

# The St Thomas the Apostle College

Hollydale Road, Nunhead, London, SE15 2EB

**Inspection dates** 22–23 May 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Recent improvements have not yet led to rising standards for all students. Students' rates of progress are variable across subjects. Attainment is below average and has fluctuated in recent years.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are not all making good progress.
- Students' levels of literacy across the school are not always of a high enough quality. Reading and writing skills are not taught effectively in some lessons.
- Teaching is not yet consistently good. Work is sometimes pitched at the wrong level which means that some students find the work too easy while others struggle to complete it.
- Teachers' planning is sometimes too focused on tasks students need to complete rather than developing their deep understanding of subjects. This limits the amount of progress students make.
- The new leadership team and governors have not had sufficient time to address all the weaknesses they have correctly identified. Some recent improvements are not fully embedded.

### The school has the following strengths

- The quality of leadership and management is good. School leaders are passionately committed to raising standards of teaching and learning to ensure all students achieve more. After a considerable period of instability and change, the pace of improvement is now rapid.
- Students make good progress in mathematics.
- Behaviour is good. New systems have improved attitudes to learning across the school. High expectations and targeted support for more vulnerable students mean that there is little disruption to learning.
- The number of students who are not in education, employment or training when they leave the school is very low. Students are prepared well for the choices they make.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 29 parts of lessons taught by 28 teachers. Twenty six observations were conducted jointly with members of the school’s leadership team. A further five lessons were visited as part of a learning walk with the head of school.
- Discussions were held with the executive headteacher, head of school, senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors were unable to take account of the online Parent View survey as too few responses were received. Account was taken of the school’s own parental response surveys.
- Inspectors reviewed the 21 staff questionnaires returned during the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, scrutinised information about students’ achievement, checked work in students’ books, examined records relating to behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school’s work.

## Inspection team

Lesley Cox, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Kanwaljit Singh

Additional inspector

Janice Williams

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Saint Thomas the Apostle College is a Catholic school for boys.
- It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and situated within a diverse, inner city environment.
- The college has entered into a soft federation with Sacred Heart Catholic School, Camberwell. The headteacher of Sacred Heart is also the executive headteacher of St Thomas the Apostle. This arrangement was agreed by the governing bodies of both institutions after a considerable period of uncertainty caused by changes in the leadership of St Thomas the Apostle. A head of school was also appointed from September 2012.
- Students are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. More than half of the students have African and Caribbean backgrounds. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is high compared with other schools.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is lower than average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding provided for students eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families, is nearly double the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.
- A small number of students currently attend courses offered by Lewisham College and Southwark Inclusion Learning Service (SILS).

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

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and leads to students making more rapid progress across all subjects, by ensuring that:
  - teachers use assessment information to plan tasks that take account of different starting points and allow work to be set at the correct level for every student, including disabled students and those with special educational needs
  - teachers quickly set a variety of activities that engage students when working with the whole class
  - teachers check for deeper understanding of subjects and identify gaps in learning
  - more attention is given to developing students' reading and writing skills
  - students are given time to make corrections and respond to the advice given by teachers
  - there is sufficient challenge for the more able students to stretch them and raise their achievement.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students generally join the school with starting points that are below average. When they leave, their attainment is still below average. Examination results over the past three years have fluctuated. In 2012, 42% of students achieved five GCSE passes at Grade A\*-C including English and mathematics, which was 13% below the national average. This was an improvement on the results achieved in 2011 but still below those of 2010. It reflects the lack of direction and sharp focus on improvement prior to the engagement of the executive headteacher and head of school.
- Students do not always learn as much as they could in lessons. This is because there is an emphasis on completing tasks rather than acquiring a deeper understanding of principles and concepts. Rates of progress are inconsistent across different subjects and more able students are not always challenged to achieve at the highest level.
- Some students with disabilities or special educational needs are not making sufficient progress in lessons. However, careful tracking and improved levels of support mean that most are learning more quickly than they were and gaps in their understanding are closing.
- Standards across the school are now rising and students are making better academic progress. Students in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve more than those who took examinations last year.
- Students supported by the pupil premium funding usually make the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics. In 2012, these students gained GCSE results in English and mathematics that were about one third of a grade below other students at the school. The gap in achievement is closing and this is likely to be reflected in examination results this year.
- Students who speak English as an additional language do as well as, or better than, other students. This is an indication of how well the school promotes equality of opportunity for all students.
- Progress in mathematics is consistently good and students achieve well. Rates of progress in English have improved this year and more students are achieving the challenging targets that they have been set.
- Students are only entered early for GCSE examinations if they are likely to achieve the top grades. Most students will sit examinations at the end of Year 11 when courses are completed.
- Students who attend other establishments for some or all of their lessons are achieving well. Their progress is tracked carefully and this demonstrates that they are working successfully towards achieving their individually agreed targets. Links with a number of alternative education providers have been made to ensure that students have access to wider opportunities that meet their needs.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Although improving, teaching is not yet consistently good. New initiatives to improve the quality of teaching across the school have not been in place long enough to accelerate students' progress in all subjects.
- Not all teachers use available information about how well students are learning in order to inform their planning. Consequently, in some lessons, the same activities are set for the whole class without taking account of different starting points or additional needs. Able students are not always challenged to learn as much as they could because they are given work that is too easy.
- Some teachers talk for too long and, as a result, students lose concentration. Opportunities to stretch and challenge students are sometimes missed because teachers fail to check understanding and students spend too long completing low-level tasks.

