

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy

Palace Fields, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 6AF

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a friendly and welcoming school. Relationships between most staff and pupils are warm and positive, upholding the school's Catholic ethos and values. Recently, however, several changes in the school's leadership have led to some uncertainty in the school's community. The school is now becoming more settled.

The school is typically calm. Staff expect pupils to behave and learn well. However, pupils say that there is disruption to learning. They are frustrated by this. A small number of pupils do not always moderate their conduct when challenged by staff.

Leaders and teachers are not consistently ambitious for all pupils. While most achieve well, pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not. The additional needs of these pupils are not catered for well in the classroom.

Most pupils feel safe at school. They say that bullying is not a major concern. Pupils know who they can talk to. They are confident that staff will deal with any immediate issues. However, some pupils and parents and carers shared some concerns that instances of bullying are not always fully resolved. Nevertheless, most pupils are happy at school. They value the range of extra-curricular activities available to them, including sports, performing arts and debating.

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

Leaders have ensured that all pupils study a broad range of subjects. The proportion of pupils studying separate sciences at key stage 4 is increasing. Subject leaders have started to identify the knowledge that pupils need to know and when they should know it. However, the quality of the curriculum is variable. Some subjects, such as geography and mathematics, are at a more advanced stage of development than others. Senior leaders are beginning to ensure that their expectations of how well pupils should learn the curriculum are commonly understood.

The proportion of pupils studying the English baccalaureate is low. In the past, too few pupils have opted to learn a foreign language. Leaders have taken appropriate action to address this.

Pupils at an early stage of reading are well supported by a specialist tutor. The extra help these pupils receive is helping them gain confidence in reading fluently.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough. There is too much variability in how staff support all pupils to succeed, particularly those who are disadvantaged or have SEND. Sometimes, pupils do not fully understand the knowledge they have been learning. When this happens, pupils leave work unfinished or opt out of completing demanding tasks. Teachers do not

consistently check pupils' understanding or how well they have completed their work. When they do, pupils respond positively.

Leaders identify the needs of pupils with SEND well. However, staff do not routinely use the information shared with them to support these pupils. Furthermore, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils do not attend school as well as they should.

Despite leaders' planning, the programme for pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is not as effective as it needs to be. The curriculum is not well sequenced across all year groups. Pupils struggle to recall important messages about British values and relationships education. Pupils are not as prepared for life in modern Britain as they should be. Leaders' new 'character curriculum' promotes enrichment and social development well. While careers education is not well sequenced in most year groups, Year 11 pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education or training.

Most pupils are punctual and behave well. However, many pupils perceive that the school's new behaviour policy is not implemented either fairly or consistently well by all staff.

Pupils, staff and some parents have mixed views about how well the leaders communicate the school's vision and policies. They feel there is not always a shared understanding. The morale of staff is not consistently high. Nevertheless, staff are proud to work at the school. Most parents would recommend the school.

The school is well supported by the trust and local governors. However, some leaders think that areas of the school's provision are better than they are.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained. They understand well their responsibilities to report concerns. Pupils know who they should talk to if they have any worries or concerns. Staff are vigilant about the indicators that a child might be at risk of harm. Designated safeguarding leaders act swiftly to help keep pupils safe. They work closely with external agencies, including the police, health care professionals and social services. Record-keeping is thorough.

Staff in the 'Bosco Centre' provide close support for children who need extra help for their emotional well-being.

Leaders' oversight of children in the care of the local authority is effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' academic oversight of pupils who are disadvantaged or have SEND is weak. The curriculum is not sufficiently ambitious for these pupils. Staff do not consistently ensure that these pupils receive the necessary extra help they need in the classroom. Leaders have not ensured that the school's strategy for supporting pupils eligible for the pupil premium is effective. As a result, vulnerable pupils fall behind in their learning. They do not achieve the best outcomes that they can. Leaders should ensure that all staff are ambitious for these pupils. They should also ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills they need to provide the right support for these pupils so that they attend well and can achieve well.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high in all subjects. Sometimes, teachers move on to new tasks before checking that all pupils have understood what has been taught, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. When this happens, pupils sometimes leave work unfinished or opt out of completing tasks. Leaders should ensure that all teachers have the skills they need to check pupils' understanding over time and help them achieve their best.
- It is not always clear what pupils should learn and when in some subjects. In these subjects, pupils, including the most able, are not able to build consistently on their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that, across all subjects, there is clarity around what knowledge should be taught and when so that pupils can successfully build their understanding over time.
- The PSHE education curriculum is not as effective as it needs to be. The programme is not well sequenced across all year groups. Pupils struggle to recall important knowledge about British values and positive relationships. Leaders need to ensure that pupils in all years benefit from a high-quality personal development programme that equips them to be well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Some staff, pupils and parents are concerned about behaviour, albeit from a small number of pupils. They say that disruption to learning is increasing. Pupils also say that the school's behaviour policy is not consistently or fairly applied by all staff. This affects their enjoyment of school. Leaders must ensure that the school's behaviour policy is upheld by all staff and embraced by all pupils.
- Some staff and pupils say that leaders do not always communicate their plans and expectations well enough. Some parents echo similar sentiments, while also recognising the positive features of the school. They are concerned that within the school community there is not always a shared sense of common purpose. As a result, the morale of some staff and pupils is not as high as it should be. Leaders should ensure that there are opportunities for all stakeholders to be involved in the future direction of the school so that leaders' vision and the school's well-considered Catholic values are shared and upheld by all.

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	146128
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10254810
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	440
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sarah Noon
Headteacher	David Redfern
Website	www.stthomasmorebuxton.srscmat.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Saint Ralph Sherwin Catholic multi-academy trust in September 2018.
- The headteacher was not present during the two days of inspection. The deputy headteacher took up her post at the start of January 2023. The school is currently being supported by several senior leaders based at the St Philip Howard Catholic Voluntary Academy, in the same trust.
- The school uses three alternative education providers for a very small number of pupils. Two of these providers are registered with the Department for Education. The other provider is unregistered.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. Senior leaders from the supporting school also joined a range of inspection activities.
- To check the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads. He reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's policy, records of support provided for pupils and the checks undertaken for the recruitment of staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust. He also met with two members of the local governing body, including the chair.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in computer science, mathematics, science and physical education. These deep dives consisted of meetings with subject leaders, visiting lessons, reviewing pupils' work and meeting with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, which included leaders' self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, records for behaviour and attendance and a wide range of subject plans, including plans for pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors met formally with pupils across all year groups, as well as informally around the school site.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, as well as responses to Ofsted's survey for staff. He also met with several members of staff individually.

Inspection team

Chris Stevens, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Dick Vasey	Ofsted Inspector
Teresa Roche	Ofsted Inspector

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