to reach standards that are just above average overall. They then go on to make particularly good progress during Key Stage 4. Achievement in mathematics is outstanding and has been consistently excellent over the past few years. Across this period, students' achievement in science has improved, and they now make good progress to reach above average standards. Although achievement in English is lower than in mathematics, data show that performance has improved over the past two years and students make satisfactory progress in this subject.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the effective care and dedicated support provided for individuals.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students benefit from assemblies having a clear spiritual theme and they enjoy working together to raise funds for a range of charities. Behaviour is good; the great majority of staff manage students well by implementing a clear policy of sanctions and rewards that is understood by all. This ensures generally positive relationships and above average levels of attendance and punctuality. The number of exclusions is very low. High numbers of students take part in extra-curricular activities such as drama productions and homework clubs. They say that they feel safe in school, with many students being well supported in friendship groups. Students new to the school gain helpful advice through a well established peer support programme. Students lead healthy lifestyles because of their high level of participation in sporting events and the emphasis placed on healthy eating by the school. Many make good contributions to the school community by taking an active role in the college council as well as undertaking projects locally. Pupils' very good basic skills, together with a sound awareness of career options, ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education and the world of work.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Some aspects, for example students' use of ICT to enhance learning, have improved since the last inspection. Lessons are planned to a useful agreed structure across the school, but there is too much variation in the quality of planning. Most is thorough with a good level of detail, but in a minority of cases lesson planning

does not reflect sufficient consideration of the needs of all students in a group. As a result, work is not always matched to students' needs, and this in turn slows progress. Almost all teaching is underpinned by secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm, which motivates students to learn. Teachers are good at telling students exactly what they are expected to learn and in most lessons teachers effectively reinforce the main learning points at the end of the lesson, often involving students in the assessment of their own progress. Students' good behaviour and willingness to learn is an important factor in maintaining a positive classroom environment. They especially enjoy those lessons that have a variety of activity, brisk pace and achievable challenge. The use of assessment is inconsistent: the marking of students' written work varies in quality, helpfulness and frequency. At best, marking gives very detailed feedback on the quality of work and tells students what they need to do to improve. A minority of teachers, however, provide relatively little feedback.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

Recent modifications to the curriculum have helped to ensure that it meets students' needs. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced, and as students move on to Key Stage 4 there is much emphasis on personalised learning. Annual curriculum reviews include careful consideration of the nature of the next Year 10 cohort and how the needs of these students can be met. The quality of individual guidance given to students on curriculum options is good, but it is not always possible for students to study certain subjects if low numbers mean that courses cannot be staffed. Nevertheless, increased emphasis on vocational pathways and work-related learning has had a positive impact on the quality of provision and has contributed to improvements in achievement and standards for Key Stage 4 students. The curriculum is enhanced through a good range of extra-curricular activities, including revision groups and booster classes as well as various sports and leisure clubs.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school cares for its students well and all statutory requirements for safeguarding them are fully met. Good individual support is provided through form tutors working closely with achievement leaders, who know students well and are fully aware of their needs. A well attended discussion group provides good support for parents in dealing with common issues affecting teenagers. Transition arrangements for new entrants to the school are well planned and ensure that students quickly settle in. The personal, health and social education programme is enhanced by good links with the local education business partnership and Connexions advisers.

The quality of academic guidance is generally good. Students regularly review their progress towards targets and staff provide appropriate support when required. There is very good support for vulnerable students, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enhanced by close liaison with external agencies.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The senior leadership team, ably led by the headteacher, shares a corporate vision for the future of the school. Good quality improvement planning outlines the school's priorities for the

immediate future, as well as developments in the longer term. Recent improvements to systems for analysing performance data have led to greater emphasis on monitoring the progress of individuals, which is enabling managers to respond promptly where intervention is required. This in turn is beginning to have a positive impact on students' progress. Overall, the school has an accurate overview of its main strengths and weaknesses. The school has recently changed its systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of its work. While it is too early to judge the impact of these procedures, there is currently limited evidence that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning are being fully addressed. Governors display high levels of commitment to the school and carry out their responsibilities effectively. They work well with teachers and other staff in scrutinising particular aspects of the school's work, for example literacy, numeracy and provision for those with special educational needs. Governors also assist school leaders in exploring issues relating to school development through detailed discussion.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**



**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

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

### 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
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

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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
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**

Following our visit to inspect your school, please accept our thanks for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your views with us. On behalf of the other inspectors I would like to tell you what we found out about your school. You attend a good school. We were pleased that so many of you told us that you enjoy coming to school because of the friendly atmosphere and we were impressed that you showed a good deal of care for each other.

You are right in thinking that the school gets good results. The 2007 examination results showed that students make good progress during their time at the school and standards overall are above average. Some subject areas perform particularly well and achievement in mathematics is outstanding. Standards in science have improved over recent years, and although achievement in English is not as good as in mathematics, there are clear indications of an improving trend here, too. Specialist college status has helped the school to improve in a variety of ways and you told us that you are pleased with the resources and facilities available.

We were impressed with your attitudes and behaviour, especially during lessons. The staff care for you and you told us that there is always someone to talk to if you are concerned about anything. You are given good advice on your progress and also on your option choices in Year 10. The school's curriculum has recently been improved so that there is now a good range of courses designed to meet everyone's needs.

We agree with your view that the great majority of the teaching at St Thomas More is good. Your teachers are keen for you to achieve well and you appreciate the effort they put into making your lessons lively and interesting. Although teachers typically plan suitable activities for all students in a group, there are a few cases where less attention is given to this, and this can slow the pace of learning. Similarly, we found that while much of the marking is of at least good quality and helps you to improve your work, there are a few instances when feedback is less detailed. We have suggested that the school looks at ways of making sure that planning and assessment are more consistent across all lessons and that senior staff consider the best methods for achieving this.

We are delighted that so many of you are proud to be students at St Thomas More. We wish you well for the future and hope that you will work hard to reach even higher standards and achieve your full potential.