- Standards of literacy are inconsistent. Students generally speak confidently and clearly, but work seen in books shows that standards of writing and presentation are not always good. The quality of reading and writing is variable and not all students make sufficient progress in this area.
- The quality of marking and feedback is also variable. Some teachers do provide explanations about what is done well and how to improve further. However, students are not always given opportunities to respond to teachers' corrections. As a result, mistakes are often repeated, leaving gaps in learning.
- Homework tasks are set regularly, but they do not always allow students to extend their understanding or develop skills in finding out things for themselves because tasks are too easy.
- The amount of good or better teaching has risen consistently since September 2012. Staff and students recognise the improvements that have been made and are aware of the higher standards that are being demanded of them. Most are responding positively to the clear direction being given by the senior team.
- Where teaching is good or better, the pace of learning is fast, and students are well motivated and engaged in learning. Activities are pitched at the correct level and skilful questioning extends students' learning. Teachers check for understanding and adapt teaching approaches to meet students' needs. As a result, all students make good or better progress.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students' attitudes to learning have improved since the last inspection. Most enjoy lessons, are well motivated and eager to learn. There was no low-level disruption observed throughout the inspection. However, not all students take enough responsibility for their own learning, relying too heavily on teachers telling them what to do.
- The number of students who are temporarily excluded has reduced dramatically and is now almost in line with other schools. The new behaviour support systems have raised expectations about standards of behaviour across the school. Students know exactly what is expected of them and the consequences of behaving poorly. Good behaviour is recognised and rewarded. Staff and students say that behaviour has improved and is now good; inspectors agree.
- The school provides high levels of support for students who require additional help. Staff are skilled at overcoming barriers to learning. They develop positive relationships, form effective partnerships with parents and provide individual learning programmes that allow students to succeed.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and when they do happen, appropriate action is taken. This includes the use of reflective discussions and the involvement of parents to ensure that concerns are recognised and addressed. Students are knowledgeable about most forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and know how to keep themselves safe. They are less sure about recognising or dealing with homophobic bullying.
- Safeguarding procedures are in place and students say that they feel safe. They particularly value the high staff presence outside the school at the start and end of the day, saying that this makes them feel secure, provides a welcome and allows them to talk to staff.
- Students demonstrate self-control and behave appropriately outside lessons, making good use of the improved facilities during lunch times. They are very appreciative of the new classrooms, games areas and library, having endured limited access during the recent rebuilding programme. They say that 'the whole school has changed' and that 'everything is much better now'.
- Attendance levels are above average and improving. The numbers of students who are persistently absent or late are reducing. This is because systems for challenging poor attendance and lateness are now applied consistently across the school, and individual attendance rates are regularly reviewed by tutors and year leaders.

**The leadership and management are good**

- Led by the executive headteacher and the head of school, leaders work as a cohesive and effective team and their strong, determined leadership is recognised by staff, students and parents. They are committed to improving achievement and the quality of teaching in the school until these are at least good. Staff and students recognise that the rate of improvement has been rapid this year.
- There are robust and rigorous systems in place to manage the performance of staff, which link to their progression through pay scales. Support programmes and wider professional training are closely linked to the needs of the school and individual staff.
- Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Although inconsistent, standards of teaching are rising quickly as a result of the careful monitoring and relentless drive to eradicate inadequate practice when it is discovered. Together with subject and pastoral leaders, the senior leaders are working hard to tackle underachievement.
- Behaviour systems are well managed. As a result, standards of behaviour have improved across the school. Raised expectations and high levels of support have led to significant improvements in students' attitudes as they are increasingly proud to be part of an aspirational community.
- Leaders have undertaken a review of the subjects being taught and have correctly identified that improvements still need to be made to ensure the school provides different, appropriate pathways for students.
- Opportunities for promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural values are strong across the school. Further improvements are planned to ensure that all lessons take account of these values and allow students to develop an improved understanding and awareness of the world they live in.
- Most students go on to study higher level courses at college and are given good advice and guidance to ensure they are successful in their choices. As a result, there are hardly any students who are not in education, employment or training when they leave the school.
- School leaders and governors have commissioned support from a number of external consultants, who work across the two schools led by the executive headteacher. They work within agreed areas that have been identified as requiring improvement and report to senior leaders. Their reports have allowed leaders to agree priorities, evaluate the performance of staff and improve the quality of teaching.
- The governance of the school:
  - Since the last inspection, the governing body has improved the level of support and challenge it offers school leaders. Governors have helped steer the school through a difficult time of changing leadership, falling standards and an extensive rebuilding programme. Together with the diocese and local authority, they have formalised a beneficial link with a partner school, appointed the executive headteacher and drawn on his considerable experience and expertise. They recognise the strengths of the new leadership team and work collaboratively with them to raise standards across the school. They benefit from the skills of new governors who are experienced in human resources, financial and educational matters. Governors access training and support from the local authority and the Diocese of Southwark to stay informed. They make good use of achievement data to check how much progress students are making. They have carefully considered how to spend additional funding, such as the pupil premium money to overcome barriers to learning for the most disadvantaged students. The governing body has been closely involved in monitoring the performance of staff and receives regular reports from the executive headteacher and head of school on this and other matters.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	100857
<b>Local authority</b>	Southwark
<b>Inspection number</b>	400431

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary Aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	674
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Joseph Reed
<b>Headteacher</b>	Serge Cefai (Executive Head) Eamon Connolly (Head of School)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 March 2010
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