



Thomas Becket Catholic School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122100
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292316
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Melanie Kavanagh HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Becket Way
School category	Voluntary aided		Kettering Road North
Age range of pupils	11–18		Northampton NN3 6HT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01604 493211
Number on roll (school)	1044	Fax number	01604 497300
Number on roll (6th form)	104	Chair	T Fitzgerald
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Tom Percy
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	7–8 March 2007	292316

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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

Thomas Becket Catholic School is situated in the north east of Northampton and, as the only Catholic secondary school in the county, it draws students from a wide area. Approximately 17% of students are from a minority ethnic background. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals, those with a statement of special educational need, and those learning English as an additional language are below national averages. However, the overall proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education overall. Standards and progress at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory, and they have improved to satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The school promotes and supports the well-being of students appropriately through work with outside agencies such as the school liaison officer, the school nurse and other health professionals. Attendance, previously lower than average, has improved to a satisfactory level.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and some aspects are good. However, the school has not yet secured consistently good teaching. Assessment is satisfactory but the school has rightly identified this as an area for further improvement, particularly in terms of showing students how to improve their work. Students report that they feel safe at the school and are adopting increasingly healthy lifestyles. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. However, there remains a small minority of students who disrupt lessons. The school provides support for students with behavioural difficulties and there have been no permanent exclusions in the past year. A minority of parents feel the school does not respond quickly enough to their concerns about behaviour, standards and communication.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have secured improvements to attendance, teaching and learning and staffing during a period of significant disruption due to the amalgamation of two schools, as a result of the change from three tier to two tier education in Northamptonshire.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Results have been below average at AS level but they are much closer to average at A level. Teaching in the sixth form is currently at least satisfactory and some is much better. This ensures that students are now making at least satisfactory progress. The mature and sensible students, who enjoy being in the sixth form, provide good role models for the rest of the school. The contribution students make to the school and the wider community is satisfactory. There is some mentoring of younger students and involvement in activities such as rugby competitions. Not all students, however, are sufficiently involved. Students are able to choose from a good range of subjects within the cluster of schools but, as the school has recognised, the courses available for less able students are limited. The recruitment and induction procedures have been revised to ensure more students make the best choices at AS level. Monitoring of students' progress is carried out by departments and any concerns identified to the head of sixth form. This system is currently being changed so that the monitoring of students' progress is part of whole school assessment. Students are given advice on how to improve but not all targets are sufficiently clear. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is satisfactory but senior management has not been sufficiently active in ensuring that rigorous monitoring and assessment systems are in place. The pastoral team in the sixth form

have only limited time to spend with students but students say they are very helpful and friendly. Advice on future education and employment is strong.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly at Key Stage 4, by securing consistently good teaching across the school.
- Respond swiftly and effectively to parental comments and concerns.
- Ensure that students receive clear written and oral feedback from all teachers on how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards across Years 7 to 11 are average and achievement is satisfactory. Students enter the school with below average attainment and make satisfactory progress from Year 7 to Year 9. There have been slight variations within subjects and for groups of pupils but these are not significant and at the end of Year 9 standards in all subjects are close to the national average.

Progress in Years 10 and 11 has been less successful with significant variations between subjects and between groups. Whilst the number of students achieving five higher grade passes had increased to near the national average in 2005, it fell in 2006. The progress made by students also fell significantly in 2006. Girls performed significantly better than boys in both 2005 and 2006. The school took vigorous action to raise standards in Key Stage 4 and this has been very effective with predictions showing expected results close to the national average. This improvement was confirmed during the inspection. The school has made a good attempt to close the gap between boys' and girls' results and this has been successful in some subjects such as English. Overall standards of work in the current Year 11 are close to the national average, confirming satisfactory progress. There are significant variations between subjects with examples of strong subjects being English, physical education and music whilst weaker subjects include mathematics, religious studies and information and communication technology (ICT).

Students' progress in the sixth form is satisfactory overall. It has been lower than expected in Year 12 where students have not been adequately prepared for the more independent style of learning. However, the current teaching in the sixth form is ensuring satisfactory progress throughout and the students are now better prepared for the style of learning needed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. They have good relationships both with their peers and with adults. They enjoy coming to school and most want to learn, although a small minority persist in disrupting lessons. They eat healthily and lead healthy lifestyles and understand why it is important to do so. They report that they feel both safe and secure at school. All child protection policies and procedures are in place, well understood and regularly reviewed. Care has been taken to ensure that all school members are safe during the new building works. Links with agencies such as the police, educational welfare and the Youth Drugs Service help students to develop as positive citizens. The school supports students who misbehave, rather than excluding them, with the result that there has been only one permanent exclusion in the past several years.

The new School Council provides an appropriate forum through which students can voice their opinions. Students run a number of events to support their extra-curricular programmes such as the 'Becks Factor', a talent contest aimed at raising the funds required to help the girls' school rugby team go on tour next year. They support their community in a number of ways including helping primary schools with basketball and netball through the school sports partnership and the Northamptonshire Ezekial project. Form groups participate in fund raising events and work with local charities such as the hospice and the Northampton soup kitchen. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory as a result of their work in a number of subjects, for example, mathematics and geography and a range of tasks they complete in their personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and some aspects are good. Staff training to share teachers' particular expertise and skills has been partly effective, but the quality is still too variable. This is holding back the students' progress. Recent training has focused on the use of ICT in lessons, particularly as new rooms become available, and good examples of this are evident. Not all teachers make effective use of targets based on students' ability when planning lesson activities, and therefore, in a minority of lessons, work is not well matched to students' needs. Students are very aware of their target grades. Much work is marked appropriately with helpful comments, but in some subjects it is not marked often enough or to a consistently high standard. Written comments on marked work do not always give clear enough guidance on what

students could do to improve. The best teaching is well planned with clear objectives and contains challenging activities which take account of students' ability. Consequently, in many lessons students enjoy interesting work which brings about good progress in a cooperative atmosphere. In less effective lessons teachers may talk too much or include activities such as copying from books so that students become restless and poor behaviour can result.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with a wide range of GCSE courses on offer but, as the school has recognized, vocational courses are limited both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. To address this, the school plans to introduce new courses for Year 10 and Year 12 students in the forthcoming year. All students study GCSE religious studies and most obtain a qualification in ICT. The school website offers opportunities to access schoolwork from home and students' usage of the SAM Learning website exceeds national and local averages. PSHE provides students with an understanding of healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. There is an extensive range of after-school events including sporting activities, music, ICT and drama, as well as opportunities for students to improve their work in some subjects. Significant numbers take part in these. However, there are limited opportunities for off-site activities and learning. Skills contributing to students' future economic well-being are developed through activities such as careers advice and work experience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides satisfactory care for its students. Most staff have good relationships with students. The school has put new procedures in place to improve attendance and places greater emphasis on contact with parents with regard to attendance. As a result, though still slightly below the national average, attendance has improved significantly this year from a low base. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are fully supported and integrated and arrangements for the safeguarding of children fulfil requirements. Transition arrangements for students moving from primary schools, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are satisfactory. Primary school pupils value the opportunity to visit the school and to meet some of their teachers. The inclusion units and the learning support unit are effective in supporting students at risk of exclusion. Incidents of bullying are dealt with appropriately. Students are well informed about their progress and know their levels in most subjects at both key stages. Careers advice is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has been through a period of significant disruption which has impacted on several areas including staffing, teaching and resources. Leadership and management are focused appropriately on improving provision and raising standards, particularly at Key Stage 4. Staff are supportive of the strategic direction and actions to secure improvement. The clear need to improve Key Stage 4 results has been addressed with some success, but standards and progress are still only satisfactory.

The school has a clear and realistic view of its strengths and areas for development. The school's self-evaluation form (SEF) was accurate in most respects and inspectors agreed with most grades given by the school. Areas for development, particularly Key Stage 4 outcomes and the need to secure consistently good teaching, were identified correctly. However, although the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has been much reduced, teaching is not yet consistently good, particularly in terms of assessment.

There have been measurable improvements to attendance, which is now satisfactory. Good and detailed data are now available and used for much improved tracking and monitoring of students' progress. The consistently low rate of permanent exclusions has been maintained and the school provides an inclusive community. Staffing issues have been largely resolved despite significant disruption and change.

School leaders have over-generously graded the school's capacity to improve and based too much on planned activity, rather than the impact of improvements put into place. Inspectors judge the overall capacity to improve as satisfactory. Governors are involved in the self-evaluation process but need more detailed and clearer information on the overall performance of the school.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
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	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the findings of the inspection. Thank you for speaking to us so openly and interestingly about your school and your opinions. We were impressed by the way you have dealt with the difficulties during building work and changes to your school.

The inspection found that yours is a satisfactory school. Standards and progress are satisfactory at Key Stage 3. We found that in 2006, Key Stage 4 was unsatisfactory but your teachers have worked hard to put this right and it is now improved to satisfactory. We have asked the school to ensure that this improvement is maintained and extended. In the sixth form, AS level results have been below average, but results at GCE A level are close to average. Those of you in the sixth form are mature and provide good role models for the rest of the school. You told us that you feel safe at school and that the school deals quickly with any bullying. Please continue to seek help quickly if any of you, or your friends, feel you need to.

Many of your lessons are well planned and interesting. Most of you behave well and listen carefully to your teachers. We have asked your school to make sure that all your lessons are equally interesting and that you always know what you need to do to improve your work further. We have also asked them to communicate quickly and effectively to your parents and carers when they have questions and concerns. We wish you well for the future.