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Mrs Leearna Thomas
Acting Principal
St Thomas More Catholic School and Sixth Form College
Greenmoor Road
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Warwickshire
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Dear Mrs Thomas

Short inspection of St Thomas More Catholic School and Sixth Form College

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2018 with Mark Henshaw, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school became an academy.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since it became an academy. Following the recent retirement of the headteacher, the board has completed a restructure of leadership positions. A strong team is now in place to continue to improve the school, overseen by the senior executive headteacher who is a national leader of education.

You, supported by this newly formed and capable leadership team, know the school well. You have accurately identified the priorities for improvement and the work begun in these areas is already having a positive impact on pupils' progress. All leaders are highly focused on what needs to be done to improve the areas of weakness and consolidate the strengths of the school.

Pupils told inspectors that the school is a safe, happy and positive place to learn. In corridors and lessons pupils behave respectfully towards one another and staff. Students in the sixth form are particularly positive about the way in which they are supported, cared for and given plenty of opportunities to be an active part of the school community. Their progress has been consistently strong over time because they are well motivated, teaching in the sixth form is highly effective and leaders have created a culture of scholarly excellence.

Over time, pupils at key stage 3 and 4 have made progress in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points. For example, pupils' progress in English has improved markedly. While some groups make strong progress, the most able pupils

have underachieved. Leaders know that the progress of most-able pupils needs to improve further, especially in mathematics and science. They have already begun to tackle this issue with tangible success. They do, however, understand that there is some way to go to ensure that all of the most able pupils make the progress that they are capable of.

The majority of staff who responded to the online survey agree that the school has improved since the last inspection. They are unanimous in saying that they are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They have a deep understanding of the specific risks that pupils face in the local community and have responded effectively to these. For example, they have used theatre companies to help pupils understand the risks of child sexual exploitation, and developed newsletters for parents to enhance parents' understanding of the dangers of social media.

Leaders' safeguarding of the most vulnerable pupils is very strong. As a result, many of these pupils thrive when they join the school.

Inspection findings

- In the past, disadvantaged pupils had extremely high levels of persistent absence. Leaders have appointed a member of staff to support these pupils' attendance, worked closely with parents and completed home visits. As a result of this well-targeted action, there has been a marked improvement in the attendance of this group.
- Leaders have accurately identified the reasons that the most able pupils are not making the progress that they are capable of. They have worked effectively to make sure that these pupils are challenged appropriately across year groups and subjects. Leaders' work to improve transition from primary school to Year 7 has had a positive impact. When pupils arrive in Year 7, their primary school teachers work with secondary school teachers to plan their work for the first few weeks. As a result, leaders can be sure that work challenges pupils appropriately. In most year groups and across the majority of subjects, the most able pupils are now meeting their challenging targets. The most able pupils currently in Year 11 did not experience the improved transition and have fallen behind. For these pupils, there is still work to do. Leaders acknowledge this and are ensuring that teaching improves to enable these pupils to succeed. Leaders have identified that in-lesson progress checking and questioning are not as strong as they need to be. They are addressing this issue effectively.
- The new leadership team currently uses an overly complex system of self-evaluation, action planning and monitoring that runs to many pages and multiple related documents. These documents do not help leaders focus sharply on the areas for development and on their evaluation of progress. Despite this, leaders know what needs to be improved. They are working effectively to move the

school forward, including designing a new system of self-evaluation and action planning.

- Pupils who have education, health and care plans are well supported to make good progress. Teaching assistants work closely with these pupils, enabling them to take part in lessons, making sure they understand tasks fully and supporting their participation in class discussions. As a result, these pupils are making strong progress from their starting points.
- The experience of students in the sixth form is having a very strong impact on their progress. Retention is very high because staff make sure that students are on courses that are appropriate for them and that they are well supported throughout their time in the sixth form. All students have interviews before they apply for a place and again after they gain their GCSEs to make sure that courses are suitable. This is followed by assessments after four weeks and regular checking of their understanding throughout their courses. As a result of this, their progress is consistently strong and has been so in most years since the sixth form was opened.
- The range of non-qualification experiences available to post-16 students is impressive and all students take part. They spoke animatedly with inspectors about the ways in which college visits and community activities enthused them, contributed strongly to their subject understanding and made them think deeply about their future career plans. They are committed to the college and value highly the work that leaders do to support them in their studies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders streamline the school's self-evaluation processes so that they can monitor their progress more effectively
- most-able pupils' progress continues to improve, particularly for pupils currently in Year 11
- the quality of questioning and assessment in lessons becomes more consistently effective.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the senior executive headteacher, the acting headteacher, a range of other school leaders and those responsible for governance. They spoke with pupils, and evaluated the 180 responses to an online pupil questionnaire. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was evaluated through lesson observations, some with senior leaders; work scrutiny; analysis of published information and the school's tracking of pupils' progress. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation. They evaluated parents' views through the 106 responses to Parent View and 100 Parent View free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of the 45 responses to a staff questionnaire.