

St Thomas More Catholic School and Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125758
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	328397
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Pam Haezwindt HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	798
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Ison
Headteacher	Martin Moore
Date of previous school inspection	1–2 February 2006
School address	Greenmoor Road Nuneaton CV10 7EX
Telephone number	024 76642400
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 31 lessons, carried out two 'learning walks' observing teaching and learning, students' behaviour and interest in learning across the school, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students, the school council and a local primary headteacher. They observed the school's work, including an assembly and personal, social and health education and citizenship sessions, and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, governors' minutes, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, and students' work. Analysis was carried out of the 292 parental questionnaires returned.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the achievement of minority groups, including those for whom English is an additional language, and whether teaching sufficiently takes into account different groups and assessment supports them
- the quality of teaching and learning in relation to areas to improve in the previous inspection report: mathematics teaching and more opportunities for students to discuss their work in lessons
- the quality of community cohesion.

Information about the school

St Thomas More is a slightly smaller than average but very well subscribed to Catholic school. The large majority of students are White British. The number of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The numbers of students whose first language is believed not to be English and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are broadly average. The school became a specialist technology college in 2003 and was designated a high performing specialist school in 2008. It has a number of awards such as the Healthy School award and the Sportsmark award.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Thomas More is an outstandingly caring school. Its ethos pervades the school community and reaches beyond to local, national and global communities. One parent wrote: 'I am grateful every day for the great life that my child has at school; the staff are determined to squeeze out every drop of talent and enthusiasm and to grow and nurture it.' Students feel extremely safe and supported and are encouraged to achieve their potential at all times. Students make excellent progress because teaching and learning overall are excellent and their attitudes to learning are outstanding. Behaviour observed during the inspection was exemplary. Standards by the end of Year 11 are high, including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or those with English as an additional language. Inspectors' lesson observations showed that just occasionally the lesson planning did not support the development of the highest attaining students.

Students speak exceptionally positively about the school. They enjoy coming to it, think they are taught very well and make very good progress. They feel the opportunities provided by the school are excellent, especially those which help them contribute to the school community and beyond; for example, through the school council, the prefect system and by contributing to many charities. Key Stage 3 students spoke particularly highly of an intercultural two-day arts festival which involved multiple events to raise their awareness of other communities and cultures. Students enjoy all out-of-school events such as trips in the United Kingdom and abroad, and the extra-curricular activities, where the take-up is exceptionally high. Most of all, students feel they are listened to and their views acted upon.

The school has made very good progress in working on key areas for improvement since the last inspection. Students now have very good opportunities to work together in groups and discuss their work. Teaching in mathematics has improved because there are high expectations and students are involved in problem solving and using their own initiative.

The headteacher's direction of the school, ably supported by his senior leadership team, middle managers and the governing body, is excellent and underpins the school's outstanding performance and students' enjoyment. School self-evaluation is accurate and there is regular and careful consideration of students' academic and pastoral development and consequent needs. All staff contribute to the school's provision very well so that lessons and activities beyond the timetabled curriculum

run smoothly and add to students' great enjoyment of their time at St Thomas More. The decision to become a specialist technology college has been extremely successful. Key Stage 4 students said how good it was to have to take a design and technology subject because it gave them a key life skill. The school is proactively bidding for a sixth form, which is overwhelmingly supported by students, staff and parents and/or carers. Senior leaders are aware that the school's information and communication technology (ICT) systems do not include the most up-to-date technology which would enable assessment outcomes to be available to all stakeholders more easily; nor a system where students, the community and parents and/or carers can learn, or communicate with the school, from home or learning centres such as local libraries. The school is looking into this currently. The school's capacity to improve is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the progress and attainment of the highest attaining students are as good in all subjects as they are in those subjects with the highest GCSE grades. To do this, improve planning to match their needs, particularly by providing very challenging tasks.
- Further develop ICT systems to promote learning and communication by introducing:
 - a more robust electronic assessment system which will ensure monitoring and assessment across all aspects of the school community
 - a virtual learning platform to support 'anytime, anywhere' learning for students and the community, and electronic communications with parents and carers.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of students?

1

In 2008, students whose attainment on entry was broadly average gained high GCSE results. GCSE results are improving year-on-year at a rate better than the national average. The number of students attaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is high. Results in major subjects (including those associated with specialist status) such as English, design and technology, ICT, science and religious education (RE) are high. Results in mathematics are above average; they have improved considerably since the previous inspection, where they were an issue, and at a much better rate than the national average. The number of subjects with high proportions of A* and A grades is high. Standards seen during the inspection are similarly high.

In a high proportion of lessons observed, students made outstanding progress; in the remaining lessons progress was mostly good. Students were consistently on task, and very interested in their lessons which engaged them very well. Students liked tackling the problems set. It was very rare to see any student who did not respond

well to the different types of group activities set up and participate with enjoyment and enthusiasm. Teaching and learning mostly made provision for different groups of students or individuals but a few lesson plans did not always take this specifically into account, particularly for the highest attaining students in a few subjects. Students question their teachers and do not accept what they say automatically but look for evidence and test theories. They are punctual to lessons, keen to do their best at all times and readily accept the opportunities the school offers to improve their learning, for example, after school or extra classes.

Students are very aware of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle and participate in many sporting activities beyond the physical education lessons provided by the school. There is quite a good take-up of healthy school meals and many bring healthy options from home. They say they have learned much from their personal, social and health education lessons. Students' contribution to the community is far-ranging. They contribute locally within the Catholic community, and in primary schools, for example, via sports. Further afield, they support a charity to provide water in Malawi, which has raised much awareness of what it is like to live in a developing country thus developing pupils' understanding of other communities and embracing diversity. Students develop very good workplace skills to contribute to their future economic well-being. They say they feel very well placed to move to the next step of their education or training. At least 90% of students continue with their education. Parents and/or carers also believe that the school helps their children to become mature and independent learners. Students have a well developed response to spiritual and moral issues. Responses to the recent retreat have shown how they can reflect whilst having fun. They are socially adept, as evidenced in lessons and by their developing understanding of different communities and societies. Students' cultural development is well supported through curriculum opportunities in, for example, RE, music, art, visitors to the school and visits out.

