

St Thomas More Language College

Cadogan Street, Chelsea, London, SW3 2QS

Inspection dates 10–11 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- GCSE results across a wide range of subjects are significantly better than those of similar schools and are well above average. As a result of outstanding teaching, all groups of students make rapid and sustained progress.
- In English all students excel and make rapid progress because levels of literacy are developed over time and promoted by highly skilled teaching.
- Teachers have high expectations regardless of students' ability and make academic demands that challenge students so that they can achieve the highest levels of attainment and leave Year 11 fully prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the college shows that students have an extremely mature attitude to each other and to their teachers and this results in a strong family atmosphere and values. Students' attitudes to learning are exemplary and are reinforced by the way in which teachers model good behaviour.
- The headteacher and his associate share an ambitious vision for excellence in driving forward even further improvements.
- The extended leadership team together with strong middle leaders have had a significant impact on improving achievement and progress since the previous inspection.
- Teachers' continuing training is outstanding, with large numbers engaged in further study and several working towards a Masters qualification.
- The very rich range of additional learning opportunities, including some outstanding music provision, are developing strong spiritual, moral, social, cultural and emotional experiences that are a real strength of the college.
- The governing body know the college intimately and work strategically with the senior team in promoting outstanding leadership.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 25 part lessons across different year groups as part of a personal, social and health education programme during day one of the inspection and curriculum lessons on day 2.
- Approximately a quarter of all lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, reviewed pupils’ workbooks, and looked at school policies, including those relating to safeguarding and equality, records of governing body meetings and planning documents.
- Inspectors considered the views of 64 parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They analysed the results of 18 replies to the staff questionnaire.
- The team met with teachers, subject leaders, members of senior management, the bursar and students and spoke with parents on the telephone.
- The lead inspector met with a representative from the local authority.

Inspection team

Kevin Morris, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Elson	Additional Inspector
Joanne Stuart	Additional Inspector
Gill Walley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas More Language College is a smaller-than-average-sized 11–16 co-educational voluntary-aided Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Westminster and in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.
- The college serves a wide geographical area across London and most students come from outside the locality.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for extra funding provided for looked-after children, students eligible for free school meals and children of service families (pupil premium) is well above the national average. In this college it provides extra funding for students eligible for free school meals and those in care. A significant minority also receive Year 7 catch-up premium to support their individual needs.
- Students come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Two thirds come from minority ethnic heritages, significantly above the national average. Over half the students speak English as an additional language but very few are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly below average.
- The college was designated a specialist language college in 2004.
- There is no off-site provision.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Enable the very good practice of assessment using the green pen policy in English to be embedded more widely across the school so that all subject departments can consistently achieve outstanding results.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students make exceptional progress in most subjects, leading to outstanding achievement at GCSE. Achievement is particularly strong in English and this is reflected in exceptional progress and high levels of attainment. Progress is also rapid in mathematics, although attainment is not as high. While students make at least good progress in other subjects, their progress and levels of attainment are not always as high as they are in English.
- The college has been very successful in closing the gaps in attainment between those known to be eligible for pupil premium and other students. In 2013 those in receipt of pupil premium performed as well as other students in English and mathematics.
- Government funding for pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up is being extremely well used to support students and is having a dramatic impact on student outcomes.
- Able students are well catered for and achieve the highest grades at GCSE. The numbers of students over time achieving A* and A grades across the vast majority of subjects continues to exceed national averages.
- Pupils with disabilities and special educational needs make the same rapid progress as other students because much is expected of them and teaching assistants support them extremely well.
- The college's robust internal data for this year shows that students are continuing to make rapid progress and attaining even higher levels.
- In Years 7 to 9, high expectations, structured and regular homework and a strong emphasis on achieving well help to establish a culture where success is seen as the norm. This continues throughout the college so that by the time students are focused on GCSEs they become self-motivated and therefore achieve very well.
- The college's parental/student surveys shows at least two thirds of students read at home every night; this is having a significant impact on standards of reading and writing.
- Since the previous inspection the college has responded to the recommendations by strengthening the use of written feedback to support progress. The 'green pen' marking policy which features in homework planners is used consistently well in English and is having a positive impact on achievement. For example, one student who has English as an additional language was using the policy to reflect on his writing by improving his level of accuracy and choice of vocabulary.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE, and this contributes to their high levels of attainment.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- In most classrooms teachers make learning exciting by providing rich and structured activities that have clarity and purpose and enable pupils to make outstanding progress. Teachers ask open-ended questions that create an inclusive climate for learning and are particularly skilled at knowing how to probe and develop more sophisticated responses from all students. The pace and challenge of lessons is almost always outstanding.
- Teachers plan lessons well using imaginative resources and structure learning around key concepts and ideas. Most teachers use data effectively and know their students strengths and weaknesses well.
- In lessons there is a good balance between teacher input and/or demonstration and student activity. Group work, paired reading and active learning are key features of good and outstanding lessons. Students work well together, focus on the task set and respond positively to teachers, who show a strong commitment to ensuring they do well.

