

St Thomas More Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102161
Local Authority	Haringey
Inspection number	335851
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Gill Close 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	837
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Isaac Phillips
Headteacher	Dr Colm Hickey
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2007
School address	Glendale Avenue Wood Green London N22 5HN
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 42 lessons and small group support sessions, and spoke with governors, staff, groups of students and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of its documentation including analyses of students' attainment and progress, improvement planning, lesson monitoring records and policies. They also evaluated 178 student questionnaires, 59 staff questionnaires and 76 parental questionnaires.

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

- attainment and progress of current Year 11 students in mathematics, English, and towards five GCSE grades A* to C including in English and mathematics
- how well teaching and courses contribute to students' progress and meet the needs of sixth formers and those students in danger of low attainment at Key Stage 4 in English and mathematics
- the extent to which care, guidance and support contribute to improvements in students' well-being, development and behaviour
- how effectively leaders and managers at all levels are raising progress and attainment at all key stages through planning, monitoring of provision and tracking.

Information about the school

St Thomas More Catholic School has been a specialist sports college since 2002. It holds the Sportsmark award, full International Schools Award and Leading Parent Partnership Award.

Students come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds with the largest groups being of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage. Over half of the students speak a first language other than English and 36 are at an early stage of learning English. More than a quarter of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, of which the main ones are behavioural, emotional and social needs. Three students out of every 10 are eligible for free school meals. These proportions are above national averages. There are more boys than girls in each year group.

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

St Thomas More Catholic School provides a satisfactory standard of education. Students make satisfactory progress from their low starting points. They reach average standards in obtaining five GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent qualifications but their attainment is low in English and mathematics. After the last inspection, attainment rose in the core subjects, supported by the school's focus on science and mathematics, but in 2009 it fell in English. Evidence from teachers' assessment shows that progress during Key Stage 3 is slow in the core subjects. In the sixth form, progress varies across subjects and courses. In lessons, students make satisfactory progress because teaching is satisfactory. It is better than this in a minority of lessons, where students collaborate keenly on activities that challenge them and regularly make assessments of how well they are doing. In the majority of lessons, students make satisfactory rather than good progress because they spend too long listening or doing work that does not make them think, and they are not aware of their targets. In a few lessons, teaching is inadequate. The school recognises that achievement has been hampered by the quality of assessment, target setting and tracking and has introduced an improved system this year.

A real strength of the school is its specialism in sports that involves students in developing leadership skills, contributes to their good adoption of healthy lifestyles, gives them a route to professional teams and university, and provides significant benefit to the local community. The Catholic ethos underpins students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour has improved since the last inspection and is satisfactory, but it is not managed consistently well. It is sometimes boisterous outside lessons and some instances of bullying are not resolved well. These adversely affect students' perceptions of safety. The good curriculum provides a wide range of vocational and academic courses that meet individual needs, including for the lowest attainers. Support for vulnerable students, such as those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, is strong although the provision for students at early stages of learning English is an area of relative weakness.

The school's own evaluation is broadly accurate and has led to actions to address weaknesses, such as the current project to improve attainment in English. Since the last inspection, there have been improvements in attainment overall and in the core subjects, teaching, behaviour and attendance. A range of staff are instrumental in the positive impact of various initiatives, such as those linked to the specialism. However, the senior leaders have not involved all middle leaders successfully in the drive for improvement or ensured that planning addresses all key areas sufficiently

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sharply. This demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and increase progress at each key stage, particularly in core subjects, through improving the quality of teaching, assessment and responding to needs during lessons so that work becomes more active, more challenging and increases students' independence and understanding, including for those at early stages of learning English.
- Inform teaching and intervention more effectively through accurate assessment, including student self-assessment, target setting and tracking.
- Involve middle managers in communicating to all staff the drive to develop and achieve agreed targets, thereby increasing accountability for all, and sharpen evaluation and planning to secure rapid improvement.
- Ensure systems for behaviour management are applied consistently so that students' behaviour, punctuality and feelings of safety improve.

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

Students make varying progress in lessons. Where they are challenged and involved well, often in the vocational and practical subjects, they make good or better progress. In the majority of lessons, they make satisfactory progress in using a skill or method but do not develop their understanding well. In a few lessons, they make inadequate progress and this holds back their achievement, particularly in the core subjects.

Students join the school with low attainment. In 2009, results at the end of Key Stage 4 were low in English and mathematics, but they rose in science to above average and continued to rise in mathematics. Fewer students than average obtained a pass in English and mathematics. The fall in English attainment lowered the proportion that gained five GCSE grades A* to C, including in English and mathematics, to 32% following a large rise in the previous year from 21%. This is significantly below the national average and fell short of the school's challenging target. The school's data for current students show that they are on track to continue the rising trend since the last inspection and reach over 40% in 2010. Progress by the end of Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for all ethnic groups. In the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress from their low starting points.

Students enjoy coming to school, respect cultural diversity and say that there is no racism. They know well how to stay fit and take part in many optional physical activities. Some of them make a very strong contribution to the community, such as

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through peer mentoring or working with primary school pupils as junior sports leaders. Parents consider that the school keeps their children safe, but some students are concerned about bullying or boisterous behaviour. Students say they know who to turn to and find the peer mentors helpful.

Since the last inspection, attendance has risen markedly to above average overall, but it is below this for some groups and there are more persistent absentees than is usual. Punctuality to school and to lessons is not good and is exacerbated by the time taken to cross the school site.

