



DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 100857

St Thomas the Apostle College

Hollydale Road

Nunhead

SE15 2EB

Inspection date: 23-24 September 2019

Chair of Governors: Mr Joseph Reed

Headteacher: Mr Eamon Connolly

**Inspectors: Mr Tom Cahill
Dr. Janet Croggon**

EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR
Tel 01689 829331

Director of Education: Dr Simon Hughes



Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Thomas the Apostle College is a voluntary aided Catholic school for boys and is heavily oversubscribed. It is situated in the Camberwell Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and is maintained by Southwark LA. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Thomas the Apostle, Nunhead; English Martyrs, Walworth; Our Lady of Sorrows, Peckham; Holy Cross, Catford and Sacred Heart, Camberwell. The percentage of pupils who are baptized Catholics is 30% but the proportion is increasing rapidly in the lower years as the school becomes more successful. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 7% in key stage 3 (Years 7 and 8) and 9% in key stage 4 (Years 9,10 and 11). Pupils take their GCSE in Religious Education at the end of Year 10, a year earlier than their other subjects.

The school now takes pupils from 11 to 18 years. The school has opened a mixed Sixth form provision on site since the last inspection. The number of pupils currently on roll is 1036 including 235 pupils in the Sixth form. The school has grown significantly since the last inspection and this expansion has been managed very well. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Around 11 % of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of students are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest proportion being Black African, which makes up over half of the college's population. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is spoken as an additional language is above average.

The school has been in a soft federation with Sacred Heart School, Camberwell since March 2012. The Head teacher of the latter became Executive Head teacher of both schools when the federation was formed.

A new subject leader for Religious Education took up post in September 2018. Since the previous inspection, Chaplaincy is now provided through a team of staff rather than one individual. The school was named the TES School of the Year in 2017 as a result of the huge



improvements that have taken place at the school in recent years including the progress made by all pupils.

The school has addressed the recommendations made in the previous inspection report, although the time allocation for Religious Education lessons should continue to be reviewed to ensure it fully meet the requirements of the Bishops' Conference

Publication date 13th November 2019



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Thomas the Apostle College is an Outstanding Catholic school because:

- The school provides the highest quality Catholic education that is highly inclusive and safe. This allows all pupils to flourish and to achieve their full potential whatever their talents, academic ability and social or ethnic background.
- The excellent and mature behaviour of the pupils both in class and around the school contributes significantly to the outstanding attitudes to learning shown by the pupils.
- Outstanding teaching has led to outstanding outcomes achieved by the pupils. As a result, progress made by the pupils is amongst the highest of any school in the country.
- Outstanding Catholic leadership from the headteacher together with his highly experienced leadership team have created a Catholic school of the highest quality. Leaders and governors have created a shared vision, known and valued by each member of the school community.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

Continue to keep the Religious Education curriculum timetable allocation under review to ensure it meets fully the requirements of the Bishop's Conference.

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Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

Catholic Life

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

1

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

1

Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

1

CATHOLIC LIFE

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- Pupils derive huge benefits from attending this outstanding Catholic school which provides all pupils with every opportunity to achieve their full potential and develop their talents.
- The school's motto of 'excellence through care' is clearly demonstrated in every aspect of school life each day. The expectations and aspirations of the staff for their pupils is impressive and the pupils respond accordingly. The result is a harmonious, safe and inclusive community where only the very best is good enough. As one pupil said "The school is like a second home to me".
- The school has created an oasis of calm for its pupils as well as a highly effective learning environment. This allows all pupils to flourish and where each and every person in the school community feels valued and respected.
- The behaviour of the pupils is very impressive whether in class or in the playground. Their highly positive and mature attitudes to learning allow them to make progress, which can only be described as exceptional, and places the school amongst the strongest performing schools in the whole of the country.
- Pupils have many opportunities to develop their leadership skills through a strong and effective prefect system. Pupils can also take leadership roles such as chaplaincy prefects as well as roles within the House system. Pupils relish taking roles of responsibility to help the school and others in any way they can.
- The school council is also highly effective and the school's leadership team is supportive whenever possible. The school council, as a way of demonstrating its support of the environment, requested the school to install solar panels. Working in partnership with the school leaders, this project has now been completed. Pupils also have the opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, Sports Leadership activities and the Catenians' public speaking competition. Pupils also have the opportunity to learn a very wide range of musical instruments.
- Respect for all and service to others lie at the heart of the school's Catholic mission. Pupils are encouraged to support others who are less well off than themselves even though many families at the school struggle financially. The school supports many charities at local, national and international levels. These include; the Demelza Hospice for children, Copleston Centre in Peckham which supports asylum seekers and refugees, The Passage and other homeless charities as well as CAFOD. The annual Christmas Hamper charity collection is always well supported. Pupils also serve at Mass and a number of the older students are Eucharistic ministers.



- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and in a meeting with an inspector, praised the leadership of the headteacher and the exceptional pastoral care provided to their sons and daughters by the teachers and support staff.
- Parents felt, like their sons and daughters, that the teachers and support staff always go the extra mile and are passionate to ensure every pupil can make excellent progress.
- Parents are welcomed into the school whenever possible and are kept fully informed through a fortnightly newsletter which covers all aspects of life at the school including its Catholic ethos.

The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The beautiful school chapel lies at the heart of the school and makes a significant contribution to supporting the Catholic life of the school.
- Local priests give generously of their time coming into school to celebrate Masses on a regular basis and to provide an opportunity for pupils to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The school has developed an effective chaplaincy team consisting of 4 members of the teaching staff. each having their own areas of responsibility such as retreats, liturgy and fund raising for charity. The subject leader for Religious Education leads the team with oversight from the Head teacher.
- Religious artefacts and icons support the distinctly Catholic ethos which permeates every part of the school.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- Leaders and governors have a clear vision for their school, which is shared and fully supported by all members of the school community. They know their school exceptionally well and the grades indicated in the school 'self-evaluation are fully endorsed by the inspectors.
- The headteacher provides outstanding Catholic leadership to the whole school community and beyond. He fully understands the role and duties of a Catholic school and his passion for the school is obvious. As one member of staff said "He is the backbone of the school and his love of the school and his pupils is infectious". Staff morale is very high.
- The school commits significant funds to employ a counsellor who is able to provide emotional support and guidance to troubled pupils. Pupils spoke highly of this provision and the difference it makes to their lives.



- The school also funds a shared support worker (with Sacred Heart School) who provides outreach work to families providing help and guidance with such things as housing and travel. Parents said they greatly valued this help.
- The school also buys additional extra Educational Psychology support as well as Speech and Language Services so pupils with additional needs are very well supported.
- The school is outward looking and shares its resources and facilities such as the on-site swimming pool with other local schools. It has also supported a struggling local Catholic school at the request of the Diocese. In 2019 it also hosted the Diocesan 'Picnic and Praise'.
- The school's Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) policy is currently being reviewed to ensure it meets Diocesan requirements.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Pupils clearly enjoy their Religious Education lessons and particularly enjoy learning about other world faiths. Their enjoyment is reflected in their very positive attitudes to learning and the highly positive relationships they have with their teachers. They take immense pride in their work as shown by the quality of work in their books.
- Pupils made clear to inspectors they very much value the hard work and commitment of their teachers who the pupils said 'go the extra mile' so that everyone can succeed. All pupils are provided with an excellent revision guide, compiled by their teachers. Teachers are readily available to pupils who fall behind or require additional support.
- Outcomes in Religious Education are amongst the highest in the school and at least in line with other core subjects and often better. National data for pupil progress shows pupils at the school make better progress than most other schools nationally. This data and school data confirms progress is therefore outstanding and this has led to outstanding outcomes for the pupils.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- The quality of teaching is at least consistently good and much of it is outstanding. This is a result of the passion of teachers for their subject and providing the pupils with the high quality lessons. Lessons are always well planned, have good pace and clearly challenge the pupils.
- Teachers regularly check the understanding of the pupils through highly effective questioning and a variety of assessment practices. Pupils have a weekly self-assessment, which they use to plot their progress during the year.
- In addition, the department makes use of the school's highly effective assessment system to track progress and provide support where a pupil may need it. The school data system is very comprehensive and again shows pupils in Religious Education make excellent progress.
- Teachers are very well qualified and have excellent subject knowledge and work collegiately developing and sharing learning resources.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- The subject leader for Religious Education was appointed to the post in September 2018. Her passionate leadership and enthusiasm has clearly had a major impact on the teaching of Religious Education and the outcomes of the



