

# Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The St Thomas the Apostle College

Hollydale Road, Nunhead, London SE15 2EB

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Inspection dates:

5 and 6 November 2024

## **Outcome**

The St Thomas the Apostle College has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

The St Thomas the Apostle College is an inspiring, exciting, and highly successful school. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, want to come to school and thoroughly enjoy everything that is on offer. Their high levels of attendance and positive attitudes to learning are exemplary. Pupils know they are safe, and they deeply trust the school staff to deal with any concerns.

The school's focus is on expectation, rather than aspiration. Staff expect all pupils and students to achieve highly and to be the best version of themselves. These expectations are realised in the school's outcomes and what students do next. Many enter employment, education, or training. The school's outcomes are among the best for all schools in the country. The school's motto is 'excellence with care.' Pupils testify to how this works in practice. One said, echoing the views of others, 'The school is very supportive about behaviour. If you are slacking, they will not give up on you, because they always go above and beyond.'

Pupils and students behave with courtesy and consideration. Girls who joined the school in the sixth form report that the boys are respectful and welcoming. In lessons, pupils are diligent, focused, and eager to learn.

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

The school's curriculum is ambitious and inclusive, preparing pupils well for life and the next stages of learning. Outcomes and progress for all pupils, including those who may be disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are exceptional. Vulnerable pupils spoke effusively about how they are encouraged and

supported. In all subjects, the content and order of pupils' learning has been carefully designed so they can build on what they already know. Teachers help them learn and remember more. Skilful prompting helps pupils explore and debate topics deeply.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. They teach in a routinised, structured way that helps develop long-term memory. Teachers skilfully and rigorously check pupils' knowledge and understanding. They identify and address any gaps pupils have. In all subjects, pupils act on teachers' advice to correct mistakes, redraft, and expand answers. This ensures their work is of consistently high quality. The school has invested hugely in creative subjects such as drama, art, technology, and music. Pupils are especially proud of their work in these areas and keen to show off their creative compositions and imaginative designs.

The school is highly effective in developing literacy and oracy and promoting reading. Pupils who struggle to read are well supported through bespoke teaching. The school specifically supports pupils with developing their handwriting too.

Pupils embrace the school's high expectations of their behaviour. They call this '100% STAC', and they can explain what it means and why it works. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Pupils say bullying does not happen, but they would know what to do if it did. Year 7 pupils report that sixth-form mentors have helped them organise their work and behave better. The school's work with the community and families, particularly to promote attendance, is a model for others.

Pupils and students are well prepared for future success in education, employment, or training. Nearly all pupils go on to further and higher education. They value the wide-ranging careers education and opportunities to experience the world of work. They also learn to be responsible citizens and kind people. Pupils are sensitively prepared for the wider world. They listen to others and express their views in a well-managed environment. This builds their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils learn to represent others through the school council and have opportunities to develop as leaders. Students report that they really have a voice in this school.

Pupils value the plethora of opportunities to pursue their own interests and talents and to gain cultural insights. They participate in an array of clubs ranging from music to Manga and various sporting activities. Last year, over a thousand pupils went on school journeys, including to various European countries and cultural events in London.

Leadership and management are exceptional. Leaders promote relevant, impactful professional development for all staff. They deeply engage with the whole school community and the wider local area. They listen to staff and take into account the pressures on them. Staff are proud and enjoy working at the school. Early career teachers are happy here and feel well supported.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged St Thomas the Apostle College to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in November 2018.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	100857
<b>Local authority</b>	Southwark
<b>Inspection number</b>	10345694
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,101
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	287
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Joseph Reed
<b>Headteacher</b>	Eamon Connolly
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stac.uk.com">www.stac.uk.com</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	20 and 21 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school's sixth form has grown from 52 students at the last inspection to 287 currently.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- St Thomas the Apostle is a Catholic college. Its last section 48 inspection was in September 2019, when it was judged outstanding in every category. The next section 48 inspection is due this year.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education

provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, executive headteacher, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. They met with curriculum leaders, governors and representatives of the diocese and local authority. They visited a wide range of lessons, particularly in the sixth form and also in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects. They spoke to groups of pupils in meetings and at social times. They talked to teachers. They looked at pupils' work. They interrogated a range of documentation, including the single central record, data on off-rolling, nationally published outcomes data, governors' minutes and data on attendance, behaviour, and destinations.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.

### **Inspection team**

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