



St Thomas More High School for Boys'

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115363
LEA SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LEA
Inspection number 279585
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Ms. Jennifer Brown LI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Kenilworth Gardens
School category	Voluntary aided		SS0 0BW
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01702344933
Number on roll	981	Fax number	01702436990
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Michael Barry
Date of previous inspection	3 April 2000	Headteacher	Mr. Peter Travis

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 23 November 2005 - 24 November 2005	Inspection number 279585
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas More High is 11-18 years of age, boys' voluntary aided Roman Catholic mathematics and computing specialist school which has a mixed sixth form, in a borough with four selective grammar schools. Its roll has increased since the time of the last inspection but it remains slightly smaller than average. The school serves a large area; just over half the pupils live outside of the borough. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties. Most pupils are of White British descent. The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background and whose first language is not English has increased. The school became a specialist Mathematics and Computing College in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's overall evaluation that it is providing a good standard of education but they identified some aspects that are satisfactory. Overall standards and pupil progress are good and are improving. The school and its pupils are strongly supported by parents. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and aspire to get good grades in their examinations. They make good progress overall by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form, but progress by the end of Year 9, and in English, is only satisfactory. Inspectors agree with the school that the progress of middle ability pupils is better than those of higher or lower ability. Pupils are well cared for, and feel safe at the school. Their personal development is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The very positive attitudes to learning are a key factor in the good progress pupils make. Since the last inspection the curriculum has been developed to meet the needs of a broader range of pupils and the school has attained specialist school status. A significant proportion of senior managers, including the headteacher, are new to their role this term, which has limited the time they have had to bring about change. The new headteacher and senior managers broadly know the strengths and weaknesses of the school although they have an over-optimistic view of how well it is doing in some aspects and how quickly it can improve. They have correctly identified most of the areas for future development and now need to ensure they create a common sense of purpose among staff to drive forward change at a sufficient pace. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but need to be more interesting, with better use of questioning. The issues raised in the last inspection remain. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance by managers at all levels is satisfactory overall, but the monitoring of teaching and learning, pupil progress and the impact of new initiatives needs to be improved.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good and judged the personal development and well-being of students as outstanding. Standards of attainment have improved significantly since the last inspection. The curriculum has been broadened and meets the needs of students. The sixth form has grown in size and an increasing number of students are joining it from other schools. Students are enthusiastic about their experience and develop into mature, thoughtful, considerate young adults who are positive role models for younger pupils. The sixth form is well led.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improving the progress pupils make by the end of Year 9 by improving learning and making the data given to parents, pupils and their teachers clearly related to national curriculum levels.
- Improving the progress pupils make in English throughout the school.
- Ensuring lessons are planned to include a wider variety of learning activities which interest and challenge pupils of all abilities, and make them more responsible

for their learning. - Improving the quality of questioning in lessons so it challenges and deepens pupils' understanding. - Improving systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance and the impact of new initiatives on raising standards and achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall standards and pupils' progress are good. Pupils enter the school aged 11 with above average standards and their attainment both at age 14 and 16 is above the national average. Pupils make different rates of progress between the ages of 11 and 16 and across subjects. The proportion of pupils attaining 5 or more A*-C passes at GCSE is well above the national average and has improved significantly since the last inspection. Few pupils leave the school without any qualifications. Standards in most subjects are above the national average and in some subjects such as art and design, computing, French and statistics they are well above. Pupils make good progress in most subjects. However, in English, where standards were just below the national average in 2004, pupils' progress is only satisfactory. Standards in tests at the end of Year 9 are consistently above average overall but vary both from year to year and between subjects. Pupils make good progress between the ages of 11 and 14 in science but their progress overall and in English and mathematics is satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because there is good provision to meet their needs and they are well supported. Inspectors agree with the school's assessment that the progress of higher ability pupils needs to be improved. Standards and achievement in the sixth form are good and improving. The proportion of students attaining A and B grades is below average in GCE A level and AS courses but above average for advanced vocational courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy coming to school and want to learn and achieve well. The strong Catholic ethos underpins the very positive relationships within the school. Pupils and students in the sixth form feel respected and almost invariably respect each other and their surroundings. They understand and follow the school's codes of conduct and behaviour. Attendance is very good. Pupils feel safe at school and are confident that if any bullying occurs it will be dealt with effectively. Pupils respond very well to opportunities to deepen their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. They appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities the school offers, particularly the sporting activities. They make a positive contribution to the school community both through acting as prefects in Year 11 and the high level of courtesy and responsibility they show when moving about the school. The school recognises it needs to develop more formal processes to take account of pupils' views. A good start has been made in promoting healthy lifestyles. Healthier eating options

