

St Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100196
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	343731
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Meena Wood 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 of pupils on the school roll	614
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barry Mizen
Headteacher	Markus Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	25 March 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 48 lessons and observed 22 teachers. They held meetings with the chair of governors, leaders and managers, teaching staff and students. They observed the school's work in Years 8 to 10, spending the majority of the time in lessons, and carried out a number of joint observations of lessons and 'learning walks' with the school's senior managers. They scrutinised the school development plan and departmental reviews, a range of school policies, local authority reviews, governing body minutes, internal teaching and learning observations, and students' work. They analysed the questionnaire responses completed by 258 parents, 70 students and 20 staff.

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

the school's compliance with current safeguarding requirements, including the recording, monitoring and reporting of all equality policies

the standard of marking and the appropriateness of planning by teachers of learning and activities for all students

the school's planning, monitoring and evaluation of its community cohesion strategy.

Information about the school

At the last inspection, St Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive School was given a notice to improve owing to its lack of compliance with safeguarding requirements.

The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has specialist status in mathematics and computing. The vast majority of its students are practising Catholics.

The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages. This includes an average number of students with a statement of special educational needs, most of whom have speech and communication, autism and physical disabilities. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average, with White European and especially Polish students being the most significant group. A much lower proportion than average speak languages other than English, with none at the early stages of learning English. The main heritage language is Polish. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. St Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive School is a good school, as demonstrated by its highly effective and committed leadership, which is steadily raising achievement for its students. The capacity to improve is good, as self-evaluation processes are thorough and leaders and managers have effectively addressed areas of improvement resulting from the last inspection. Subsequent changes in the senior leadership team and administrative staff have resulted in highly robust safeguarding procedures. The team has also successfully addressed other key priorities arising from the last inspection, with the result that students now benefit from the impact of initiatives that the school has put in place in relation to community cohesion. In addition, there is more effective monitoring of the outcomes of different groups of students, in relation to the school's equalities action plans. The majority of students have achieved high standards in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, over the last three years. This impressive result is on track to be sustained for the current Year 11, with an even higher percentage of Year 10 students predicted to exceed the challenging targets in 2011. Students' behaviour, achievement and the development of their workplace skills are outstanding. This is due to the strong ethos of respect for learning that has been engendered by the school through good teaching and a responsive curriculum that meets students' needs. They take pride in their school, are very polite, extremely well motivated and have a highly positive attitude to learning. The majority benefit from enjoyable extra-curricular activities and additional responsibilities, thus ensuring they develop into well-rounded citizens. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding overall.

Senior leaders and heads of departments have worked hard to establish consistent marking and assessment procedures across all subjects. However, lesson observations and a scrutiny of students' work revealed that there is still some inconsistency in the quality of the marking of students' classwork and homework, and insufficient checking of all students' learning in lessons to ensure that all are making the progress of which they are capable. The school's managers ensure that all teachers have robust and accurate information on their students' attainment and ability profiles. In those lessons where teachers use this information in planning, learning activities and tasks are well structured and in line with students' abilities. In these lessons, all students develop independent learning skills, sound knowledge and good subject skills and the progress they make is good and sometimes, outstanding. However, teachers' planning does not consistently take into account the full range of students' prior attainment, in particular,

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those of higher and lower ability who may be at risk of underachieving. When this occurs, rigorous monitoring by managers of students' progress, results in excellent out-of-class interventions, including additional subject revision in the core subjects and supplementary qualifications. These ensure that all students do achieve their full potential.

Care, guidance and support for students are outstanding, owing to the excellent pastoral care and the academic guidance received by students on their next steps in learning and post-16 destinations.

Senior and middle managers have successfully built on the strong religious ethos of the school and this has had a positive impact in fostering an inclusive and caring learning community, where students develop a good sense of independent learning and achieve highly in their academic studies.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the learning and progress of all students during lessons across the school by November 2010 through:
 - greater consistency in checking students' acquisition of knowledge and skills during lessons and in marking students' written homework and class work with precise feedback and guided actions that enable them to improve
 - more effective structured lesson planning by teachers and learning support assistants, in line with each individual student's attainment and ability.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The 2009 results indicated that 77% of students obtained five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, and 92% achieved similar grades in five or more subjects. Similarly high results were also reached in the specialist subjects. One third of all students were successful in attaining the higher A* or A grades in their GCSEs. The standards of written work and oral responses observed by inspectors in lessons confirmed this trend. The vast majority of students are determined to display their best work during activities and tasks and make excellent progress. Most students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. In Year 7, a small number of these students receive additional lessons in the core skills that are much valued. In a number of lessons observed by inspectors, students were highly responsive to well-structured paired or group tasks, actively contributed to discussions, were able to articulate clear responses and visibly enjoyed their work. Whilst sharing a piece of his writing with inspectors, one student acknowledged that the English teacher's encouragement had helped him enormously; 'If I hadn't persevered in this work, I wouldn't be the writer I am today.'

Students at the early stages of learning English, individual students with moderate learning difficulties, and those facing challenging personal circumstances receive well-targeted in-class support, and the majority make good progress.

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Students report that they feel safe at school. They are clearly aware of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles and around half of them take advantage of the school's extra-curricular sporting activities. Through daily assemblies and form tutor sessions, students understand the importance of spiritual values and working together supportively. Consequently, the majority of students have an excellent sense of how to behave and what is morally acceptable. Cultural development is good rather than outstanding, as in lessons teachers do not always extend learning opportunities that develop cultural values and concepts so that students can reflect more deeply and develop higher-order thinking skills. Students are involved in shaping school activities through, for instance, the mentoring of younger students in reading challenges. Some students are enlisted on a racism awareness course as student leaders at a local football club and will act as ambassadors within the school championing these values.