These are the grades for students' outcomes

Students' attainment ¹	1
The quality of students' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do students feel safe?	1
How well do students behave?	1
To what extent do students adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do students contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Students' attendance	2
How well do students develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

The quality of the school's work

The quality of teaching and learning is high. Teachers have high expectations, excellent subject knowledge and know their students very well. Use of time is very good, with timed activities which encourage students to work in a very focused way. Questioning is often very good, but occasionally it does not include all students as well as it could. There is very good deployment of teaching assistants. There were excellent examples of marking where it was made very clear to students what their next steps of learning were as well as their overall achievement and targets. There was also some good evidence of student self-assessment.

The school has rigorous in-house assessment systems which enable teachers and managers at all levels to see how well all students are doing and provide intervention where necessary. Middle managers effectively monitor students' standards and progress and identify students requiring special support. There is good involvement of students in assessing progress; all know their targets and present standards and individual personal goals.

The curriculum is fully compliant and RE and citizenship are well provided for. There is very good impact from the technology specialist status in terms of the extensive use of ICT by students and confident use by staff to enhance learning. A GCSE technology subject is compulsory in Key Stage 4, with a good range of options, and this is appreciated by students. The take-up of a language in Key Stage 4 improved in Year 11 and the school now reaches the 50% benchmark for take-up the government has asked for. Applied learning is very effectively offered in partnership with a local college. There is extensive extra-curricular provision which is very popular. The school ensures that particular groups benefit from targeted provision. The school is piloting both the DCSF Key Stage 3 science engineering club and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) pathfinder pilot. The school is developing its provision in the light of the new secondary curriculum and cautiously looking at diploma options.

Curriculum planning contributes to excellent transfer and transition from primary schools. Induction is very good, with parents and/or carers involved. Guidance for transition is robust and students report that they are well supported and involved in the process. Heads of year are key figures in students' lives, with very good working relationships valued by students. Good attendance is very well promoted, rewarded and celebrated through the house system and tutor groups. The school is successful in ensuring that a group of Polish students are quickly integrated into school and achieving well. Vulnerable students are well known and well cared for, and make good progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets students' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1

Support, guidance and care	1
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How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team’s strong vision for constant improvement inspires middle managers and staff to strive to do their best by students. This vision permeates to students, who also want to do their very best. Staff morale is high. There is no sense of the school resting on its laurels. Leaders at all levels monitor closely the work of the school. A good example is the way teaching and learning are monitored and evaluated. Detailed, helpful feedback is given which focuses on learning as much as on other aspects of lessons. Inspectors found that the senior leadership team’s judgements on teaching and learning were similar to their own.

The school provides a very inclusive environment for learning and is highly effective in ensuring it meets the needs of different groups and individual students.

At the time of the inspection, safeguarding and child protection procedures met requirements. Governors know the school extremely well, and challenge and hold it to account through rigorous debate. Most students are not aware of the role of governors in schools and there is scope to develop this. There is very good attendance at parents’/carers’ evenings and they receive regular questionnaires canvassing their views. The school has excellent partnerships with other organisations and agencies, including close links with local businesses, which enhance students’ opportunities to improve their skills and develop as effective citizens.

The school’s contribution to community cohesion is considerable. It effectively develops and embraces the three strands of religious, ethnic and socio-economic factors. The school knows its own context well and constantly evaluates its provision and its impact on students, ensuring that they develop empathy and respect for wide-ranging communities. The school deploys its resources very well to achieve excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school’s relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The completed parental questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive. Parents made extremely supportive comments about the school. For example, 'I have nothing but praise for St Thomas More. The staff are fully supportive, encouraging and committed... staff and management are always available to listen to concerns,' and, 'I am proud to send my child to St Thomas More.' One parent said she is happy that her child 'belongs'; another that 'the values and ethos of the school will provide valuable life skills which will support the children throughout their lives'. The proportion of questionnaires which raised concerns was less than 1% and they mainly related to the recent school closure for snow and an occasional issue with homework.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its students' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its students. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the students' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** an overall measure of the students' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Students might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



27 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School and Technology College,
Nuneaton, CV1 7EX

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team which inspected your school last week. Thank you very much for your help and cooperation, especially in talking to us in different groups and in lessons, and in providing some work for us to look at.

We find that your school cares for you exceptionally well and provides an outstanding education for you all. The school is constantly improving and goes from strength to strength. Your headteacher, senior staff, and heads of year and subjects lead the school very well and ensure that you are making excellent progress and achieving excellent results in your GCSE examinations.

Your behaviour is outstanding. You know about healthy lifestyles and most of you are beginning to develop one. You contribute very well to and respect the school community; almost all of you have a good understanding of wider communities. You develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally very well indeed.

Teaching and learning are for the most part excellent and the curriculum, including that which is beyond the timetable, provides you with outstanding opportunities to learn and develop as rounded citizens. The support and guidance you are given, for example, via year heads, is excellent.

In one or two subjects we think that some of you might achieve more A* or A grades in GCSE so we have asked staff to plan lessons with this in mind. We also think that the ICT systems in school could be further developed to provide you with 'anytime, anywhere' learning, for example, from home and communication with the community, and a more comprehensive assessment system.

Yours sincerely

Pam Haezwindt
Her Majesty's Inspector

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