are available at lunchtime and there is a good level of participation in physical activities. However, some lower school pupils do not have access to the recommended amount of physical education per week through the curriculum they follow. Pupils are appropriately prepared for working life through work experience and the effective development of their skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Personal development and well-being in the sixth form are outstanding. Students mature to become thoughtful considerate members of society. They make a significant contribution to the life of the school and the local community through, for example, the well valued ongoing support they give to younger pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school judges the quality of teaching and learning as good, whereas inspectors judged it to be satisfactory with some good features particularly in the sixth form. Relationships in the school are good and this has a positive impact on pupil motivation, enjoyment and progress. Central to pupils' examination success is teachers' strong knowledge of their subject and very good preparation of pupils for exams. A predominantly teacher-directed style of learning enables most pupils to make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. Nevertheless, much of the teaching is mundane and lacks variety and vibrancy. Many of the issues identified as being in need of improvement in the last inspection still remain. These include the use of a wider range of teaching and learning styles, questioning to challenge and deepen pupils' understanding, planning lessons to meet the needs of all pupils and to enable more independent learning. Some good practice was seen during the inspection but too much was satisfactory. In the good lessons the teachers skilfully structure learning activities to maximise interest and participation through challenging group work, oral and written tasks. Marking and target setting is inconsistent throughout the school, but where it is regular and detailed, pupils are in a better position to know how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve the standard of their work. Three departments have recently trialled different ways of giving feedback to pupils on the quality of their work and this has had a positive effect on learning in these areas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is good. A broad range of courses meets the needs of all pupils in Years 10 and 11, including those with special educational needs or who are at risk of exclusion. A good range of sporting, social and cultural extra-curricular events and activities adds to the enjoyment of coming to school for many pupils. The school is at an early stage of implementing its specialist status as a Mathematics and Computing College. The curriculum time given to information communication technology has

increased and plans are in place to further develop its use across the curriculum. Careers education is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form, where it enables students to make informed choices about higher education and their subsequent careers. Students in the sixth form have the opportunity to follow some vocational courses as well as more traditional advanced level courses. General studies and religious education add breadth to their programmes. A high proportion of students progress into higher education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of pastoral care is good. Staff work closely with outside agencies to meet the needs of more vulnerable pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are identified quickly and monitored well, so they make good progress. The school acknowledges it is not currently meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils and that although the academic support of pupils is good in the sixth form, it needs to be improved in the main school. Most parents are very supportive of the school. They work in partnership with staff to ensure pupils achieve high standards. Parents are rightly confident that the school provides their children with a secure and safe environment. Well-established child protection procedures are in place and health and safety is monitored effectively. There is a strong emphasis on pupils taking personal responsibility for their behaviour and actions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's assessment of its strengths and weaknesses is broadly accurate but it has an over-optimistic view of how well it is doing and how quickly it can improve. Inspectors judge that leadership and management are satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. A significant proportion of senior managers, including the headteacher, are new to their role this term, which has limited the time they have had available to drive forward change. Senior managers place a strong emphasis on raising standards, the school's Catholic ethos and the quality of care provided to the pupils and students. Since the last inspection standards in both the main school and the sixth form have improved significantly. The curriculum has been broadened and the school has attained specialist school status. But they have been less rigorous in addressing issues raised about teaching and learning and improving the progress of pupils in the lower school. The headteacher and senior managers have identified most of the areas for future development and begun to put plans and processes in place to move the school forward. Currently, however, when planning new initiatives, they are not specific enough about what they are intending to achieve nor how they will evaluate the impact on standards and achievement. Monitoring of the school's performance by managers at all levels is satisfactory overall but the monitoring of teaching and learning and pupil progress, particularly in the lower school needs improvement. Managers carry

out observations of lessons. However, the process devised by senior managers puts too much emphasis on assessing what teachers are doing rather than how much learning is taking place and whether pupils are making enough progress. Systems are in place to monitor pupil performance but senior managers acknowledge more work is needed to make the data more meaningful to parents, pupils and their teachers. The governing body is well organised, committed and supports the school well. Day to day financial management is good. The school's budget went into deficit in 2003/04 but a recovery plan is being successfully implemented and the budget is on target to be back in credit by the end of this financial year. Significant investment has been made in specialist resources and accommodation, which are very good and make the school a very pleasant environment for staff and pupils to work in. The school provides good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of that inspection. I would like to thank you on behalf of the inspection team. We thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you and to listen to your views about the school. We were impressed by your courtesy and good behaviour during our visit. A number of your parents and carers responded to a confidential survey and this was very helpful. We were pleased to see that the standards you achieve in tests at the end of Year 9 and in examinations are good and are improving. Most of you make good progress while you are at the school although your progress is better in the upper school than the lower school. We could see that you enjoy coming to school and that you want to learn and achieve well. We know your teachers work hard to ensure you get good examination results but we think more of your lessons should be made more interesting. We also think that you need more information about how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve your work further. Many aspects of the school's work are good: your personal development, which in the sixth form is outstanding, the care and individual support you receive when you most need it and the support you provide to each other. We agree with you that the school is a friendly place and that you have very good relationships with each other and adults at the school. You told us that you enjoy taking part in sporting activities at the school but would like more opportunities for your views to be listened to and taken into account. The main things we have asked the school to do to improve further are: - To improve the progress you make by the end of Year 9 and to give you and your parents information about how well you are doing in relation to the national curriculum levels. - Improve the progress you make in English throughout the school. - To ensure lessons are planned to include a wider variety of learning activities which will interest and challenge you, and make you more responsible for your learning. - To improve its systems for checking how well it is doing and how well you are doing. Best wishes for the future