Students' attendance is high and punctuality is exemplary and the majority display the highly responsible attitudes, literacy and numeracy skills they need to equip them for further education, training and the world of work.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

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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Relationships between teachers and students are strong and help to build a mutually trusting learning environment, with the vast majority of students enjoying their studies.

In an excellent English lesson on the impact of inspirational orators from a range of cultural backgrounds, the teacher developed a deeper understanding and sense of enjoyment in learning among all students, through targeted questioning and precise assessment techniques. All students, including those with learning difficulties, were helped to form their own analysis and conclusions. Teachers in English use precise assessment descriptors during tasks, so that students know what level they are working at, and these are linked to students' targets. Careful marking of their work and detailed feedback informs students of where they could improve on their targets on the Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) framework of levels and aspects.

However, helpful marking, teachers' feedback in lessons and targeted questioning that enables all students to contribute to their learning are not in evidence across all subjects. In some lessons, too much teacher input, whole-class activities which last for long periods of time and ineffective questioning mean that a small proportion of students' learning and progress is insufficiently checked. In these cases, more able students and less able students do not always make the progress they are capable of. Learning support assistants work productively with individual students in the main, but their skills and expertise are not used equally well in the lesson planning process in all subjects.

Academic tracking of students' progress is accurate in Years 7 to 11 and students are directly supported to raise their attainment in English, mathematics and science through timely interventions and additional subject input.

Strong multi-agency working through the pastoral staff is highly effective in engaging vulnerable students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The school monitors students' behaviour rigorously and rewards students' achievements and good behaviour publicly, thus encouraging positive role models.

The curriculum is responsive to the majority of students' needs through providing a range of academic qualifications and, in addition, vocational courses at the local sixth form college and other establishments. The school provides a good range of opportunities for students to undertake courses in information and communication technology at their own level. Students receive excellent advice and guidance on their curriculum choices in Year 9.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>2</p>
	<p>3</p>
<p>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</p>	<p>1</p>

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How effective are leadership and management?

Through the headteacher and deputy headteacher's excellent leadership of their team, the school has successfully raised achievement year on year. They are ably supported by a team of managers who share this commitment and work cohesively as a team through sharing good practice across departments. This is beginning to have a greater impact.

The school's self-evaluation process is collaborative and includes input from the governing body, which provides good levels of support and challenge to school staff. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation provide an effective account of the school's strengths, and the areas where the school needs to improve. Departmental school improvement plans and reviews reflect this analytical approach, although the actions to achieve greater consistency in marking and the use of assessment procedures across subjects have not been as effective. There have been significant improvements in the management of teaching and this is robust, but observers place too much emphasis on the quality of teaching and insufficient focus on the quality of the learning and progress of all students.

Safeguarding procedures are now very effective across all aspects of the provision. The school rigorously monitors students' outcomes at individual level and by group, in line with its equalities policy, and this is evaluated for its impact. The school works productively with a range of primary and secondary schools locally, and is developing enterprise opportunities with local businesses. This has contributed to the cohesive community within the school. The school has found sustaining the flow of information to parents on their children's progress relatively challenging. Senior leaders are currently prioritising this area through reviewing the school strategy on its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money

1

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of the parents who responded to the questionnaires or spoke with inspectors reported that their children were happy at the school, and that they appreciated the quality of education and care provided for their children. They reported favourably on students' behaviour and believed that the school prepared their children well for the next stage in their learning, especially if their child was more able or had a learning difficulty or disability. A significant number of parents believed that parent/school communication on their child's progress and the marking of homework were areas the school could improve upon further. Inspectors agreed with these comments.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas More Roman Catholic School 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 258 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 605 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	117	46	130	50	8	6	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	159	62	98	98	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	95	37	134	51	27	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	106	41	139	54	8	6	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	110	43	141	55	4	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	87	34	143	55	24	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	74	29	153	60	24	9	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)	112	43	130	50	10	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	95	37	148	57	14	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	137	53	108	42	7	5	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	22	156	61	30	12	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	111	43	134	52	9	7	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	138	54	114	44	5	4	0	0

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.



9 July 2010

Dear Students

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

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons, looking at your work and talking to you, and were impressed by how very polite and courteous you were. We judged that St Thomas More Roman Catholic School is a good school. These were the main things we found out about your school:

' Between Years 7 and 11, the majority of you make outstanding progress in your learning and attain above average standards in GCSE examinations. If you are not making the progress you should, the school is very quick at providing you with very good additional subject support outside lessons. We were very impressed listening to your articulate and imaginative responses and enjoyed observing your contributions in tasks and activities during lessons ' well done!

' The care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding. The school's responsive curriculum provides you with a range of courses that help you be successful in your studies. The emphasis the school places on outstanding attendance and punctuality, coupled with your excellent levels of behaviour, helps you develop into responsible and caring citizens.

' The school provides you with excellent advice and guidance on the courses to take and prepares you very well for the next stages in your learning and life. Well done for raising your aspirations!

To help the school improve further, we have asked the school's leaders to ensure that:

' teachers consistently mark your class and homework more effectively, give you precise feedback on how to improve and check your learning in lessons more rigorously through sharper questioning, to help you do even better in your studies

' teachers and the learning assistants consistently plan lessons so that all of you can make outstanding progress and achieve your full learning potential.

We wish you all the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector

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