

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic High School

Lynn Road, North Shields, Tyne and Wear NE29 8LF

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 May 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

There is warmth and friendliness at St Thomas More Catholic High School. Although the school is large, pupils are treated as individuals and staff know them well.

The pastoral support and care that staff give to pupils is a particular strength. Leaders have invested in this area and many parents value both the academic and personal guidance that their children receive. Pupils attend well. The high standard of pastoral support means that most pupils feel safe in school. The vast majority of pupils feel that bullying is rare. Pupils feel that, if bullying does happen, it is dealt with well by staff.

Pupils conduct themselves well. They are friendly and polite. Pupils understand the behaviour system and most feel that staff apply this consistently. In lessons, behaviour is positive. If there is minor off-task behaviour, staff deal with this swiftly to prevent escalation.

Pupils appreciate the broad range of subjects that they can study in school and in sixth form. Pupils have opportunities to develop leadership skills by joining committees such as the charity or leadership committee. Students who attend the sixth form are very positive about their decision to study here. One student commented that 'it is like a family', illustrating the kind and inclusive atmosphere that is present.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is ambitious for all pupils, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are well prepared for their future and are supported by a strong careers programme. Many pupils choose to study modern foreign languages in key stage 4 because of the strengths in the key stage 3 curriculum. Leaders have invested in curriculum development in recent years. They have supported subject leaders to construct their curriculums around exactly what pupils need to know. Leaders are aware of where this is not as clear as it could be and work is underway to ensure that all subjects have clearly sequenced curriculums to reduce any remaining variability.

Teaching staff are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their curriculum subjects. Pupils are familiar with activities that are designed to help them remember important information, and teachers routinely use retrieval activities. Teachers question pupils appropriately to check their understanding; however, more planned opportunities are needed to ensure that as many pupils as possible, including disadvantaged pupils, contribute to lessons. In sixth-form lessons, students are supported well to develop and extend their responses.

Pupils with SEND receive good support. Staff know and identify the needs of these pupils well. Staff receive regular training and helpful guidance. Most staff use this

information to make reasonable adjustments to lessons so that these pupils keep up with other pupils in their learning. The school's 'Ambrose' base provides effective support for pupils, including those with SEND, who need additional pastoral support.

Reading is prioritised across the school. Leaders have identified those pupils who need support to become better readers and have put intervention in place. Pupils who have dyslexia get one-to-one support from well-trained staff. Pupils who struggle to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds to correctly pronounce written words receive extra help so that they can catch up. Leaders promote literacy across the curriculum and many curriculum areas now contribute to developing pupils' literacy skills in specific subject areas. A love of reading is promoted across the school. Some pupils enthusiastically showed inspectors their reading books!

The sixth form is very successful. Students achieve well in a broad range of subjects and are well prepared for their next steps. After sixth form, high proportions of students enter further education, employment or training successfully. However, not all students choose to access direct work experience opportunities. The sixth-form centre supports students to work independently. Students appreciate the quality of support provided by teaching and pastoral staff.

The school's personal, social and health education programme is well thought out. Leaders have carefully considered the topics and issues pupils need to learn about in each year group. The programme is extensive and encourages pupils to become responsible individuals who have an active part in society. A strength here is how well pupils are taught about inclusivity and tolerance. Pupils can access clubs and activities including music clubs, sporting activities, chess, dance, and trips and visits overseas. However, too few pupils are taking the opportunities that are on offer to develop their talents and interests beyond the academic curriculum. This includes sixth-form students.

Leaders think carefully about how to develop staff. They provide many opportunities for staff, including those who are new to teaching, to enhance their knowledge and skills. Governors ask questions of leaders to assure themselves that decisions are made in the best interests of the pupils. Leaders at all levels have a strong, shared vision to ensure that all pupils access a high-quality education regardless of background. The vast majority of staff are happy and feel well supported by leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. All staff share in the responsibility for ensuring that pupils are kept safe. The members of the safeguarding team are well known and work well with teachers and pastoral staff to support pupils at risk.

Leaders regularly update staff on local safeguarding issues. Staff, at all levels, know what to do if they have concerns about pupils. The designated safeguarding lead keeps accurate records and works well with external agencies to protect children.

Pupils know who to go to if they need help, and they feel confident that their concerns will be dealt with.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not carefully plan to involve all pupils in the lesson. This means that not all pupils fully engage with learning, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Leaders must ensure that all teachers use consistent approaches so that all pupils know that they are expected to participate fully in lessons to maximise learning.
- Not enough pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, pupils with SEND and sixth-form students, attend extra-curricular provision. In addition, not all sixth-form students choose to access work experience opportunities. This means that too few pupils access activities that enhance their curriculum beyond the academic. Leaders need to ensure that more pupils are accessing the extra-curricular offer and make good use of opportunities to develop their talents and interests.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137734
Local authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	10255660
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,613
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	277
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Anita Bath
Headteacher	David Watson
Website	www.stmacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 and 18 October 2017

Information about this school

- The school is part of Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses one alternative provider for a small number of pupils. This is a registered provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team completed deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, geography, science and modern foreign languages. To do this, inspectors met with subject leaders, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school, priorities for improvement and minutes of governors' meetings.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with a group of governors and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The inspection team reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising records and through discussions with staff and pupils.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and a review of Ofsted's surveys. The inspection team also considered correspondence that was given to inspectors during the inspection.

Inspection team

Jessica McKay, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Hannah Millett	His Majesty's Inspector
Richard Wood	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
Michelle Farr	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Sheriff	Ofsted Inspector

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