

St Thomas More Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111452
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310602
Inspection date	13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Sue Harrison 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	635
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr Peter Walters
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2004
School address	Dane Bank Avenue Crewe Cheshire CW2 8AE
Telephone number	01270 568014
Fax number	01270 650860

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Thomas More is a Catholic school, situated close to the centre of Crewe. It is a smaller than average secondary school. It serves a wide, diverse area that includes areas of relative affluence and relative deprivation. The school enrolls students across the whole ability range, although the proportion of students with higher levels of attainment from Key Stage 2 is above the national average. The school was designated a specialist school for mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) in July 2005. Within recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of students from minority ethnic groups. The school currently has 57 students for whom English is not their first language, most of whom are Polish. The school's Catholic ethos aims to identify and value individual abilities and qualities, to help students develop fully their potential and sense of self-worth, and at the same time to promote a spirit of respect and concern for others.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Thomas More is a good school. Students enjoy coming to school. The majority behave very well and are courteous and polite. There is a culture of respect and support between staff and students. Many students speak of how well the staff know them as individuals and how this helps in their work. The standard of work students produce is good. Examination results are above the national average at both key stages. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE has risen each year for the last three years and was 74% in 2007. Most students make good progress in both key stages during their time at the school. In mathematics, students make very good progress. In English, it is more variable but good overall. Students' progress in science improved at both key stages last year and is good. A small proportion of Year 11 students did not reach their full potential in 2006/07.

Teaching and learning are good. There are outstanding features of teaching and learning, but some lessons are less effective at fully engaging learners. Teachers have a good understanding of their subjects. In the best lessons, they communicate a passion for the topic which enthuses students to achieve their potential. Plans make clear exactly how learning objectives will be achieved. Interesting methods are used to stimulate interest and help students to learn, for example the very effective use of electronic whiteboards. Students' understanding is regularly checked and different needs are catered for well. In the satisfactory lessons, teachers are competent in delivering their subject but the lessons lack sparkle. Students are well behaved and carry out tasks as instructed but are not fully engaged in their learning. Plans for these lessons often describe the activities or topics to be covered rather than show how the learning will be achieved.

The curriculum on offer is good and successfully meets the needs of the majority of students. The school recognised that the curriculum on offer to Years 10 and 11 was too limited and has recently introduced a range of new options. This provides for vocational alternatives, including Business and Technology Education Council diplomas and two Young Apprenticeship schemes. Students are pleased with the additional choice this gives them. The school has identified the need to extend vocational provision further, particularly at Level 1. Two GCE AS subjects are on offer for students able to work at advanced level. At Key Stage 3 the school has introduced more literacy provision and extended the range of languages on offer. Students appreciate the range of activities on offer after school and many of them participate in sporting activities, clubs and school performances. There is also the opportunity to pursue additional subjects after school, such as Latin.

Care, guidance and support are good. Students with English as an additional language (EAL) are integrated into the school well and there are effective systems in place to assess their needs and provide additional support. All of the EAL learners who left school in 2007 gained a Level 2 qualification and all progressed to college. There is also good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their needs are clearly identified and staff receive information on how to help them in class. These students generally make good progress and the school plans training to improve further the skills of teachers working with these students.

Students receive good information and guidance to help them make decisions on options and what to do when they leave school. They are clear about the target grades they are working towards and many staff give them clear guidance to improve their work further. The school's

marking policy is designed to ensure consistency across subjects, but the school does not check sufficiently that all staff follow best practice.

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Students feel safe around the school and any instances of bullying are promptly dealt with. Effective measures are in place to deal with misbehaviour, including a mentoring scheme which students appreciate. The changes to the curriculum are also part of the behaviour strategy to ensure students are on courses that best meet their needs and interests. Through their spiritual, moral and social development, the school successfully encourages students to think of others. Older students help younger ones and many staff and students are engaged in fund-raising and other activities with the wider community. Within the school, students value the opportunity to contribute their views through the school council and they receive feedback from the headteacher on their requests. Attendance is generally good, although the school is experiencing some increase in students taking leave during term-time. It is taking appropriate action to combat this. Students are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. This is having a positive impact on many students but the school recognises the need for further progress with some young people. Students are prepared well for their future economic well-being via the enhanced curriculum, the improving links with employers and the school's greater attention to literacy. They also have the opportunity to develop financial literacy skills via the school bank.

Leadership and management are good. The school has made good progress in addressing issues from the last inspection, particularly the weaknesses in ICT. It has also made some improvements to the accommodation and addressed the weakness in English in Year 9. The leadership team has focused well on pupil progress and on making further improvements in teaching and learning. The school knows itself well, including its areas for development, and has good capacity to make further improvements. Its development plan rightly focuses on trying to ensure all departments perform as well as the best. Challenging targets are set and are generally met. A new electronic system is in place this year to monitor how well departments are tracking individual pupil progress. The school plans earlier intervention in Year 11 for any students at risk of underachieving.

The school's specialist status has produced positive benefits in the specialist subjects: resources are better, there is a wider range of courses and examination results have risen. It is also having a good impact throughout the school: teachers use computers more extensively and effectively in the classroom, and good practice in tracking pupil progress in mathematics is being shared across the school.

Partnership working is strong, including the external links with other schools and colleges. This has helped the school in the development of its curriculum. There is good sharing of specialist expertise and resources across the local schools and further education colleges. Resources are deployed well and the school gives good value for money. The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school. One summed it up by saying St Thomas More is a, 'well run school which not only has an emphasis on the academic side, but also overall child development'. However, a significant minority of parents would like the school to listen more to their views.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that students reach their full potential in all subjects.
- Spread good practice in teaching, so that students are fully involved in learning in all lessons.
- Develop more ways to involve parents.

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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?	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

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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

How good is 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
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

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

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
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 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**

Inspection of St. Thomas More School, Crewe CW2 8AE

As you know, your school was recently inspected. Thank you for your warm welcome and your help in finding my way around and giving me your views about the school. I really enjoyed visiting your school and am writing now to tell you about my findings.

I agree with you that St Thomas More is a good school. Many of you described how you enjoy coming to school and how you appreciate the help you receive from staff, who know you well as individuals. The majority of you are polite and courteous and work hard. This results in you producing good standards of work and gaining examination results above the national average. Most of you make good progress against your starting points on entering the school, though progress in some subjects is better than others. In all lessons, you conscientiously carry out the tasks given to you and in some lessons you respond with real enthusiasm.

There is a good ethos of mutual respect in the school and staff and students work well together, including fund-raising and other activities within the wider community. The school has worked hard to improve its curriculum and you now have a good range of options to choose from. You explained that you receive plenty of information and guidance on making choices and moving on at the end of Year 11. Many of you spoke about the activities you join in after school and the popularity of the school performances. There are good levels of support for all students, including those with additional needs and those for whom English is an additional language.

The school is well led and managed. The majority of parents are very positive about the school, although a significant minority would like to see their views canvassed more regularly. The school is good at judging its own effectiveness and the headteacher knows the areas for further improvement. Most of you told me there is nothing you would like to change about the school, but I think there are some things that could make it even better! I have asked the headteacher to prioritise the following improvements:

- To ensure that every pupil reaches their full potential in all subjects
- To spread good practice in teaching, so that you are fully involved in learning in all lessons
- To develop more ways of involving parents.