

The St Thomas the Apostle College

Hollydale Road, Nunhead, London SE15 2EB

Inspection dates

20–21 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher, executive headteacher and those responsible for governance have an unwavering determination that every pupil will achieve their potential.
- Leaders have ensured a track record of success since the previous inspection in 2014. The school has maintained exceptionally high standards of pupils' progress every year.
- Leaders have an accurate view of how well the school is achieving. They are sharply focused on making what is already excellent even better.
- Teachers' high expectations are at the heart of teaching in the school. Current pupils' progress is extremely strong, including for the most able, disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Teachers plan learning that engages, challenges and motivates pupils of all abilities. Pupils learn skills and acquire knowledge in depth and with breadth.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive. They engage with work set in class diligently and participate in the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities.
- Pupils behave impeccably in lessons and throughout the school. They are polite, thoughtful and determined to do well.
- Staff at all levels go the 'extra mile' to make sure pupils achieve, feel cared for and thrive within a supportive and productive learning environment. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance for all groups of pupils is high.
- There are excellent arrangements in place to support pupils' personal development. These arrangements make a significant contribution to developing pupils' positive and responsible attitudes.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding extremely well. Teachers make the most of opportunities to encourage pupils to debate, discuss and reflect on issues of interest.
- Sixth-form students make above average progress in academic and vocational subjects. Through high-quality support and guidance, the overwhelming majority of students go on to further training or study.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In the sixth form, build on the strong teaching and learning to ensure that all students achieve the highest grades across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and executive headteacher provide exceptional leadership. They are uncompromising in their ambition. There is a tangible culture of high expectations of both pupils and staff. Leaders are passionate to improve what is already excellent. This leads to pupils not only making exceptional progress from their starting points but also providing them with a broad range of memorable experiences, developing them as rounded individuals.
- Leaders set very high standards for the school's performance, and rigorously evaluate how well they are doing against these standards. This ensures that where there are dips, whether in the quality of leadership and teaching or in the outcomes that pupils achieve, they act quickly and decisively to improve them.
- All leaders have expertise within their areas of responsibility. Through this, leaders take effective and swift action to ensure that the school continues to improve. Pupils' progress, well-being and development are at the forefront of every action that leaders take.
- The outstanding leadership of teaching means that teachers receive all the support they need and are held to account well for their work. Teachers work closely together to share best practice and reflect on one another's teaching. Staff are proud to work at the school and morale is high.
- Leaders ensure that additional funding for pupils with SEND, pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils who need to catch up is used to overcome barriers to learning so that these pupils make strong progress.
- There is a broad and balanced curriculum in place which enables pupils to access a wide range of experiences and activities which contribute to their development as young people. The curriculum is determinedly ambitious and challenging. A higher proportion than the national average enter the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) suite of subjects, and the progress of these pupils is well above the national average.
- Pupils' experiences are enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, activities and trips. Pupils take part in sporting, and cultural activities as well as orchestras and charity work. There is a flourishing gospel choir in which pupils participate with great enthusiasm. These opportunities ensure that pupils develop into rounded young people who are keen to make a positive contribution to their community and to society.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is a strength of the school. Pupils learn about online personal safety, citizenship and diversity. Pupil leadership is a strong feature of this school. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the role of the school council in working with leaders to bring about changes, for example with the design of the new school logo. Pupils are committed to taking care of each other and celebrating the diversity of each other's backgrounds.
- Leaders ensure that pupils prepare exceptionally well for life in modern Britain. Through tutor-time activities, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and assemblies, pupils develop a strong knowledge of how to keep themselves safe,

work with and support others, and play an active role in society.

Governance of the school

- Governors strongly support the school's values and provide effective strategic guidance to ensure that these values are upheld. They are ambitious for the school and share the headteacher's and executive headteacher's determination that all pupils will do as well as they should.
- Governors have an accurate view of the quality of education in the school. This allows them to ask probing and challenging questions to support the school to develop further.
- Governors ensure that they receive the relevant safeguarding training. Minutes of governing body meetings indicate that safeguarding is a high priority for the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The record of checks on the suitability of staff to work with children is well maintained and meets statutory requirements. Leaders make sure that the appropriate checks are made on newly appointed staff before they join the school, including checking references that reassure leaders of their suitability.
- Pupils talk openly about the excellent work that the school does to keep them safe. They are confident in explaining how they stay safe online and how staff keep them safe when travelling home from school. They know the warning signs to look out for if their friends are experiencing difficulty. Pupils are confident that reporting issues will result in help and support. As one pupil said, 'Teachers aren't just teachers, they are listening ears as well.'
- Teaching and non-teaching staff have a strong understanding of the local risks posed to pupils. They are vigilant to signs of abuse, gang affiliation, extremism and radicalisation and know what to do should they become worried. Leaders work closely with families and external agencies, including the police, to ensure pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They use their excellent subject knowledge to plan lessons that significantly extend pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress.
- A well-established culture of research and development ensures that teachers have honed particular teaching methods and strategies. This provides considerable consistency of approach across subjects and key stages. The strongest practitioners in the school provide excellent support for less-experienced colleagues.
- Teachers use a range of ways to check pupils' levels of understanding, including high-quality questioning. Questions are carefully phrased and directed at particular pupils at times to check for any misconceptions or errors in their learning. This practice helps pupils to maintain high levels of interest, with an expectation that they explain and

justify their thoughts, and this keeps them engaged during class discussions.

