

Saint Thomas More Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100502
Local Authority	Kensington and Chelsea
Inspection number	323290
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	617
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Stuart Wilson
Headteacher	Mr Gerard Connolly
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
School address	Cadogan Street London SW3 2QS
Telephone number	020 7589 9734
Fax number	020 7823 7868

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Saint Thomas More Language College is a smaller-than-average, oversubscribed Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Westminster. The college serves a wide area of London, and most students come from outside the local area. There are more boys than girls in all year groups. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Students come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and about two thirds come from minority ethnic heritages, much higher than the national average. Predominant proportions are from Black African and various minority White heritages. Over half the students speak a language other than English, a much higher proportion than average, and a few are at an early stage of learning English. Thirty-nine different languages are spoken at the college, and after English the most commonly spoken are Portuguese and Tagalog. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average, including those who have a statement of special educational needs. Many of these students have moderate learning difficulties. The college was designated a Language Specialist College in 2004. It achieved Healthy School status in 2008 and it also has Extended Schools Core School status. In February 2008 the college was inspected as part of Ofsted's survey inspection programme in relation to music provision, and was judged to be good in this aspect of its work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Saint Thomas More Language College is a good and improving school. The college's strong Catholic ethos, its exemplary pastoral care and good leadership and management is at the heart of its success. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally strong. Students have a profound sense of spirituality and this was expressed in their reverence during the Mass to celebrate Ash Wednesday at the start of the inspection. They say they feel very safe and well cared for in the college and greatly enjoy their education. One student captured this by remarking, 'This is a cool place to be.' The college promotes community cohesion well and the strongly cohesive college community exemplifies this well.

Students' good achievement and outstanding personal development is supported by a much-improved and good curriculum. The college's exceptionally strong contribution to partnership working has helped it develop an increasingly broad range of curriculum options that meet students' needs and aspirations. The languages specialism considerably enhances the curriculum by enabling students to become competent in a wide range of languages, and by exposing them to a wealth of international opportunities. The specialism has a pronounced impact on teaching and learning across the college and in local schools.

A large majority of teaching and learning is good and some is exemplary. Typically, lessons are characterised by excellent relationships between teachers and students. This is reflected in students' good behaviour and intense enjoyment of their learning. Skilled teachers plan their lessons well and use a variety of techniques and activities to improve learning. Where some lessons fall short of this high quality, teachers are not using assessment data well enough to plan lessons, target support and provide feedback to students. Overall, the information provided to students and parents about targets and progress is regular, informative and contributes well to their achievement. Most parents who wrote to inspectors were very positive about the effectiveness of the college and this aspect was highlighted by a number of them, summed up by one who wrote, 'I welcome the school's feedback about targets and agreed success criteria for the next steps in learning.'

Given the improved and high quality of its provision, it is not surprising that students achieve well and reach above average standards. Attainment in GCSE examinations has risen over the past three years, and there has also been an improving trend at the end of Key Stage 3. The fact that all students achieved five or more GCSE passes in 2008 is testament to the college's highly inclusive, caring and supportive ethos. This positive picture is a result of a range of successful strategies by staff to improve teaching and learning, better use of data and targeted intervention and support in responding to potential underachievement. Students also achieve well because their own motivation helps them to meet challenging learning targets.

The leadership and management of the headteacher and his deputies is very strong. The wider senior leadership team and middle managers also contribute well to the college's improvement. However, while most departments are strong, there remains some variability between them, for instance in the quality of teaching and learning and in the effective use of data. Governors have historically been very supportive of the college and this is now combined with a greater degree of challenge. In the vast majority of areas they hold the college to account well. However, while the college's procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements, governors' monitoring of aspects of these have not been sufficiently rigorous. Appreciable improvements in virtually every dimension since the last inspection, the quality of provision

and the determined and focused drive of leaders and managers, underpin the college's good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure better consistency between departments in how they use assessment data to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Strengthen the governing body's capacity to hold the college to account for all aspects of its work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the college with standards that are broadly average and make good progress by the time they leave. They achieve above average standards. In 2007 students achieved broadly average standards at the end of Year 9, and above age-expected levels in English and science. Unvalidated 2008 results represent an overall improvement, and this is reflected particularly in the proportion of students achieving Level 6 in English, mathematics and science. In 2008 all students achieved five or more GCSE passes and the proportion achieving five or more higher grades, including English and mathematics, was above average. The standards attained in students' best eight GCSE subjects were also above the national average. The college's specialism contributes to high and improving standards at Key Stages 3 and 4. For instance, in 2008 the proportion of students achieving a higher grade in a modern foreign language was well above the national average.

