

Inspection of Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College

Urban Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA15 8HT

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2022

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Sixth-form provision	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected nine years ago and was judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff do not have consistently high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve in Years 7 to 11. Pupils do not benefit from a sufficiently ambitious curriculum. The wider personal development curriculum on offer to pupils is also variable in quality. As a result, pupils' academic progress and the quality of their personal development are uneven and sometimes weak in key stages 3 and 4.

Conversely, students in the sixth form benefit from an effective education across a broad range of subjects. They achieve well. Students experience an age-appropriate personal development programme. They behave consistently well and show positive attitudes to their learning. Students said that they enjoy attending the sixth form.

The quality of pupils' behaviour in Years 7 to 11 varies. While the majority of pupils behave well, a persistent minority spoil the experiences of others. Some of these pupils disrupt lessons and struggle to regulate their behaviour around school. Pupils said staff do not manage behaviour consistently well.

Pupils said that some pupils call others inappropriate names. Less frequently, pupils experience more unpleasant behaviours such as bullying. Pupils felt that staff handle these incidents well if they are reported. However, some pupils are less willing to report concerns about poor behaviour, including bullying.

Most pupils feel that staff are approachable. However, some pupils are frustrated with the quality of education that they receive. This affects what they want to study in the next stage of their education. Nevertheless, pupils value the range of extra-curricular activities on offer. They particularly appreciate supporting local and national charities.

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

Until very recently, leaders and governors have not fully understood the weaknesses in the quality of education and the wider personal development experiences that pupils receive. Over time, leaders and governors have not evaluated some aspects of pupils' lived experiences of school life in sufficient depth. For example, they only have a partial understanding of the support that staff need to improve pupils' learning experiences and the quality of their behaviour. While leaders and governors are starting to address some of these concerns, it is too early to see the impact of their actions.

Leaders ensure that pupils study a sufficiently broad range of subjects in key stages 3 and 4. However, the quality of pupils' learning experiences varies widely across subjects. This is because, over time, the overall design of the curriculum at subject level has lacked ambition in some curriculum areas. Some pupils have not been exposed to the depth of subject content that they require to develop a rich body of knowledge. This has resulted in pupils missing out on key learning experiences.

In some curriculum areas, leaders have not ensured that essential subject content is delivered in a logical order. This has hampered some pupils' enjoyment of these subjects, and it has adversely affected some pupils' achievement. Leaders have begun to support staff in these subjects to design and deliver suitably ambitious curriculums to pupils in Years 7 to 11. However, these much-needed improvements are in their early stages of development. Consequently, it is too early to see the impact that they are having on pupils' learning and development.

In contrast, in some other curriculum areas, teachers use their subject knowledge to deliver topics and concepts well. They provide helpful activities for pupils to learn and use new knowledge. Pupils said that they value these learning experiences in these subjects.

Some teachers make effective use of leaders' assessment systems to identify what pupils know, remember and can do. However, some staff do not assess subject matter as effectively as they should. That said, leaders are now taking effective action to improve their assessment systems.

Leaders ensure that pupils and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn the same subject content as their peers. Leaders accurately identify the needs of these pupils. In the main, teachers use this information carefully to provide helpful support to these pupils in lessons.

The uneven experiences of pupils mean that they do not make equal gains in what they know and remember across the subjects that they study. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

Leaders carefully identify the needs of pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read. They provide well-matched support to help these pupils successfully strengthen their reading knowledge. Staff are encouraging and supporting pupils and students of all ages to read more widely and often.

Students in the sixth form benefit from a broad and balanced range of academic and vocational subjects. These meet their learning needs well. Subject curriculums are carefully designed around the knowledge that students need to succeed. Teachers deliver the curriculum effectively in the sixth form. They ensure that students confidently recall and use the knowledge that they are taught in a range of different contexts.

Leaders' expectations of behaviour are not understood by all staff. Staff do not always apply the school's behaviour systems consistently well. Leaders' checks on pupils' behaviour do not give them a clear enough insight into the deterioration of some pupils' conduct.

