

# The St Thomas the Apostle College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	100857
<b>Local Authority</b>	Southwark
<b>Inspection number</b>	335607
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 March 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Samantha Morgan-Price

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	729
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs E Doran
<b>Headteacher</b>	Damian Fox
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 March 2010
<b>School address</b>	Hollydale Road London SE15 2EB
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Three quarters of the time was spent looking at learning; 38 lessons were observed; 38 teachers were seen. The inspection team held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's improvement plan, student achievement data, departmental action plans, records of lesson observations and scrutinised 141 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the achievement of all groups of students, especially average ability, more able, Black African and those requiring school interventions, to determine whether teaching is sufficiently challenging and meeting the needs of all students
- teachers' use of assessment for learning throughout the college to identify whether it is used effectively to match lessons to the needs of all students and to inform them how to improve
- the effectiveness of care, guidance and support systems to enable students to demonstrate improved outcomes
- the effectiveness of middle leaders and managers in embedding ambition and bringing about improvement, especially in poorer performing subjects.

## Information about the school

The college is smaller than the average size comprehensive school. The majority of students are from minority ethnic heritages, the largest proportion being Black African, which makes up over 50% of the college's population. Around 20% are Black Caribbean students. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, as is the number of students with a statement of special educational needs. The majority of these students have behavioural, emotional and social or moderate learning needs. The college received mathematics and computing specialist college status in September 2004. It is also a designated training school. The college is currently in the first stage of its extensive building renovation, which has been funded from the Building Schools for the Future initiative.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

The St Thomas the Apostle College is a satisfactory school where students say they feel very safe. The care, guidance and support given by teachers and managers are good, especially for vulnerable students. This has enabled those students to achieve in line with their peers.

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average, although attainment levels have improved in recent years. They make satisfactory progress in their learning to achieve broadly average standards in their GCSEs in Year 11. Students' progress in mathematics and English is better than in other subjects. Students make satisfactory progress because teaching does not address the needs of all groups of students in lessons, particularly the more able. Students know their National Curriculum targets but not what they need to do to improve their performance. Teaching is not consistently effective in ensuring that all students are motivated or learning as well as they can. Students work well together and value their peers' opinion. Their behaviour is good. Older students assume effective leadership and mentoring roles working as prefects and mentors to younger year groups. This work is strongly embedded in the life of the school. The head boy stated that, 'It is my responsibility to set a good example to other students.' Students' spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. They display a clear sense of knowing what is right or wrong and they work together harmoniously. However, students' cultural awareness is not as well developed as they demonstrate a lack of appreciation of the difference or similarities between their own and other cultures.

The positive impact of the mathematics strand of the specialist status is clearly evident in student outcomes. Students make very good progress in mathematics. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is not embedded and does not make an impact on students' life in the college. Few students take vocational courses. The college is now looking at ways of increasing the options available to students for work-related learning.

Leaders and managers have been successful in providing a cohesive college community where students know who to turn to when they have concerns. The college has taken some actions to improve its contribution to its local and wider communities, although it has not evaluated its effectiveness. The college's self-evaluation is broadly accurate but the level of monitoring of action plans has not enabled the school to address some underperformance rapidly. As a consequence, planning for improvement lacks precision. Actions to improve teaching, some underperforming subjects and the provision in ICT have been particularly slow. There is insufficient monitoring of the performance of groups of students, especially those students who previously underachieved. The college

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has been successful in maintaining the good levels of progress students make in mathematics and English and therefore demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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

- Raise students' achievement in all subjects by:
  - improving the quality of teaching by ensuring it meets the needs of all groups of students
  - monitoring the effectiveness of leaders' and managers' actions to bring about improvement.
- Broaden the curriculum to better prepare students for life in the wider community and the world of work by:
  - improving the vocational provision available to students
  - improving the vocational provision available to students
  - improving the school's contribution to community cohesion.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

The proportion of students who achieve five good GCSE grades is low, although an average proportion of students achieve five or more A\* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. In lessons seen, a very large majority of students make satisfactory progress in their learning. In the better lessons, students were enthusiastic to learn and responded well to teachers' directions. Inspectors observed some good examples of where students worked cooperatively and collaborated well when they were given engaging and challenging tasks to undertake. Students did not learn as well where they were not encouraged or challenged to do their best. In some of these lessons, students lacked a sense of urgency to complete their work or to ensure that their written work was of a good standard. In these lessons, students' focus became off-task quickly.