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	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory. It varies greatly between lessons. In some instances it is outstanding and on occasions it is inadequate. In the best lessons, teachers engage all students in working together on interesting and demanding activities. They use their good subject knowledge to ask students open questions that help to extend their learning and check how well they are doing. Students make assessments of their own work and are clear about their targets and levels of performance. In the majority of lessons where teaching is satisfactory, students are given routine tasks with little opportunity to discuss ideas or develop understanding. Teachers do not convey sufficiently high expectations for students to make good progress or use assessment well enough to show individuals how to improve.

Students can choose from a wide range of vocational courses in addition to academic

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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subjects at Key Stage 4. Some of these are offered through partnerships with local colleges. Provision for lower attainers includes the certificate of personal effectiveness alongside appropriate Key Stage 4 courses. This has contributed to a drop in fail grades, although there is still room for improvement in this respect in English and mathematics. There is an integrated course in Year 7 with cross-curricular themes. The sports specialism delivers outstanding breadth of courses and opportunity for all students through excellent partnerships and external links. Personal, social and health education and citizenship are taught through dedicated days and tutor time, but quality varies and tutor periods are not always well used. Students participate well in the many available enrichment activities.

The school has effectively increased attendance and reduced the number of exclusions over recent years. Internal exclusion systems are used productively, in liaison with parents, to help students improve their behaviour, although systems for tracking learning during this time are underdeveloped. Support for vulnerable students with behavioural difficulties has enabled some to turn their lives around and do well.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have monitored teaching and taken some steps that have improved it, so the quality of lessons has gradually risen. Nevertheless, some inadequate teaching and much that is satisfactory remains. Closely focused action has concentrated on Key Stage 4 attainment in science and mathematics, which were the weakest areas, and led to improvement. However, this action has not been broad enough to improve the teaching quality and progress in core subjects at Key Stage 3. Weaknesses in assessment and tracking contributed to the drop in English performance in 2009. While target setting and tracking in some areas have helped students to do well, the school has correctly identified the need for greater consistency and accuracy. It has introduced an improved system this year, for which it is too soon to see an impact. A thorough action plan is in place as part of the Gaining Ground programme, with support from a partner school that started this term. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are actively involved in the project to improve attainment in English and mathematics. They visit the school but do not routinely gather views from students and parents.

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The school’s work to promote community cohesion in the school and beyond is good. Students get on well with others who have different backgrounds within the school and across the many groups they meet through activities with other schools. The strong links with schools in Trinidad, South Africa and China have contributed to the full International Schools Award. The effective promotion of equal opportunity leads to racial harmony and improved performance of vulnerable students, supported by working with their parents. For example, through a Polish speaking member of staff keeping in close touch with parents who are not fluent in English, their children’s attendance has risen substantially. The school’s good engagement with parents has been recognised through the Leading Parent Partnership award. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and the school is proactive in its work with other agencies.

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
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
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The progress that students make in lessons, and overall, varies depending on the courses they take. It is best in the vocational BTEC courses and in drama, where it was above average in 2009. Although achievement rose at A level in 2009, it fell at AS level because students made below average progress in too many subjects. There is also room for improvement in the success rate of those who retake GCSE in English or mathematics. Students are effective role models and make a good contribution to the community, for example through mentoring younger students. Teaching is satisfactory, and some is better than this. Even where classes are small, students say they have sufficient opportunity for discussion to help them deepen their learning. The adequate range of courses and caring support for vulnerable students enable some to raise their expectations and continue to higher education. Students find their teachers’ advice helpful for their studies and application to university, but guidance for choosing sixth-form courses and use of tutor periods

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each morning are less effective. Attainment has risen since the last inspection. Leaders have a clear sense of the priorities for raising achievement, in particular at AS level, and increasing students' independence but planning lacks specificity.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3
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

Parents are happy with the school. Almost all agree that their children enjoy it and that they are informed about their progress. Most agree with all statements on the questionnaire. A few think that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors found inconsistency in managing behaviour and have identified this as an area for improvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas More 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 76 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 837 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	42	41	54	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	18	24	45	59	7	9	2	3
The school informs me about my child’s progress	34	45	38	50	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	32	38	50	8	11	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	27	36	39	51	8	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	22	29	42	55	8	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	28	45	59	6	8	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)	21	28	42	55	6	8	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	19	25	41	54	9	12	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	29	33	43	11	14	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	22	42	55	8	11	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	22	29	41	54	5	7	3	4
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	29	38	36	47	7	9	1	1

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 all 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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 pupils' 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.



24 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School, London N22 5HN

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school and for taking time to talk to us about it and complete our questionnaire.

We found that you do best in practical and vocational courses but not so well in English and mathematics. When the lessons are active and interesting you make good progress, but sometimes you spend too long listening or doing work that does not make you think. You have excellent sporting opportunities that help you to keep fit and a good range of courses in Key Stage 4.

You respect each other's differences and get on well with people from diverse backgrounds. We found that behaviour had improved but some of you were still concerned about it or bullying. When you spoke to us, you said that you felt safe and knew who to turn to if you had a problem. You find the peer mentors helpful. Your attendance has improved but sometimes you are not punctual for lessons.

We have asked the teachers to:

- ensure you make more progress and reach higher standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science
- improve teaching so that lessons are more active, more challenging and help you to understand, including if you are just starting to learn English
- use assessment and targets more effectively so that you do better
- all play their part in helping the school to improve quickly
- manage behaviour more consistently so that it improves.

You can help by being punctual, behaving well, thinking hard and assessing how well you are doing.

Yours sincerely

Gill Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

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