Pupils in Years 7 to 11 cannot always recall what they have previously learned about some important aspects of the personal development curriculum. Suitably trained staff expertly design and deliver some aspects of pupils' personal development, such as relationships and sex education. However, other important areas, for example

personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, are not delivered as well. Pupils' experiences of PSHE are often disjointed. Many staff lack the knowledge or skills to deliver this content as effectively as they should.

Pupils get a wide range of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) to help them think about their futures. Students in the sixth form spoke highly of the carefully focused CEIAG opportunities that they get. However, these experiences have a mixed impact on the wider development of pupils in key stages 3 and 4. Some pupils in Years 8 to 11 are often unable to articulate how these opportunities have helped them to make choices about their next steps in education, employment or training.

Teachers value the support that leaders and governors give to them. They said that leaders and governors listen to the experiences of staff. Most staff appreciate what leaders and governors do to make a positive contribution to their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the safeguarding risks that pupils and students sometimes face. They ensure that pupils are well educated about these potential risks.

Leaders successfully train staff so that they are confident to look out for pupils' and students' welfare and well-being. Staff understand what to do if they have concerns about a pupil. They are vigilant and report concerns in a timely and appropriate manner.

Leaders carefully consider and act on the potential concerns that staff share about pupils. They make use of a range of internal and external expertise to support pupils and students. They regularly review and adapt the help that pupils receive to ensure that the support they offer is working well.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- For some time, pupils in Years 7 to 11 have not benefitted from an appropriately ambitious, carefully sequenced and well-delivered curriculum in a range of subjects. This has impeded how well pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and some pupils with SEND, achieve in these subjects. It has also affected their enjoyment of these subjects and their desire to study them further. Leaders and governors should continue to provide subject leaders and staff with the support they need to design, deliver and embed suitably ambitious curriculums across all subjects.

- Some pupils do not behave as well as they should. Around school, some pupils are often boisterous and use unpleasant language. A small number of pupils do not show the respect to others that they should. This affects how well some pupils enjoy and engage in school. Leaders should ensure that all pupils understand the behaviour that is expected from them. They should ensure that pupils are consistently challenged and supported to behave as well as they should.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils in key stages 3 and 4 benefit from a coherently planned and consistently high-quality personal development programme. This includes CEIAG. Consequently, pupils' wider personal development experiences are disjointed and often of variable quality. Leaders should act to ensure that all aspects of pupils' personal development are carefully designed. They should ensure that all staff access the support and training they need to deliver these programmes consistently well.
- Leaders' and governors' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses are not always informed by a suitably broad range of information. This means that they do not have a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the quality of education that pupils receive or how well pupils behave. Leaders and governors should evaluate more thoroughly all aspects of the experiences that pupils receive and act on the findings.

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	106376
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	10226383
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,555
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Hope
Headteacher	Lee Fishwick and Emma Taylor (Co-headteachers)
Website	www.bthcc.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 and 20 June 2013

Information about this school

- Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College is maintained by Trafford local authority.
- The school is a voluntary-aided faith school. It is part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in May 2019.
- There are a small proportion of pupils and students with SEND in the sixth form. Some of these pupils have education, health and care plans to support a wide range of learning and/or physical needs.
- The school makes use of six alternative provisions to provide full- and part-time education for 12 pupils. This includes the use of four registered and two unregistered providers.
- 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 education 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim co-headteachers and other senior leaders. They met with representatives of the governing body, the local authority and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at how the curriculum is delivered in some other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of safeguarding checks and referrals. They met with the leaders who have overall responsibility for safeguarding. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about the leaders' work to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for SEND and reading. They also looked at information about the support for pupils who have additional needs.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and around the school site. They also scrutinised behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils from all year groups and considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff and considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including the comments received through Ofsted's free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the views of parents who contacted them during the inspection.

Inspection team

Michael Pennington, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Lindy Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Veitch	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Long	Ofsted Inspector

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