pupils as well as the profile of the department in the school. She is well supported by her departmental colleagues and her collegiate and open approach has resulted in a strong team with high morale.

- The headteacher line manages the department and they very much value his support and commitment. The department is quite rightly seen as a core subject within the school. It is well resourced and enjoys large and bright classroom accommodation.
- A link governor to the department monitors the work of the department and feeds back to the full governing body.
- Leaders and governors are fully aware of the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in regard to the time allocation for Religious Education. Although the time allocation for Religious Education is less than that specified, the school is able to show that other timetabled lessons such as PSHE and assemblies also contribute to the Religious Education curriculum. This detailed analysis indicates the school at least meets the minimum requirements. However, Leaders and Governors should continue to review the curriculum to ensure such requirements are fully met.
- The school has a two year GCSE course for Religious Education which starts in Year 9 and pupils take their GCSE exam at the end of Year 10. It is the only subject in the school, which has this early entry. The outcomes of pupils clearly suggest this approach is very successful and does not appear to have any negative consequences although there is no assessed Religious Education course in Year 11.
- The courses offered by the school are fully compliant with the Curriculum Directory. At Key Stage 3, the school is reviewing the course to ensure a greater range of world religions is included in the programme. At GCSE, the department offer the Edexcel Syllabus A, including the study of Judaism and Philosophy and Ethics. A small number of pupils follow an entry-level course where GCSE is not appropriate. This might be the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or pupils joining the school late. 'A' level Religious Education is becoming increasingly popular and again outcomes are excellent. A general course for Religious Education is also provided in the Sixth form although this is not formally assessed.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- Pupils respond very positively to prayer and collective worship, which is of high quality and carefully planned to meet their needs. They show great respect during collective worship and other liturgical celebrations.
- Prayers are said at the start of Religious Education lessons as well as other subjects. Pupils are keen to lead prayers, which are often composed by themselves.
- Pupils are keen to participate and lead collective worship. The excellent gospel choir involves a very large number of pupils singing at Masses and other liturgical celebrations. Singing and music ensures all pupils are engaged and participate enthusiastically.
- Weekly assemblies are carefully planned and follow the themes of the liturgical year. They take into account the diverse nature of the pupils at the school. In an excellent assembly seen during the inspection, music was played by a pupil as their peers entered the hall. Their behaviour was impeccable and they carefully listened to the staff and pupils involved in delivering the assembly. They fully grasped the aim of the assembly and the values and morals being promoted.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.

- The school ensures that worship and prayer are at the heart of the school as well as central to every school celebration.
- The school is fortunate to have a beautiful chapel, which dates from when the school was a convent. Collective worship and prayer in the chapel makes a significant contribution to the Catholic ethos of the school and to developing the spirituality of the pupils.
- The chaplaincy team ensure all liturgical celebrations including Masses are well prepared and structured in order to meet the needs of the pupils, taking into account the wide range of faiths and beliefs represented at the school.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.

- School leaders ensure that pupils have access to high quality collective worship, which is planned to reflect the liturgical year and to meet the needs of all the students. Mass is celebrated on all major feast days which take place in term time as well as welcome Masses at the start of the year and for the feast day of St Thomas.
- Governors are regular visitors to the school and these Masses, as well as other liturgical celebrations and school celebrations.



- The headteacher meets regularly with the subject leader for Religious Education who also leads the Chaplaincy team. Liturgical celebrations are evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis.
- The chaplaincy team provide tutors with high quality resources for daily collective worship whether in form time or in Year or school assemblies.

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