- Teachers' good subject knowledge makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' progress and ensures students learn effectively. Teachers are very skilled in adapting lessons to motivate and strengthen progress and are not limited by the lesson plan, which they use flexibly to support the least able and to challenge high-ability students.
- Students read well and spoke passionately about their choices of fiction and non-fiction texts. The library is used frequently by students and supports them with research and independent work for projects and homework. Students with special educational needs and those in receipt of pupil premium equally make good use of the library and this with the support of very effective teaching assistants helps to secure the rapid progress made.
- Students write well, are generally accurate and take pride in their presentation. The work seen in books over time showed that students are set a good range of written tasks that include writing longer pieces from Year 7 onwards to encourage and promote the skills needed for GCSE.
- Marking is generally well done with helpful commentary on how to get better. In most subjects marking is frequent but on occasions and in a small minority of classes this was not always the case.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students behave extremely well both in lessons and around the college, showing high levels of maturity and respect for their teachers and peers. Prefects take leadership roles and are encouraged through the school's Council to represent student views, which are taken seriously.
- Students talk very positively about how the school promotes other faiths and cultures and is committed to being an equal opportunities college where all opinions are valued.
- There are very few examples of bullying and no examples of racism or prejudice. Students feel that the college responds swiftly and appropriately, should the need arise. Students were able to talk confidently about the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and e-safety, and feel very safe during the school day.
- Students particularly value the support provided by Pastoral and Academic Leaders ('PALs'), whose role has helped to widen the leadership opportunities provided by the college. Very strong relationships with feeder primaries and a well-attended summer school for Year 6 students are helping to establish good partnership relationships.
- The college offers a range of support and extra small-group work. Students with disabilities or special educational needs are supported consistently and effectively so that they can take advantage of the outstanding opportunities which the college offers. Outside speakers, including visitors from Young Enterprise and the Department for Work and Pensions, help to broaden students' experiences of the world of work.
- Attendance and punctuality are improving as a result of detailed checks and new expectations shared with parents. For example, Year 11 parents are contacted when attendance falls below 95% and this is helping to sustain positive outcomes.
- Fixed-term exclusions are reducing rapidly over time and there have been no permanent exclusions.
- Excellent information, advice and guidance for careers and education beyond Year 11 is helping students to secure places at competitive sixth forms in London. Speakers from a range of sixth form providers and previous students of the college support Year 11 in making their choices. Many students continue their education with AS and A levels but some choose more vocational pathways to reflect their interests and career ambitions.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The leadership team, driven by the headteacher and his associate, shows commitment to an ambitious vision in all aspects of the college. There is a relentless drive to continue to improve an already outstanding college. There is a strong focus on academic achievement, pastoral care and a concern for students as individuals.
- The headteacher is practical and knows what needs to be done to make things even better. He is aware of the changes to education policy and how this will impact on the future of the college. The college is not afraid to do things differently and this approach works because it reflects the trend of improvement over time.
- Professional development has a positive impact on the life of the college. Teachers are able to access high-quality courses in a variety of ways. A significant number of staff are engaged in Masters courses, encouraged by leaders, so that staff keep fully abreast of the latest developments in teaching and learning.
- Middle leaders make a strong contribution to the ambitious vision. They are rigorous and accurate in their tracking and analysis of students' progress.
- Self-evaluation is sharp, strong and accurate and helps to clarify strengths and areas for development. It is a 'working document' that is used to respond swiftly as issues arise.
- The curriculum is both traditional and innovative. It is significantly enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including drama, music and sport. All students are supported with targeted literacy support, with teachers paying particular attention to subject-specific vocabulary.
- Senior and middle leaders are relentless in their pursuit of good outcomes, including for those who have special educational needs, those in receipt of pupil premium and those who are supported in Year 7 by 'catch-up' funding. The use of this funding to support reading and reduce class size is a testament to the keen and focused leadership of the headteacher and his team.
- Parents and carers are now showing a growing engagement with the college. Although responses to 'parent view' (the online questionnaire) were few, the college's internal questionnaires had a much higher response rate. Parents confirm that their children are well looked after, happy and safe.
- The college benefits from the light-touch support provided by the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are involved in planning and are informed and supportive in realising the ambitions of the college. The newly appointed Chair of the Governing body has an excellent grasp of how to move the college forward in a changing landscape. She is well supported by informed and highly motivated governors whose skills in finance and special educational needs are holding all leaders to account for the decisions reached. Governors are not afraid to tackle a difficult issue, which enables the college to have robust systems for accountability, performance management, monitoring and evaluation. Governors have a good grasp of how well the college performs and this helps them to ask pertinent and challenging questions. They understand the impact of the use of pupil premium funding and they review statutory policies to ensure that, for example, safeguarding procedures are in place. Governors recognise the need for a more formal induction for new governors and this is now being addressed.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Unique reference number	100502
Local authority	Kensington and Chelsea
Inspection number	428928
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	604
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs L McCabe
Headteacher	Dr T Papworth
Date of previous school inspection	March 2009
Telephone number	020 7589 9734
Fax number	020 7823 7868
Email address	info@stm.rbkc.sch.uk

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