There is no significant variation in the performance of different groups. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the excellent support they receive. Some, for instance those with a statement of special educational need, make better progress than their peers. The college has taken corrective action to raise standards where there has been any variability and this can be seen, for instance, in improvements in mathematics since the last inspection and current progress in physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The college's strongly positive and caring Christian ethos has a pronounced impact on students' personal development and well-being. Students are happy and motivated to learn. They thoroughly enjoy their education, and their behaviour is good both in lessons and around the site. Attendance is very good. Students conveyed to inspectors a strong sense of being cared for and this makes them feel very safe. This view is endorsed by the vast majority of parents. Students adopt exceptionally safe practices. Rare incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively and there is no room for racism. Students have a good understanding of the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle, recognised by the Healthy School award in 2008. Participation in a very wide range of sports and other extra-curricular activities, such as dance, ice-skating and football, is very good.

Opportunities abound for the promotion of Catholic values and students develop these through their excellent religious development and their high level of respect and tolerance for others. They develop mature social and moral skills as they progress through the college. The language specialism has heightened students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Support for a large number of 'home' languages spoken at the college enhances this truly harmonious

and multicultural college community. Their contribution to the community is good with, among other things, a thriving junior sports leaders' programme and involvement in local initiatives such as the youth parliament, music events, diocesan liturgies and work with local elderly residents. Their views contribute regularly to the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. Students develop good skills to enhance their future economic well-being through a comprehensive programme of enterprise and work-related activity built into many aspects of college life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the college's evaluation that teaching and learning has improved and it is now good. Lessons are characterised by very good relationships between students and teachers and with each other. Students enjoy their lessons because teachers are confident in their subjects and use a variety of activities to engage learners. They have established good routines that foster a very positive learning environment and lead to good progress. An increased focus on the quality of learning, combined with more effective use of achievement data is at the heart of this improved picture. In the best lessons students are able to make rapid progress because of very good planning which caters for their differing abilities. For example, in an English lesson the use of effective strategies helped students form opinions, generate speculation, think about biblical parallels, and promoted a challenging debate. Although data is used well by most departments to enable teachers to assess, plan and monitor progress, occasionally its use is inconsistent. In less effective lessons, assessment information is not sufficiently well linked to planning and learning intentions. In a few lessons and in some feedback teachers are not using assessment sufficiently well to inform students about progress towards levels and gaps in their learning. Support for students is good, although it can be variable when planning lacks detail. Very good additional support is provided by caring and supportive staff in homework clubs that enable students to gain confidence and succeed. The library is very well used by students before and after school for additional study. Students have grasped the opportunities to extend their learning at home using internet-based materials provided by the teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Students are engaged well by a curriculum that promotes their personal, social and emotional development well and contributes appreciably to the above-average standards they achieve. International languages feature very strongly in the college, with exciting classroom work that has included video conferencing with another school in France. Year 7 and 8 students enjoy learning about Chinese culture with the innovative use of podcasts of language and music that is broadcast electronically from the college. Students, who may be more reluctant to learn German, are given the opportunity to enjoy football training with a Premier League football coach followed by a German lesson. The 'teach a friend a language' initiative has allowed younger students to gain confidence and knowledge of a new language through a buddy system. Many older students have gained qualifications in their first heritage language, such as Portuguese, and two additional languages that will prepare them well for adult life. The college has increased the curriculum time for English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 and this is having a positive impact. It has also implemented creative changes this year such as a carousel

