

Thomas Becket Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122100
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	340090
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1025
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Gemma Johns
Headteacher	Mr Paul Gardiner (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
School address	Becket Way Kettering Road North Northampton
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 32 lessons and 31 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents including the school's self-evaluation and plans for raising attainment. At the time of the inspection no sixth form lessons were taking place. Judgements about the sixth form were made by scrutinising data about students' achievement and personal development, interviewing a group of students and the leader responsible for the sixth form, and scrutinising documents including monitoring reports on teaching quality.

Inspectors also analysed the questionnaires completed by staff, students and 82 parents and carers.

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

- the progress that students of all abilities make in their work and the standards they reach
- the quality of teaching and how accurately the school's leaders identify areas for improvement in teaching so that they can bring about improvements
- the extent to which students are able to work independently and have good attitudes to learning
- the accuracy of leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the quality of their plans for improvement.

Information about the school

The school is of average size. It is the only Catholic secondary school in Northamptonshire and so draws students from a wide area. About one quarter of its students are from minority ethnic groups and about one in six students speaks English as an additional language, both these proportions are slightly above average. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages, though the proportion with statements of special educational needs is lower.

The school is a specialist school for sport, with English as a supporting subject. It has gained the Investors in People award, Arts Mark and Sports Mark.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The standards which students are reaching in their work show a consistent trend of improvement over the last few years, but remain low. The progress that all groups of students are making is also improving. It is satisfactory overall, but in some areas it is good. Students' attendance has improved strongly in the last year; it is now above average. The target for reducing the proportion of students who are persistently absent has been bettered. Behaviour is improving, with a good reduction, for example, in the number of exclusions. Improvements are the result of a clear focus by the school's leaders. The leaders' evaluations of the school's work are generally accurate and plans for improvement are adequate. However, some of the faculty improvement plans lack specificity. For example, in plans to improve teaching, there is no analysis of what aspects of teaching need to be improved. In a faculty plan on improving behaviour, there is no analysis of why behaviour in some lessons is better than in others: behaviour is seen as being independent of teaching. Nevertheless, the senior leaders have developed a robust means of checking that improvements in faculties are on track and to support and challenge subject leaders, a significant proportion of whom are relatively new to their posts. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. The satisfactory progress made by students in their learning is the result of their good attendance, sound, and often good, teaching and a satisfactory curriculum. However, there is not enough emphasis on developing the skills and attitudes required for independent learning, and students' attitudes to learning are only satisfactory. There is good use of a sophisticated approach that uses assessments of students' learning to identify where additional support for them is required. The curriculum has a good range of courses for students whose interests and aspirations lean more towards vocational courses, although the uptake of these is relatively low. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well catered for. There is a strong emphasis on diagnosing the precise learning difficulties of this group of students. This is used well to provide specific support for them. The approach is used more effectively by the specialist staff than it is by classroom teachers. Students who speak English as an additional language are assessed on entry to ascertain their potential. These students generally feel that they are given work that is suitably challenging, but this is less often the case in mathematics. While the placing of these students in ability sets is reviewed regularly, evidence from the inspection suggests that this is not frequent enough for some of the more rapidly developing students in this group. Not enough use is made in lessons of questions to establish understanding in order to ascertain the need for any further explanation.

The school's safeguarding arrangements at the time of the inspection were good and

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students are safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' attainment through further developing the quality of learning by ensuring that:
 - teaching is more sensitive to the range of abilities of students in the class and questioning is developed more to assess what progress is being made during lessons so that further teaching can be provided when required
 - students are provided with the skills and opportunities to develop as fully competent independent learners
 - the relationship between teaching quality and students' behaviour is fully recognised and the sharing of good practice by teachers leads to enhanced attitudes to learning on the part of students.
- Improve the impact of the self-evaluation and improvement planning process, by both middle and senior leaders, by ensuring that:
 - the areas for improvement are more precisely identified so that support and the monitoring of its effectiveness, are strongly focused
 - there is a more precise understanding of individual teachers' strengths and their areas for development so that more targeted support can be provided
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When students join the school in Year 7, their attainment is well below average. In the public examinations taken by Year 11 students in 2009, attainment was low, although in English it was average. This year, the school entered a group of students for their English GCSE examination several months before they would normally sit it. Their attainment was average, with challenging targets achieved, despite the fact that the students had not had the usual two years studying the course. The externally set and marked modular examinations in mathematics show, in one case, that challenging targets have been achieved and in the second module they were almost achieved. In both these subjects, the results show an improvement on the year before. Data from modular examinations in science is more mixed with less evidence of improvement. This data matches that from the school's own monitoring of lessons, which inspectors found to be accurate, which shows that progress in the core subjects is strongest in English, where it is good, and weakest in science where it is satisfactory. The school's data show that no group underachieves and that the progress made by students who speak English as an additional language is good, as it is for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The learning and progress observed in lessons was very variable being outstanding in a very small minority of lessons and inadequate to a

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slightly greater extent. In most lessons, learning is either satisfactory or good, with a greater proportion of the latter. Overall, learning and progress are judged to be satisfactory and this is confirmed by scrutinies of students' work over a period of time. Girls and boys make similar progress to each other.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory. Students, as well as parents, report that there is little bullying. Students also say that disruption to lessons caused by poor behaviour is rare. Students are well informed about how to keep healthy. The recommended time for sports activities is adhered to in the curriculum and there is a large number of extra-curricular sports activities and almost half the students take part in interschool sports competitions. This is partly a result of to the school's specialist status, which is also responsible for some of the contributions that students make to the community, for example in primary schools as junior sports leaders. However, in school there are only satisfactory opportunities for students to make a contribution. Students' development of workplace skills is satisfactory. The proportion of leavers who do not go onto employment, education or training is very low. Students' use of collaborative skills is satisfactory as a result of the opportunities they are given. They communicate well and speak confidently.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

