

St Thomas More Roman Catholic High School Aided

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108648
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	309755
Inspection date	27 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Hancock HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1750
6th form	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Fred Stimpson
Headteacher	Mrs Diane Donkin
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2004
School address	Lynn Road North Shields Tyne and Wear NE29 8LF
Telephone number	0191 2588340
Fax number	0191 2006336

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Thomas More Catholic High School is a specialist mathematics and computing college located on the north bank of the River Tyne. It is a larger than average secondary school with an intake which reflects the full range of social and economic backgrounds. Nearly all the students have English as their first language. Many students start school with key skills that are above what would be expected nationally. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. It is a 'Leading Edge' and training school with many achievement awards for excellence.

The inspectors investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the personal development and well-being of students; the quality of teaching and learning; the care, guidance and support provided by the school; leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation form; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; observations of the school at work; interviews with members of staff and students; and the parents' questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Thomas More is an outstanding school. It is working very well to make further improvements, closely steered by senior leaders and the governors. Students make excellent progress and the standards they reach are well above average. Personal development is exemplary because the students are fully involved and have an excellent understanding of how to feel safe and enjoy school. Parents support for the school is very strong. One parent reflected the views of the vast majority when writing 'My children are truly happy and receive the best that education can provide'.

There has been consistent improvement in achievement and standards since the last inspection. Many students start school with key skills that are above what would be expected nationally. They make excellent progress and, at Key Stage 3, standards are well above all national averages. In 2007, the most challenging targets were exceeded in English, mathematics and science.

At Key Stage 4, the number of students gaining higher GCSE grades was 82% in 2007 compared with 72% three years ago. The GCSE results including English and mathematics are well above average and consistently around 70%. As a specialist mathematics college, subject performance is very good, with 75% to 78% of students consistently achieving higher GCSE grades. Similar improvement can be seen in the sixth form. In 2007, the best ever results were achieved which exceeded challenging targets. The school knows where it can improve performance even more and is taking appropriate action to do this.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They make excellent progress developing their personal skills and attributes which help them become thoughtful and mature young people. They know very well how to keep themselves safe and promote the health of others. Students thoroughly enjoy their education and demonstrably appreciate the excellent opportunities they have to learn from the very productive relationships that exist.

Attendance is well above average. Students behave extremely well and make a very good contribution to the school and wider community. They develop an understanding of others who are different from themselves through the very good fellowship generated by strong Christian principles. They take responsibility for others through the very prominent school council. Students are asked for their opinions formally and during the appointment of new staff. The picture is the same in the sixth form where their excellent personal skills mean they are very well equipped for this phase of their education.

Teaching and learning is consistently good overall and frequently exceptionally good and outstanding because the teaching has a sharp focus on students' thinking and learning. Lessons consistently demonstrate a high standard of planning, delivery and assessment. Students are mature learners who confidently express their views. Teacher's subject knowledge is very good and the systems to monitor students' progress and identify specific areas for improvement are highly effective. Students understand how they work and know what they must do to achieve their individual targets. There is a very strong culture of professional development which has teaching and learning at the centre.

The school provides a good curriculum. Vocational course provision is not fully developed and the school is working on this as a priority. There is a strong and rigorous programme for personal, social and health education, careers guidance and citizenship. Students learn how to work well in teams through good enterprise education which is incorporated into a wide range of subjects.

The vast range of out-of-school activities is excellent and contributes significantly to students' enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and contribute significantly to progress and well-being. Students particularly value the practical guidance they are given through individual targets and marking which tells them what they need to improve. Parents agree that students are looked after very well. The school rigorously deals with health and safety matters and any safeguarding issues. There are very effective links with parents and a range of local agencies that safeguard the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The very strong pastoral support team, which includes learning mentors and counsellors, provides very high quality care for all students.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The work of the headteacher, staff and governors is sharply focused on achieving high standards and promoting the well-being of students. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. As a result, the school knows itself very well and identifies the right areas for improvement. All departments are involved in evaluating their own provision and further improvements to teaching and learning are a central part of the process. The capacity to improve is excellent and can be seen in the track record since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards in the sixth form are above average and achievement is very good. Many students join from other schools. The AS and A Level pass rate in 2006 was above average and results in 2007 were the best ever. Challenging targets, particularly in the proportion of the higher grades A and B achieved, were exceeded. Results in the vocational subjects were above average. The school evaluates standards rigorously and where performance causes concern, effective action is taken.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students say they especially appreciate the help and guidance they receive from teachers which helps them do so well. Teaching and learning is very good overall with a significant proportion which is excellent. Teachers inspire confidence through their expert subject knowledge. As a result, learning is enthusiastic and sharply focused. The curriculum is good. It provides ample opportunities for the majority who wish to follow academic courses. Improving vocational course provision is identified as a priority and electronics and engineering are being added as a result of links with another local school.

The excellent care, guidance and support enjoyed by students in the main school continue in the sixth form. The assessment and tracking of student's progress contributes to their good achievement and many pupils speak of their determination to reach the challenging targets set by their teachers. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and have a successful focus on raising achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school has identified all the significant areas for improvement and is taking appropriate action.

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
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?	1	1

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?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

28 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic High School, North Tyneside, NE29 8LF

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleague on 26 September. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we found out about your school.

- St Thomas More is an outstanding school.
- Results are well above average.
- Your personal development is exemplary.
- Parents support for the school is very strong.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding and contribute significantly to your progress and well-being.
- The school is working very well to make further improvements, closely steered by the headteacher, senior leaders and the governors.

Your teachers and the staff work very hard and want to make the school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they could continue to take action in all the significant areas for improvement the school has already identified. You can help by continuing with the mature approach you have to your studies. I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock HMI