

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas More High School

Kenilworth Gardens, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 0BW

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 March 2024

Outcome

St Thomas More High School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Gemma Ackred. The school is part of the Assisi Catholic Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Frank McEvoy.

What is it like to attend this school?

At St Thomas More High School pupils are supported to achieve, both academically and personally as individuals. The school has built strong relationships between its pupils, staff, and parents and carers. Leaders have developed a caring community where pupils and staff feel part of a family. Pupils are respectful of each other and their teachers. They are proud of their school.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities. Many pupils take part in clubs such as aviation and astronomy, and also belong to teams such as for chess. These are very well attended by pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. This helps pupils to successfully develop skills and interests that they can use beyond the classroom.

The school has thought carefully about how to prepare pupils for adulthood. Pupils are encouraged to take up a wide variety of leadership positions. For example, every year there is a leadership retreat. This develops leaders in sixth form and key stage 4. This equips pupils to make a valuable contribution to their community in a range of different ways.

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

The school has developed an ambitious curriculum that enables its pupils to achieve well. The number of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate has started to increase. This is because the school has developed a strong curriculum in all key areas. Students in sixth form are aspirational because their teachers have high expectations for them.

Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to set out important concepts clearly. They regularly check on the understanding of pupils. This ensures that pupils know and remember more over time. Some staff have not given enough thought to supporting pupils to be able to use essential skills to best demonstrate what they have learned, for example developing pupils' writing skills. When this is the case, pupils are not as effective in expressing their ideas and demonstrating what they have learned. This means pupils are less able to show how well they are achieving. Leaders have identified that this is an area to develop and have started to share good practice across the school.

The school has clear plans in place to develop pupils' literacy. Weaker readers are quickly identified and are provided with appropriate support. This helps them to become more fluent and confident with their reading.

The school provides teachers with the training and guidance they need to help pupils with SEND to learn. Teachers carefully consider how to adapt the learning for these pupils. This supports pupils to achieve well across the school. The school is further developing some aspects of the curriculum to ensure that pupils can achieve even more.

Pupils have high attendance because they enjoy coming to school. The school also has clear and effective systems to respond to pupils' absence. Pupils are calm and respectful because teachers expect a lot from them. This means that learning is rarely disrupted. Bullying and harassment are not tolerated in this school. Students in the sixth form are exceptional role models for younger pupils.

The high-quality personal development programme teaches pupils how to make positive contributions to society. They can express themselves maturely and confidently. Pupils and students who are new to the school say that they feel welcomed and included by others. This is because leaders have developed a culture that is inclusive. Pupils know that they can access the support when they need it.

The school encourages pupils to be aspirational for their future. Pupils in all key stages receive effective careers education and guidance. This helps them make informed plans about their futures. The school has developed many opportunities for pupils to engage in encounters with employers. Pupils have access to a broad choice of work experience placements. As a result, pupils and students are well prepared for their next steps in education or employment.

Staff enjoy working at St Thomas More High School. Leaders take exceptional care over their well-being. The school provides high-quality training and development opportunities for their staff. This means that they are better equipped to be able to support pupils. Parents are highly complimentary about the support that their children receive and the progress that they make.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some instances, teachers do not provide pupils with clear guidance as to how they can improve their communication of what they have learned, for example through their writing across the curriculum. This means that some pupils are unable to express their ideas and what they have learned clearly. The school should ensure that pupils are consistently supported to be able to communicate effectively what they have learned and know across the curriculum. This will ensure that they achieve better in all subject areas.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2015.

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	137310
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10295042
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,242
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	322
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Frank McEvoy
Headteacher	Gemma Ackred
Website	www.st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 December 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, staff and pupils. Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body, and governors. As part of evaluating governance, the lead inspector met the chair of the trust, and trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, met with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited a range of lessons.
- 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 puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including curriculum plans, school development plans, policies, and documentation for behaviour and attendance.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and a review of Ofsted's surveys, including Ofsted Parent View. The inspection team also considered correspondence that was given to inspectors during the inspection.

Inspection team

Andrew Robinson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Robins	Ofsted Inspector
Aimee Bray	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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