

# Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy

Palace Fields, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 6AF

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Inspection dates:	3 and 4 June 2025
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is David Redfern. The school is part of the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi 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 (CEO), Kevin Gritton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sarah Noon.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This school fosters a positive climate of care. Staff know pupils exceptionally well. They create a calm and positive environment that helps pupils feel safe, happy and ready to learn. Everyone understands the school's mission, and pupils take pride in their aspiration: 'not to have more, but to be more'.

The school has a lovely learning atmosphere. The behaviour policy and procedures work really well. Learning disruptions are rare. Pupils consistently follow well-established routines. When Year 11 pupils entered the examinations, for example, their behaviour was truly exemplary.

The school has emerged from a turbulent period and made significant improvements since the last inspection. Staffing issues have been addressed. Skilled staff are teaching pupils. Previously, outcomes at the end of key stage 4 were not strong enough, but this is set to change. Pupils are now learning more. Their progress through the curriculum has improved.

The school extends its curriculum beyond the school day. Pupils engage in many clubs, trips and activities. Their character is developed through opportunities in the school and the wider community. The school council represents their peers with great honour, skill and dignity. Members are an absolute credit to the school.

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

The curriculum is well structured and reflects the demands of the national curriculum. Catholic social teachings also shape pupils' learning. The proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, studying the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects has increased. A key priority is the development of literacy. Pupils' understanding of technical language across the curriculum is encouraged and is strong.

Subject leadership is a developing strength. Skilled and knowledgeable staff have joined the school. They have significantly enhanced the quality of pupils' education. In English for example, the curriculum is extremely ambitious. Pupils' knowledge is systematically built over time. Pupils are developing robust subject knowledge and a genuine enthusiasm for learning. However, in a couple of subjects, aspects of subject leadership remain less established.

The implementation of the curriculum has improved. Staff are subject specialists. The school's 'teaching and learning seven' strategy provides a structured approach to learning that pupils appreciate. Sometimes, aspects of this strategy are inconsistently implemented. For example, insufficient checks are made to ensure that pupils have thoroughly learned what has been taught. This can lead to gaps in pupils' knowledge which may then go unaddressed.

Reading is an absolute priority. Pupils receive expert help if they find reading difficult. The library is an asset. It is a wonderful learning space. Staff are successfully opening pupils' eyes to new authors and to the exciting world of books.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Staff swiftly identify pupils' needs and take every measure to address them. In lessons, pupils with SEND receive effective support. The actions taken to improve communication with the parents and carers of pupils with SEND are effective and well received.

Pupils receive a warm welcome to school. They attend regularly. They are rarely late. Tenacious staff work tirelessly to ensure that all pupils are in school and are learning.

The personal, social and health education curriculum is thoughtfully planned and consistently delivered, equipping pupils with essential knowledge to stay safe and healthy. Pupils understand how to build positive relationships. Suitable careers advice and guidance is in place to ensure that pupils make well-informed choices for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Governors have the appropriate knowledge and expertise. Statutory obligations are met. They have an accurate view of the school. The internal trust support to leaders has been effective.

Staff show incredible commitment to the school and to the community. They recognise how much the school has improved and are extremely proud. They are well led and supported.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Some subject leaders are new to school. Some have not benefitted from the training and development needed. This means that aspects of the curriculum are not as meticulously designed, or as well established as required. Pupils do not learn as well as they could. The school must ensure that subject leaders receive the guidance and support needed to become highly effective. They must make sure that the quality of the curriculum is consistently strong across all subjects so that pupils' outcomes improve.
- There are some inconsistencies in the implementation of the school's 'teaching and learning seven' strategy. In some lessons, this can mean that pupils' learning gaps are

not addressed. This may be a barrier to them learning more and being able to do more. The school must ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is consistently strong across all subjects and that pupils achieve as well as they should.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	146128
<b>Local authority</b>	Derbyshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10379595
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	428
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Sarah Noon
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Kevin Gritton
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Redfern
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stthomasmorebuxton.srscmat.co.uk">www.stthomasmorebuxton.srscmat.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	10 and 11 January 2023, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is part of the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust.
- The school uses two registered and one unregistered alternative provision.
- 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.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 put pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: English, geography, design and technology and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their wider learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also visited lessons across a wider range of other subjects.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the trust, the chair of the trust board, the trust director of standards and performance (secondary), and a representative of the Diocese of Nottingham.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including education, health and care plans, to evaluate provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of pupils' attendance information. They spoke with the inclusion manager and the family support worker. They observed the behaviour of pupils as they arrived at school, in classrooms and at social times.
- The views of staff and pupils who responded to Ofsted's surveys were considered. Additionally, inspectors reviewed the views of parents through Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

## Inspection team

Jayne Ashman, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

John Harrison

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Mark Rhatigan

Ofsted Inspector

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