In lessons and around the college, students are respectful of each other and of other members of the college community. They have a good awareness of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle and participation in extra-curricular physical activities is high. However, some students recognise they could do more to maintain a healthy diet. Students are well prepared for their life after St Thomas the Apostle. They have a good awareness of what options are available to them, make good progress in mathematics and English, and some develop excellent leadership skills. The level of students' attendance is broadly average and is improving well.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

In most cases, teachers' planning of lessons is thorough and they use National Curriculum levels or grades to enable students to have an understanding of what can be achieved. However, there is insufficient attention to the levels of challenge required for the differing levels of students' ability. In better lessons, inspectors observed the good use of timed targets to inject good pace into the lesson. In these lessons, students make good progress in their learning. The number of teaching assistants has improved since the last inspection, although their use to support learning in lessons is inconsistent.

The college provides a traditional curriculum for students in both Key Stages, although new BTEC courses are to be introduced in Key Stage 4 in September 2010. The supporting curriculum for more vulnerable students in both Key Stages is working well. However, there are few curriculum opportunities for more able students. In Key Stage 3, the college's use of the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) and personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) curricular initiatives is embedding well and as a result of this, students demonstrate better learning skills.

Students contribute well to the care, guidance and support provided by the college. Year 10 students act as 'reading partners' to younger year groups and there is an effective system of prefects' support. These peer support systems have positively impacted upon students' behaviour and levels of aspiration. There is a well-managed behaviour and support unit with good monitoring procedures that has enabled the college to provide targeted support for students with poor behaviour. This has reduced the instances of poor behaviour. The college works well with external agencies to provide the

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appropriate support for vulnerable students. However, insufficient attention has been given to the monitoring of referrals and the progress of vulnerable groups of students.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective are leadership and management?

Under the caring and thoughtful leadership of the headteacher, the college has identified the right priorities to bring about improvement. Procedures for safeguarding are satisfactory, although some systems to monitor vulnerable students' support are not stringent enough. The challenging target set to improve the quality of lessons is yet to be realised and, as a consequence, the improvement in students' achievement has been slow. Staff use data well at all levels, although teachers are not always using data to inform the level of challenge required for students. The college works hard to provide a harmonious community where all students are cared for and supported well. The school tackles racial and other discrimination well. However, leaders and managers do not have a clear understanding of the performance of groups of students in the college, especially those which are underachieving. As a result, the college's promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Analysis of the college's contribution to its wider and global community is not well developed and insufficient evaluation of its actions has been undertaken. Governors are supportive of the college's work and have a sound understanding of the key priorities of the college. However, their lack of understanding of students' achievement has limited their level of challenge to the college's performance.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>

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<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelming in their opinion that their children enjoy school and that the college keeps them safe. Most parents and carers are of the view that the college informs them of their child’s progress. Not as many parents and carers thought the college helped their child to have a healthy lifestyle or that the college took account of their suggestions or concerns. Inspectors judged that the college provides many good opportunities for students to have a healthy lifestyle that results in good student participation. Inspectors judged that there are many good mechanisms to communicate with parents and carers, and that there was very good attendance at parents’ and carers’ evening.



## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The St Thomas the Apostle College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 141 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 704 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	62	44	66	47	7	5	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	53	38	78	55	7	5	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	70	50	60	43	5	4	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	37	78	55	9	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	47	33	77	55	8	6	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	27	82	58	12	9	6	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	21	74	52	25	18	9	6
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	41	29	76	54	9	6	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	28	75	53	13	9	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	32	71	50	15	11	6	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	23	74	52	14	10	5	4
The school is led and managed effectively	51	36	72	51	7	5	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	43	63	45	8	6	5	4

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



12 March 2010

Dear Students

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

Thank you very much for welcoming us when we came to inspect your college. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing what you feel about the school. Your views are important in helping the school to improve.

We judged that your college is satisfactory. It does provide good care, guidance and support. You felt the college made you feel safe, that you worked together harmoniously and behaved well. The college has enabled you to develop excellent spiritual, moral and social skills and understanding, although your awareness of differences or similarities of your culture compared to others is not as good. We judged that the work of the prefects in the school gave older students excellent opportunities to develop leadership skills. Overall, we judged that you gain broadly average grades in your GCSE because your progress is satisfactory, although you make good progress in mathematics and English. The headmaster and senior managers do understand what they need to do to improve your achievement, and the inspection team have recognised that there are always things that could be better. Therefore, we have asked your leaders and managers to:

- raise achievement in all subjects by
- improving the quality of your lessons by ensuring teaching meets the needs of all groups of students
- monitoring the effectiveness of leaders' and managers' actions to bring about these improvements
- broaden your curriculum to better prepare you for life in the wider community and the world of work by
- providing a more effective provision in ICT
- improving the vocational provision available
- improving the college's contribution to its local and wider communities

You can help the college by continuing to attend well, being attentive in lessons and behaving well at all times.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price

Her Majesty's Inspector

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