

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School

Tyne Crescent, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK41 7UL

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 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	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Martin Bonner. This school is part of Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Tony Bishop, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Christopher Donnellan.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Thomas More Catholic School as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Thomas More is a close-knit community with a strong 'family' ethos. Pupils appreciate and embody the school's Catholic values of faith, hope and love.

Pupils are provided with the knowledge and skills to lead happy, successful lives. They achieve well. The school has high expectations and aspirations for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils are polite and courteous. They say that they feel safe. Typically, they behave well. They move around the school calmly.

Pupils can access opportunities in many different areas to develop and stretch their talents and interests. For example, Year 8 pupils help Year 7 pupils settle in. Other pupil leaders assist at local primary school sports competitions. Pupils and students in all years are actively involved in supporting the local community. They successfully organise food bank collections and charity events.

Clubs include young enterprise, carpentry and gardening, as well as a wide range of sports. Pupils with SEND benefit from activities designed specifically to meet their needs.

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

The school has planned an ambitious curriculum. Teachers present key concepts well and systematically revisit them in lessons to help pupils remember them. Most staff use assessment effectively so that pupils and sixth-form students know more and remember more over time.

In some subjects, teachers have not given enough thought to the concepts that pupils often struggle to understand. Leaders are developing more effective curriculum plans to address this. Teachers typically have good knowledge of their subjects. Where they are not subject specialists, they receive effective support from their colleagues.

The proportion of pupils studying the subjects that contribute to the English Baccalaureate is increasing in line with the government's national ambition. Most students in the sixth form achieve the grades they require to follow their chosen pathway. The majority choose to go on to university.

The school supports pupils with SEND well. It works closely with their parents to identify pupils' needs. Teachers receive the training and guidance they need to help these pupils learn the same curriculum as other pupils.

Pupils who struggle with reading increasingly receive the help they need to become confident readers. The school has trained sixth-form mentors to support this.

Teachers have made a rich selection of texts to enhance the English curriculum. Form tutors read regularly with their tutor groups.

With support from the trust, the school has overseen a recent improvement in pupils' behaviour. Most pupils now behave well in lessons and around the school. The strong pastoral team helps pupils improve their behaviour if it falls below expectations. Pupils understand the behaviour policy. They say that the consequences for poor behaviour are fair. However, they also say that some teachers do not apply the policy consistently, for example when dealing with mobile phones.

The school has developed good systems to improve attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic. Pupils' attendance is now above average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is below the national average. Attendance in the sixth form has also improved.

The school respects and values people's differences. It develops pupils' character well. Pupils grasp the opportunities offered to make a positive contribution to society. Last year's 'culture and diversity day' was a particular highlight.

Pupils learn about a range of topics in assemblies and in personal, social and health education lessons. Topics include healthy lifestyles, finance and staying safe. The relationships and sex education curriculum enables pupils, and students in the sixth form, to make well-informed personal decisions. Teachers promote discussion and debate about moral and social issues during form time.

Careers education is effective. All Year 11 pupils have careers interviews. These inform the decisions they make about their futures. Following student requests, the school now provides more guidance about apprenticeships in the sixth form.

School and trust leaders regularly check the quality of education. They share a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The trust has delegated some responsibilities to the local governing body. This group challenges and supports leaders well. It meets its statutory obligations. Leaders take great care to consider the workload and well-being of staff. Staff are proud and happy to work at the school. The school seeks to communicate meaningfully with parents. It has, for example, recently consulted on changes to school uniform.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' high expectations for behaviour are not applied consistently by staff across the school and in the sixth form. This means some learning time is lost.

Leaders should ensure that all staff are well trained and have a clear understanding of how to implement these expectations.

- Curriculum plans are more rigorous in some subject areas than others. As a result, pupils do not experience a consistently high quality of education across the curriculum. Leaders should act at pace to implement the changes they have planned so that all pupils and students achieve well.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	139517
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10268229
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	945
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	168
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Christopher Donnellan
CEO of the trust	Tony Bishop
Headteacher	Martin Bonner
Website	www.st-thomasmore.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academy Trust.
- The school has a Roman Catholic denomination. The last section 48 inspection was on 14 March 2017.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The trust's chief executive officer is referred to by the trust as its strategic executive lead.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers. The lead inspector met members of the local governing body. He also met the chair of the trust, its chief executive officer and other trust leaders. He spoke to a representative from the Diocese of Northampton.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors considered the views of pupils through their responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils and through meetings held with pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff through meetings and informal discussions, and through their responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.

Inspection team

Peter Whear, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Caren Earp	Ofsted Inspector
Imtiaz Patel	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Dick	Ofsted Inspector

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