

St Thomas the Apostle College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100857
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	307511
Inspection dates	20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Sean Hanan HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	745

Appropriate authority	Governing Body
Chair	Mrs E Doran
Headteacher	Mr D Fox
Date of previous inspection	January 2004

School address	Hollydale Road Nunhead London SE15 2EB
Telephone number	020 7639 0106
Fax number	020 7277 5471

Age group	11-16
Inspection date(s)	20 June 2007
Inspection number	42522

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-size, Roman Catholic comprehensive school. The first criterion for entry is that boys and their families must be practising Roman Catholics. The remaining places are filled by boys from practising Christian families. The college recruits pupils from a wide geographical area that includes some areas that are particularly socially and economically disadvantaged. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the percentage eligible for free school meals is above average. English is not the first language for almost half the pupils. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The college has specialist status for mathematics and computing and it is a designated training school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Founded on a strong Roman Catholic ethos that permeates its life and work, St Thomas the Apostle College provides a good quality of education for its pupils. The pupils and their parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the college and its work. There is a very high level of respect for people, their differences and the surroundings. Behaviour is very good because rules are simple, clear and effective. Attendance rates are around the national average. The result is a safe and orderly learning environment. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enjoy being at college and understand the importance of a healthy life style. The large majority mature into confident, polite and articulate young men who relate well to each other and to adults. They contribute well to the local community and nearly all continue in further education when they leave. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Prefects are used very effectively in a variety of roles, both to act as role models and to provide excellent support for younger pupils.

Achievement and standards are good overall. Pupils join the college with levels of prior attainment that are below the national average. By the time they leave, they have reached standards that are broadly average. Total points scores at GCSE were slightly above the national average in 2006. In the same year, the percentage of pupils who gained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE fell to below the national average, having been above the national average for the previous two years. The corresponding rate including GCSE mathematics and English was around the national average. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make good progress, especially in English and mathematics, although they do not improve at such a good rate in science. In Years 10 and 11, pupils make satisfactory progress that is in line with similar pupils nationally. Pupils with learning difficulties make as good progress as their peers. Overall, pupils have progressed more quickly than similar pupils in similar schools for the past three years. Their progress in mathematics and English during their time at the college is particularly good. Pupils' rates of progress are tracked very effectively in Years 10 and 11, but there is a need for some greater consistency in earlier years.

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils with learning difficulties are very well supported. The best lessons are well planned and challenge pupils effectively by using a wide variety of activities to stimulate learning. The college recognises the need to further develop the use of information learning technology to enhance pupils' skills, and the need to refine the approaches to providing individualised support in lessons. The college also recognises the need to improve the quality and regularity of homework. The inspection focussed on progress in English and found that effective strategies are leading to an improvement in pupils' progress, which is good. The curriculum is good and pupils are offered a wide range of opportunities to accelerate the pace of their learning. GCSEs can be taken early and some pupils study GCE AS level modules in Year 11. The college recognises that there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to engage in work-related learning. There are plans to address this by introducing vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. Many pupils participate in a wide range of extra curricular activities. The care, guidance and support provided for the pupils, including those with learning difficulties, are outstanding.

Leadership and management are good. Governors work effectively to support the work of the college and to act as 'critical friends'. The college's view of itself is accurate, correctly identifying its particular strengths but also honestly appraising areas where it can perform better. This is a reflection of good leadership by the headteacher, senior staff and middle managers who have worked hard to establish a culture of continuous improvement. Lessons are observed routinely and the information is used in performance management and to inform professional development. College leaders prioritise pupils' personal development and this is having a significant impact on their attitudes and their progress in lessons. Change has been significant and positive over the past three years and the capacity for the college to improve further is outstanding.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, personal development and well-being, and care, guidance and support. Evidence was gathered from the college's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the college's own assessment records, policies and minutes, observation of the college at work, interviews with members of staff and pupils, and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the college's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the college's own assessments, as given in its self evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance individualised support in lessons.
- Extend opportunities for work-related learning.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16–19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	n/a
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	n/a

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	n/a
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	n/a

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	n/a
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	n/a
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	n/a
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	n/a

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	n/a
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	n/a
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Annex B



2nd July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas the Apostle College, London SE15 2EB

I am writing to let you know the judgements we have made about your college. Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking to us about your work and your life in college.

- Your college provides a good education for you.
- The Roman Catholic faith is central to the way in which your college operates.
- The headteacher and the other people with responsibility make decisions with your best interests at heart.
- Nearly all of you attend regularly, behave yourselves well and are confident and polite.
- You enjoy coming to college and work in a safe environment.
- Most of you make good progress during your time at college.
- You are respected as individuals and the support you get from your teachers and tutors is outstanding.
- You contribute well to life in your college and the local community, by telling people what you think and helping in areas such as charity work.

Your college needs to make the following improvements.

- Do more in lessons to help you as individuals.
- Introduce more vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Hanan', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sean Hanan HMI
Lead inspector