- Teachers consistently engender mutual respect in the classroom. Pupils work in a calm and hardworking environment. This contributes to the very strong progress made by pupils.
- Strong, caring and respectful relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils like and trust their teachers. They also support each other very well. As a result, pupils are not afraid to have a go at tackling difficult work, secure in the knowledge of their teachers' and classmates' support.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very strong. Pupils see school as a safe and secure place where their interests and ambitions will be nurtured by teachers and other staff. Pupils respond with high levels of engagement. Time is used effectively in lessons so that pupils can craft their writing, absorb ideas and reflect on new knowledge, for example.
- The high quality of pupils' oral responses to teachers' questions supports pupils in their written responses to tasks. Pupils' written work is characterised by strong standards of literacy. These strong standards of literacy and oracy enable pupils to write longer and more complex responses to tasks. This is evident not only in English, but in subjects across the curriculum, such as geography.
- Teachers' assessments and feedback to pupils are regular and help pupils to improve their work. Therefore, pupils know how well they are doing in each subject and, specifically, what they need to do in order to improve further.
- Pupils with SEND receive excellent support in class because teachers and teaching assistants plan their support effectively. Teachers ensure that these pupils receive the right balance of challenge and support, enabling them to make strong progress.
- Pupils overwhelmingly praise teachers for the care and support they provide. Pupils value highly their learning opportunities and demonstrate great pride in their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils' personal qualities make a significant contribution to their progress and achievements. Pupils are mature and proud ambassadors for their school.
- Pupils display unfailingly positive attitudes and commitment to learning. They get to lessons promptly and apply themselves diligently, sustaining their concentration across the day. All pupils wear the correct uniform and conduct themselves impeccably. The school site is well maintained and provides a positive, safe environment.
- Leaders and staff work tirelessly to make sure that the welfare of pupils is of utmost priority. Effective relationships have been established with other agencies and professionals. Due to these high-quality relationships, pupils, including the most vulnerable, attend school regularly and make strong progress.
- The school provides a range of services to support pupils, including mentoring and

counselling. Pupils' emotional well-being is appropriately cared for.

- Pupils are highly aware of their social responsibility and display a tangible empathy for others. Fund-raising, charity appeals, and visits to elderly people in residential care are regular features of pupils' community work.
- The school's records show that there is very little bullying in any year group. This is supported by pupils, who say bullying is very rare and, if it arises, it is dealt with promptly.
- Pupils feel safe in and around school. They demonstrate an excellent awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including outside school and when using the internet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- During the inspection, the standard of pupils' behaviour in lessons was never less than impeccable. Conduct around the school was equally impressive, with calm and orderly movement a matter of routine. Pupils respect the school environment and ensure that it is free from litter.
- Pupils conduct themselves towards staff and visitors with excellent manners and courtesy. The strength of relationships between staff and pupils is a significant reason why the standard of learning across the school is so high. The quality of relationships, allied with effective planning, means that pupils are resilient in their learning.
- Pupils support one another extremely well. Prefects and older students keep a close eye on the younger ones and help to ensure that they settle well. As a result, younger pupils show a high degree of respect towards older pupils.
- Leaders have created a school culture that respects diversity. Pupils demonstrated an excellent understanding of the importance of treating people who are different from them with equal respect.
- Pupils love coming to school and are highly appreciative of the support they are offered in both their learning and personal development. As a result, their attendance is exemplary. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that all pupils value their education. Initiatives in place to reduce persistent absence are effective and the rates of persistent absence are below the national average for all groups of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Since the previous inspection, pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 11 have been consistently very strong, and significantly above the national average. Typically, pupils enter the school with starting points below others nationally. In 2016 and 2017 overall progress for pupils from their starting points was in the top 2% of schools nationally.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is significantly above the national average for other pupils. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils' progress placed the school in the top 5% of schools nationally.
- Pupils make especially strong progress from their starting points in mathematics. For example, progress in mathematics placed the school in the top 1% in 2016 and the top

4% in 2017.

