

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100196
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	323244
Inspection date	25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	606
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gerald Peters
Headteacher	Mr Marcus Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2006
School address	Footscray Road London SE9 2SU
Telephone number	020 8850 6700
Fax number	020 8294 1855

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in one day. HMI evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues in detail.

- How well do all groups of students achieve in all subject areas, given their starting points when they join the school?
- How effectively do teaching and learning, and the curriculum, meet the needs, interests and abilities of all students?
- How effectively does the school promote community cohesion, and how well do leaders and managers evaluate the school's community cohesion strategies?

Evidence was taken from assessment data; school documents, including those relating to statutory policies for promoting students' well-being; visits to a range of lessons; a tour of lessons with the deputy headteacher; a visit to an assembly; observation of students at break-time; scrutiny of students' work in classrooms; parental questionnaires; meetings with senior staff, the chair of governors and a parent governor; and a discussion with members of the school council.

Description of the school

St Thomas More is a small, voluntary-aided comprehensive school situated in the Eltham South ward of Greenwich. When admitting students, the school gives first priority to those from Roman Catholic families, so almost every student is a practising Roman Catholic. Most are from White British backgrounds and almost all have English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. However, the proportion of students with statements of special needs is above average. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Very few students move into or out of the school during their secondary education.

St Thomas More has been a specialist mathematics and computing college since September 2004. In January 2008, the school took up a second specialism in languages.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in order to meet fully all the current requirements relating to safeguarding.

As at the time of the last inspection, there are some considerable strengths in the work of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Comprehensive School. Standards are exceptionally high, while achievement and teaching and learning are good, with outstanding features. Teachers' marking and lesson planning are generally good but not consistently so. The school's self-evaluation judges students' personal development and well-being to be outstanding, and the exemplary behaviour seen during the inspection supports this view. The curriculum too is assessed as outstanding by the school and evidence presented during the inspection also supports this judgement.

There is also no doubt that there are some outstanding elements to the care, guidance and support offered to students and this, along with behaviour, is what pleases parents most about the school. However, notwithstanding these strengths, at the time of the inspection the school did not meet all the requirements relating to safeguarding. Action to tackle this weakness is an urgent priority and this is the reason the school has been given a formal notice to improve. Similarly, while there are strong features of leadership and management, and the school's self-evaluation accurately identifies these strengths, there are aspects of monitoring and evaluation of key policies and procedures such as those relating to equalities and community cohesion that have not been given sufficient attention. However, the school's capacity to improve is good and this is reflected in the good progress made since the last inspection in reducing inadequate teaching and in improving the curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school complies fully with current safeguarding requirements, including the recording, monitoring and reporting of all equality policies.
- Ensure that there is a consistently high standard of marking and that in their planning all teachers identify the learning that is to take place, in addition to the activities to be undertaken.
- Sharpen the school's planning, monitoring and evaluation of its community cohesion strategy.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The standards reached by students at the end of Year 11 are exceptionally high and, even though starting points are above average, this represents good achievement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been well above average for the past three years. Standards were above average in most subjects in 2008, and were exceptionally high in English, French, music and science, including vocational science. Standards in the specialist subject of mathematics are above average. In 2008, standards were exceptionally low in performing arts. However, the school reports that issues with this option have been resolved and students taking this course are making better progress this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school's self-evaluation is that students' personal development and well-being are outstanding, and evidence seen during the inspection supports this view. Attendance remains good. The proportion of exclusions is in line with the national average, a reflection of the school's expectations for the highest standards of behaviour. Students' behaviour during the inspection was exemplary, making an excellent contribution to learning in classrooms. Students say that they feel very safe in school, and that peer mentors are on hand for support should any bullying occur. There are many good opportunities for students to contribute to the community through outreach work and charity fundraising.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and often outstanding. The school reports that there is no inadequate teaching, which is an improvement since the last inspection. In the very best lessons, there is an ethos of collaborative working among students and, as a result, the atmosphere is often vibrant and animated. Where there is variability in the teaching, it is because teachers' planning places too much emphasis on the activities to be taught rather than on the skills, knowledge and understanding that students are to gain. There are examples of excellent, incisive marking, but also examples where marking is less regular or less detailed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

There have been significant improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection and provision is now excellent. The number and range of vocational courses available to students in Key Stage 4 have increased and include several courses offered in partnership with other providers. There is very careful monitoring of these courses, including very good attention to students' attendance when they are off-site.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The school has faced some exceptionally challenging events over the past 18 months, including the unexpected death of three students. Parents and students speak, without exception, of the superb pastoral care and leadership shown by governors, staff, and particularly the headteacher, in helping the school community through these difficult times.

Good support is given, with many revision classes provided after school and at weekends for examination candidates. However, care, guidance and support are inadequate overall because of the school's failure to meet all current safeguarding requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Since the last inspection, the school's leadership team has kept a clear, ambitious focus on maintaining and improving particular aspects of provision and outcomes for students, and has done so very effectively. It has been well supported in this respect by the governing body. However, the school has not kept such a detailed focus on other management responsibilities and some important processes have not kept up to date with requirements. For example, the school does not meet all the current requirements relating to safeguarding and action to tackle this weakness is an urgent priority. Furthermore, while the governing body has approved the school's race, gender and disability equality policies, these have not been evaluated or reported on as they should have been. The school makes some excellent contributions to the community, particularly in partnership with other Roman Catholic schools, through its adult education classes in information and communication technology and its music work in the New Eltham cluster. Nevertheless, the school recognises that it is in the early stages of planning, monitoring and evaluation of its wider community cohesion strategy.

Parents are generally pleased with the school, and particularly praise the school's caring, supportive ethos. Their biggest concern, as at the time of the last inspection, is the efficiency with which the school communicates with parents and takes account of their suggestions and concerns.

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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?	4
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	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

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

05 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Comprehensive School, London, SE9 2SU

I would like to thank you very much indeed for the welcome that you gave me when I visited your school recently. Throughout the day I was met with exemplary manners and behaviour - many congratulations for this. These attitudes are extremely important in providing good conditions for teaching and learning, and play an important role in helping you to achieve exceptionally high standards in your GCSE examinations. I visited many of your classrooms and particularly enjoyed seeing lessons where you were working collaboratively with each other, often in a very animated fashion! You are taught well and enjoy an outstanding curriculum. To enable you to make even better progress, I have suggested to the school that it makes sure more lessons are of the quality of the best.

Your school council told me that everyone gets on really well with each other at St Thomas More, and that you feel well cared for. I know that the school has experienced some very difficult events recently. You and your parents told me that you very much appreciate the support and care of the headteacher and the staff.

The school's leadership team sets high expectations for excellent behaviour and high standards of learning, and you told me that St Thomas More is a school where you feel safe. These features help you to make very good progress in your learning and in your personal development, but there are also some management procedures which have not been attended to in as much detail as is required and, for this reason, the school has been given a formal Notice to Improve. I have asked the school to ensure that these matters are put right as quickly as possible. Inspectors will come back to the school in about six months' time to make sure that the necessary changes have been made, so that the school can continue to move forward and help you achieve even higher standards in all aspects of your work and personal development.

Thank you once again for the part that you played in this inspection, and best wishes for your examinations this summer.

Yours faithfully

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector