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Mr David Watson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Watson

Short inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 2017 with Mike Tull, HMI, 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 was judged to be good in November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, other leaders and governors are proud of all pupils and staff that are part of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy, and you are all determined to ensure that all pupils achieve what they are capable of.

Since your appointment, in September 2016, you have encouraged staff and pupils 'to follow the example of Jesus Christ in work, worship and relationships.' You have encouraged staff and pupils to take pride in the school and their work and to take an active role in moving the school forward in its next stage of development. Staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, and staff whom inspectors spoke with during the inspection made it clear that they all fully support you. As a result, staff morale is high.

The school is a safe and orderly environment. Pupils behave well while they are in lessons, when they move between classes and during social times. They wear their uniform with pride and look very smart. Pupils make good progress because of their positive attitudes to learning, and the strong relationships they have with staff. The school provides a wide range of experiences for pupils so that the curriculum is enriched further. These enrichment opportunities support and promote pupils' personal development and welfare. For example, pupils in the main school enjoy taking part in debating and sporting clubs, and students in the sixth form enjoy taking a leading role in charity work and supporting younger pupils with their studies. The values of respect, tolerance and humility permeate the school and

leaders' active promotion of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is tangible and exceptional.

You and your highly effective leaders work well together and accurately identify areas of strength, and areas that need further development. As a result, you take decisive action to improve the school. There is a philosophy of continuous improvement in the school, and because of this, the quality of teaching is improving. Leaders are responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching and are in a more informed position to affect change and improve any identified weaker practice. Leaders' initiation of 'teaching and learning communities' has given staff wider opportunities to share and develop their practice, and access training opportunities to help them improve. The vast majority of teachers are proactive in developing their own practice and value the support they are given. However, you and other leaders are right to recognise that not all teachers are using pupil information as well as they could to plan learning that meets the varying needs of all pupils.

Governors are passionate and capable and bring a diverse range of skills and experiences to the table. They use their skills and experiences to be increasingly involved in the school's work. Governors, for example, are involved in reviewing safeguarding policies and procedures and completing governors' reviews of identified subject areas. This involvement keeps governors well informed to further challenge leaders. They are determined to support, yet challenge you and other leaders so that the school continues to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are suitably detailed and kept safe and secure. Leaders and staff work together to ensure that the school is a safe place so that pupils can achieve their full potential. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are both happy and feel safe at school.

The school's records of recruitment checks are thorough, clear and up to date. Systems in place are robust and leaders ensure that no member of staff begins their employment until they carry out all the necessary checks. A number of leaders and governors have accessed safer recruitment training.

Pupils know whom they can go to if they want any support or advice. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that if any form of bullying happens, leaders and teachers deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils also say that staff are always present and are approachable. The school's assembly programme, supported by the personal, social and health education programme, provides numerous opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe from risks, including when using social media and the internet.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have improved procedures for tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils and groups of pupils. Such procedures give senior leaders the information they need to work alongside middle leaders to address underachievement at class, group and individual pupil level. Leaders are constantly reviewing information and refining their skills in tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. As a result of this work, leaders have identified key areas that need attention, for example the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, and are taking necessary action to improve.
- Leaders' approach to improving the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is starting to have a positive impact. For example, progress for disadvantaged pupils overall improved between 2016 and 2017. The progress and attainment gap for this group of pupils and other pupils is steadily diminishing because leaders have implemented a pupil premium strategy that fully addresses the barriers to learning. Inspectors observed few notable differences in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils during the inspection. Leaders have used strategies to support disadvantaged pupils well. For example, they have ensured that disadvantaged pupils receive good-quality advice and guidance to raise aspirations and so that they can make the most informed choices about what to do when they leave school.
- Attendance of pupils overall in the school is excellent. The vast majority of pupils attend regularly and benefit from this. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, while improving, remains stubbornly low. Leaders are well aware of this, and, as a result, are taking appropriate action to improve further the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. The school has embarked successfully on an 'attendance challenge' throughout key stage 3. This challenge has had a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' attendance as they engage enthusiastically with the challenge and now realise the importance of attending school and do attend school more regularly.
- Sixth-form leadership is a strength. The head of sixth form has an accurate awareness of the strengths and areas that need further developing, for example in bringing about consistency in students' outcomes across academic subjects. Last academic year, because of leaders' closer monitoring of subjects such as German and biology, students' outcomes improved. The head of sixth form is resolute in her ambition to ensure that all students, based on their different starting points, achieve consistently well. She is putting plans into place so that she can more frequently monitor the quality of teaching at key stage 5, and she is ensuring that staff receive appropriate training opportunities.
- Students spoke with high regard about the support, guidance and care they receive from sixth-form staff and their teachers. Students access a variety of enrichment programmes. These programmes develop students' leadership skills and the skills needed for their future choices. For example, university visits and talks from local employers have made students aware of the qualifications and skills they must develop and possess. Such programmes prepare students exceptionally well for further education, employment or training. Students are ambitious and want to do well. In visits to sixth-form lessons, inspectors saw

teachers meet the needs of students by adapting their teaching to tackle students' misconceptions and further aid their knowledge and understanding. Sixth-form students are great ambassadors for the school and are excellent role models for younger pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently use pupil information to plan learning that sufficiently challenges all pupils and meets their needs, taking into account their varying starting points
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve
- leaders continue to monitor the progress of sixth-form students accessing academic courses, and intervene swiftly to combat any underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you, and members of your middle and senior leadership teams. Meetings also took place with the chair and other members of the governing body, a group of pupils from Years 8 and 9 and a group of sixth-form students. Inspectors examined the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and monitoring records concerning teaching, learning and performance management, and attendance, exclusions and destinations. The single central record was checked and relevant safeguarding procedures were reviewed. Learning was observed in each key stage alongside members of the senior leadership team. Four responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey, 26 responses to the staff survey and 184 responses to Parent View were received and considered.