- The 2018 provisional outcomes information indicates that pupils' progress, including disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics, English and in the EBacc group of subjects of science, history, geography and modern foreign languages, is significantly above the national average. In other GCSE subjects, provisional outcomes suggest that pupils' progress is also significantly above the national average.
- The school's assessment information indicates that current pupils make outstanding progress throughout key stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Inspection evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of work in pupils' books and folders confirms that this is the case. Progress remains outstanding across subjects and year groups.
- Expectations are consistently high across the school and pupils learn to apply themselves and work hard. Their diligence and clear commitment to improving their work ensures that they quickly develop a secure grasp of essential knowledge and skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well because teachers expect just as much from them as other pupils. Well-considered additional support is provided for disadvantaged pupils who need it, and this has a positive impact on their progress.
- From their different starting points, pupils with SEND make outstanding progress in line with their peers. In current year groups, these pupils make strong rates of progress because of the effective additional support that they receive.
- Similarly, teachers' effective planning enables pupils from different starting points, including the least and the most able, to make strong progress.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as other pupils in school. This reflects the high regard and value that the school places on supporting pupils to reach their potential. Pupils who join the school with very little or no English receive highly effective additional support. As a result, they quickly develop their communication and literacy skills and are able to access fully the outstanding educational provision at the school.
- The catch-up funding is used well to support pupils who have lower levels of attainment on entry to the school in English and mathematics. A significant majority of pupils in Year 7 who are supported by this grant are making at least the progress expected by leaders.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their education or training. As a result of effective careers guidance and preparation throughout the school, the vast majority of pupils progress to an appropriately challenging destination at the end of Year 11.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Leaders have established a culture of high expectations in the sixth form. They use rigorous systems to drive improvement by keeping a very close eye on how well students are doing. They intervene with alacrity when necessary to get students back on track.
- In 2017, student progress for academic and vocational subjects was extremely strong.

Provisional information for 2018 indicates a dip in outcomes for academic subjects. Nevertheless, they remain above the national average.

- Leaders took swift action to identify and rectify reasons for underperformance in a small number of subjects, including physics, further mathematics and economics. As a result, leaders judge progress in vocational and academic subjects for current students to be much better than national averages. Inspection evidence confirms that students make exceptional progress in most subjects, both academic and vocational.
- The quality of teaching is high. As a result of teachers' aspirations for what students can achieve, students are independent and resilient learners. Across a variety of subjects, they are encouraged and enabled to use their curiosity as enquiring learners to make strong progress. Teachers expect and insist that students produce work of a high standard, and students make excellent high-quality notes that deepen their understanding and aid their revision.
- Very few students commence sixth-form courses without a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and/or mathematics. Of the most recent cohort in 2017/18, the proportion of students that achieved a grade 4 in English was similar to the national average. There were no students who commenced courses without a grade 4 in mathematics.
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are self-assured, punctual and ambitious. Students debate issues in a thoughtful and considered manner. They show high levels of independence and cooperate well with each other and their teachers. They work hard and produce high-quality work over time. Students feel safe in school and show high levels of tolerance and respect towards each other.
- Students in the sixth form see themselves as ambassadors for the rest of the school and in the wider community. They say that they have a responsibility to promote high-quality learning throughout the school. Retention in the sixth form is high and student numbers are rising rapidly.
- Leaders have ensured that the requirements of the government's study programmes for 16- to 19-year-olds are fully met. Students undertake a bespoke period of work experience during Year 12 that is built on extensive links with the employment sector. Students' programmes of study consist of the appropriate balance between examination-based courses and an extensive enrichment programme. This includes preparation for applying to university, charity activities, public speaking, Duke of Edinburgh and sports leaders' awards.
- Students are very well supported in the careers guidance they receive, both before commencing courses and during their time in the sixth form. The vast majority of students progress to university. There is strong support for those for whom employment or training, including apprenticeships, is a more appropriate destination.

School details

Unique reference number	100857
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	10058954
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	941
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joseph Reed
Headteacher	Serge Cefai (executive headteacher) Eamon Connolly (headteacher)
Telephone number	020 7639 0106
Website	www.stac.uk.com
Email address	enquiries@stac.southwark.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 November 2014

Information about this school

- This inspection is a section 8 deemed section 5 inspection due to the addition of a sixth form in 2015.
- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The designated religious character of the school is Roman Catholic. The school was inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, on 14–15 November 2013.
- The executive headteacher is the headteacher of Sacred Heart Catholic School, Southwark.

- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils in receipt of support for SEND is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is above the national average.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a wide range of evidence during the inspection, including through observations of teaching, the majority of which was undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work during lessons and sampled a wide range of pupils' written work.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in formal interviews, during lessons and informally at lunchtimes and breaktimes.
- Inspectors held meetings with school staff, including the headteacher and executive headteacher, other senior leaders and staff in charge of aspects of the school's work. Inspectors met with a group of newly qualified teachers.
- The lead inspector met members of the governing body, and spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone.
- A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information relating to attendance and behaviour, minutes of governors' meetings, pupils' progress information; and documentation relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

Inspection team

Carolyn Dickinson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jan Allcorn	Ofsted Inspector
Niall Gallagher	Her Majesty's Inspector
Laurence King	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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