There are significant variations in the quality of teaching. In general, students are clear about what the objectives of the lessons are. In the best lessons, the clarity of the objectives is very well matched by the activities students then undertake and by the teachers' questions to help to secure understanding. In one outstanding lesson, students were asked to assess their own learning against the objectives of the lesson so they could take steps to improve it where necessary. Questions were used well in a geography lesson and a history lesson to reveal some misunderstandings on the part of students which were then corrected. In weaker lessons, the emphasis is less on developing understanding and more on completing the activities that have been set. In one mathematics lesson, on place value, the students' misconceptions about the work were identified by the teacher, but were ignored in favour of 'getting through the work'. The pace of lessons is generally good, although some lessons are too dominated by the teacher talking to the detriment of students' working independently or collaboratively. Marking too varies in quality, with some that is helpful to students' learning and some that has comments that are not specific enough to show how learning could be improved.

There is good support for students. Those who are vulnerable receive well planned, coherent support. Students' attendance has improved well as a result of the school's work, which includes telephone calls home for those who are absent. Students who exhibit challenging behaviour are given effective support which can include anger management training and a programme to build self-esteem. Such work is sensitively organised with the full involvement of parents. Students report that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, for example in deciding which options they should choose for Year 10, or preparation for their time in the sixth form.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the previous inspection, there has been a rigorous review of the school's management practices, to good effect. A new system for tracking the progress of students has been introduced and is used well to identify where more support is required. Challenging targets have been introduced for all students and those for attainment in English are highly ambitious. A regular programme of teaching

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observations has been implemented and the leaders' judgements of teaching quality are generally accurate. There are now frequent evaluations of how effectively the school's leaders are bringing about improvement across a range of issues. However, the plans for improvement in some faculties are not precise enough and this reduces the efficiency and the effectiveness of their work. Senior leaders now have regular meetings with faculty leaders, who report that they are both supported and challenged by them. The meetings are successful in maintaining the school's leaders' focus on the need to improve attainment, which is improving as a result, and in successfully embedding ambition.

The work done to support students is enabling all to make at least satisfactory progress in their work, and equality of opportunity is promoted. The school has a good appreciation of the extent of the diversity of its intake. It engages satisfactorily with the local community, and has established a link with a school in Kenya which it uses to enhance students' understanding of communities that are different to their own. Safeguarding procedures are effective. There is some exemplary care taken to ensure that students are safe, for example in food technology, and in physical education when students are learning to throw the javelin. The practice seen in science and design technology is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is below the national average, as it is when they leave. Nevertheless, the progress they make is satisfactory and the picture is

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an improving one as the curriculum is becoming better matched to students' needs. This supports the school's own analysis that the quality of teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. A higher than average proportion of students stay on into Year 13 and a high proportion then move into higher education, including the students who speak English as an additional language. Students' behaviour and attendance are good. There are good opportunities for them to take responsibility, for example undertaking voluntary work in a special school, helping younger students with their literacy and numeracy skills and acting as junior sports leaders.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Only a small proportion of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. Of these, a very large majority agree that their children enjoy school, are kept safe at school and are helped to have healthy lifestyles. A similar proportion also agrees that the school helps them to support their children's learning and that the school is effectively led and managed. These views are in keeping with the findings of the inspection team. The areas where parents are most critical, though only a small minority is so, are to do with whether unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively and whether children's particular needs are met. Inspectors found that behaviour is satisfactory and that the school's promotion of equal opportunities is also satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thomas Becket Catholic School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 82 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1025 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	24	50	61	8	10	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	21	26	52	63	4	5	2	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	35	41	50	8	10	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	20	46	56	15	18	4	5
The teaching is good at this school	19	23	43	52	15	18	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	17	52	63	13	16	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	20	49	60	12	15	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	17	21	47	57	6	7	5	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	16	43	52	17	21	4	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	22	40	49	17	21	5	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	12	47	57	11	13	5	6
The school is led and managed effectively	18	22	48	59	10	12	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	29	41	50	9	11	5	6

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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 pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Becket Catholic School, Northampton, NN3 6HT

Thank you for being so helpful when we visited your school recently. We spoke with quite a number of you in meetings, lessons and around the school, and found you to be friendly and polite.

We have found that your school is satisfactory. The progress you make in your learning is satisfactory and, although the standards you reach by the end of Year 11 are low in relation to the national average, they are improving. Inspectors are particularly pleased to see the progress you make in English. The progress you make is a reflection of the teaching you receive, which is satisfactory in general, and good in English. Those of you who need extra help with your learning make good progress because of the good support you are given.

We found that your school takes good care of you. It keeps you safe, helps you to adopt healthy lifestyles and is successful in encouraging you to attend well. There is good guidance for you too. All of this is confirmed by your responses on the questionnaire and from those we spoke to.

We have suggested to the school's leaders what the school can do to develop further. The suggestions are to do with helping you to make more progress in your work by developing the quality of the teaching you receive and for the school's leaders, including those who are in charge of faculties, to be more precise in their evaluations so that areas for improvement can be more clearly identified. All of this is explained more fully in the report, which I hope you will read. You can help by making sure you understand what you should be learning in lessons and doing all you can to do so.

With best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector

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