of learning in music, art, information and communication technology and design technology for younger students, and special and popular event days to teach aspects of the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme. The college will be reviewing the effectiveness of the carousel arrangements on curriculum continuity, and have not as yet resolved how to evaluate how the special event programme contributes to citizenship. The college provides an increased range of subjects, including vocational options, at Key Stage 4. This is being supported by the excellent contribution the college is making to the local authority's 14-19 strategy, such as the development of a common timetable. Off-site provision, for example in sports, is used creatively to compensate for the limitations imposed by the site.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Some aspects, such as the college's pastoral care and the support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are exceptionally strong. Rigorous monitoring and the adoption of consistent approaches to managing attendance and behaviour have resulted in very low levels of absence and exclusion. Procedures for ensuring students' safety and protection are good. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Students speak very warmly of the support that they receive, and told the inspection team that they feel included, valued and respected at Saint Thomas More. Year 7 students make a smooth transition, helped by good support from staff and a carefully planned integrated curriculum programme. Statistical information on students' past attainment is analysed well so that leaders and managers can set challenging targets and track academic performance. Regular, supportive and diagnostic marking of students' work can be seen in lessons, but this has yet to be embedded as a consistently strong feature across the college. The Student Support Centre offers excellent support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and this, together with targeted and well-planned support in lessons, contributes to these students achieving very well. All key elements of the student support structure, including excellent liaison with external agencies and the appointment of a chaplain, are very effective in ensuring that students receive good personal support, care and advice throughout their time at the college.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides skilful leadership, clear vision and direction. He and two highly effective deputy heads provide very good leadership and management of the college. They set high expectations for themselves and the staff as a whole. They are relentless in their focus on improvement, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning, effective use of data and higher achievement by students. They are well supported by other senior leaders, an increasingly stronger and more effective middle management team and staff as a whole. The college has strengthened the capacity of middle managers and there is a good mix of managers who have been in the college over time, and more recent heads of departments who bring additional strengths. Good internal and external support is provided for staff and they are held to account through rigorous performance management systems for ensuring that all departments reach challenging targets. The college rightly identifies that aspects of middle management can be strengthened further, to ensure a consistently high quality across all departments. Planning is effective in securing improvement. Staff have an accurate understanding of strengths and areas

for development, informed by a well-organised and comprehensive cycle of evaluation, monitoring and review. Rigorous external reviews by the local authority complement the college's own accurate analysis of its performance. Leaders give high priority to ensuring equality of opportunity for staff and students alike and this is enhanced by the college's good promotion of community cohesion. The college accepts that its strategy to promote community cohesion could be more closely linked with the planning and evaluation cycle.

Financial management and value for money are good. The college makes good use of the resources despite being somewhat restricted by the site. Some members of the governor body are relatively new, but they bring a wide range of experience with them. The governing body is very supportive of the college and has increasingly become more effective in asking the right questions and holding the college to account in the vast majority of areas. While the college's vetting systems for staff meet requirements, governors' oversight of this is an example of where they have not been sufficiently rigorous.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Saint Thomas More Language College, London, SW3 2QS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your college recently. You attend a good school. We enjoyed speaking with you and seeing you at work. Thank you for including us in your prayers during your Mass on Ash Wednesday. Your reverence and other aspects of your personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. You, and your parents, were very positive about how good your college is and we agree. You have good relationships with your teachers, other staff and with each other. This is one of the reasons you enjoy your college so much and why the attendance of most of you is so high.

You have a good curriculum, an increasing and varied range of subjects and lots of extra activities and clubs which you enjoy. The fact that your college specialises in languages means that you have very good opportunities to broaden your experiences and knowledge of other cultures as well as studying your home language. Most of your lessons are good or better and this is because of the skill of your teachers, the variety of learning activities and your own motivation to do well. Some lessons are better than others. This is because sometimes teachers are inconsistent in the way they use the information they have about your progress to plan lessons, target support for you and give you feedback about how well you are doing. We have asked the school to improve this so that all departments are as good as each other.

The college has improved a lot since the last inspection and this can be seen in good results over the last three years in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations. These have been above average and reflect the good progress you make from the time you start in the college. Your headteacher, deputy headteachers, other leaders and staff have been instrumental in making the college as good as it is. They are well supported by a governing body that also checks on how well the college is serving you. We know from speaking with you that you act in an exceptionally safe way in the college and feel secure there. We have asked governors to make sure that they keep an eye on this and all other aspects of the college's work so that you will continue to be well cared for and do even better than you have to date.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning and do your best. On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all a happy and successful future.

Yours faithfully

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector