



## SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the  
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of  
Denominational Education under Section 48  
of the Education Act 2005

URN 100857

St Thomas the Apostle College  
Hollydale Road  
Nunhead  
SE15 2EB

Inspection date: 14-15 November 2013

Chair of Governors:	Joseph Reed
Executive Headteacher:	Serge Cefai
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# SECTION 48

# Introduction

## Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Camberwell Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Southwark LA. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Thomas the Apostle, Nunhead; Our Lady of Sorrows, Peckham; St James the Great, Peckham Rye; English Martyrs, Walworth; St Mary Magdalen, Brockley and St George's Cathedral, Southwark. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 41.0%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 8% in Key Stage 3 and 10% in Key Stage 4.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 16 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 593. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly around average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (47.0%) is above average. Around 94 (15.9%) of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of students are from minority ethnic heritages, the largest proportion being Black African, which makes up over 59.0% of the college's population. Around 14.5% are Black Caribbean students. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language (23.0%) is above average.

The school entered into a soft federation with Sacred Heart School, Camberwell in March 2012. The Headteacher of the latter became Executive Headteacher of both schools when the federation was formed. The Governing Body subsequently restructured senior leadership in the school, with a new Head of School taking up post in September 2012 joined by a new Deputy Headteacher. A new Head of Religious Education took up post in April 2013, whilst a new second-in-department was also appointed and started in June 2013. A new part-time lay Chaplain, who is also a long-serving member of the Religious Education department, took up post in January 2013.

## Key for inspection grades

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

# Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE  
2

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding and governors carry out their role very effectively. The Executive Headteacher and Headteacher are spiritual and reflective leaders who are committed to providing a Catholic education which meets the needs of pupils in the twenty-first century. Aply supported by the leadership team, the Headteachers' vision for the school is well articulated and shared with all stakeholders. They give a high priority to continuing development of the Catholic life of the school. The governors' Ethos and Pastoral Committee ensures that this vision, together with the strategic direction of the school, will develop and flourish. The school has a very distinctive Catholic ethos which is easy to identify. The Catholic ethos underpins the policies and planning of the school and is experienced in the excellent relationships within the school community. The religious artefacts and displays, including attractive etchings of saints, together with the impressive chapel and the prayer life of the school, mark the school as distinctly Catholic. Chaplaincy is developing well since the Chaplain's appointment earlier in the year. As well as co-ordinating worship throughout the school, organising and leading retreats, the Chaplain acts as counsellor to pupils and staff. In this her contribution is invaluable. Pastoral care is outstanding and the very close involvement of chaplaincy with the formal pastoral care system is to be highly commended. Links with the parishes are good and, throughout the year, the Chaplain successfully arranges for the local parish priests to come in to celebrate Mass with the pupils. Pupils' contribution to the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. Pupils feel very positive about the school. They value the very strong sense of community and feel that any incidents of bullying are immediately dealt with. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent and pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils feel safe in the school and they value the efforts the staff make to ensure their safety. Religious Education provision has improved rapidly over a short period of time owing to the good leadership in the subject. This will have a direct and positive impact in the foreseeable future on pupils' achievements in Religious Education which currently require improvement.

## What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Executive Headteacher, Headteacher and staff should:

- Provide pupils with more varied opportunities so that they are involved in leading prayer times prepared by them in acts of communal worship.
- Explore ways in which to harness the interactive capability of technology including the electronic whiteboards in Religious Education classes.
- Monitor marking to ensure pupils complete any unfinished work in their books and that the assessment expectations are applied consistently across the department.
- Extend pupils' understanding of world religions by increasing the variety and number of visits to other places of worship and visiting speakers from other Christian traditions and faith backgrounds.
- Continue to increase the curriculum time for Religious Education at Key Stage 3 so that it meets the Bishops' Conference requirements of 10%.

## The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

Inclusiveness is given a high priority in the school and pupils readily subscribe to this. Pupils are proud of their backgrounds and beliefs and have a strong sense of self-esteem. For example, a Muslim pupil in the upper school said, "I found it difficult at first when I joined in Year 7 but, since Year 8, I have felt included and part of the school community. In RE lessons I am encouraged to share my beliefs with the class when topics of other faiths are discussed." Pentecostal Christians in Year 11 shared how they appreciated being able to receive individual blessings from the priest during Mass. They are happy to participate in Religious Education lessons, particularly because they are consulted on issues which may differ from the Catholic perspective. Pupils are very responsive to the needs of others in the local community and beyond. For example, BTEC students in Year 10 support pupils from deanery and local primary schools in Physical Education and sporting activities. Pupils supported the regeneration of the Brayards Estate by planting flowers and shrubs. Facilitated by the Chaplain, they have developed strong links with residents on the estate through visits to the senior citizens and Christmas hampers going to people in need. Pupils are extremely responsive to the links between the local parishes in Nunhead and Peckham. This is facilitated by members of staff or their families, as they are Confirmation catechists in these parishes. Pupils treat others with high levels of respect which was seen in the relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff during the inspection. Bullying is a rare occurrence in the school and is dealt with swiftly either by senior prefects and/or staff. In addition, pupils show an acute sense of care for those in need. Senior prefects spoke animatedly of the mentoring of pupils during 'Form Time'. Three Year 10 pupils recounted how they had displayed poor behaviour in Year 8 and had been mentored by older pupils, who helped them through their difficulties. They, in turn, are now supporting younger pupils and believe that their mentees' attitudes are now more positive as a result. The school is thus providing ways to make this important pastoral intervention sustainable. Pupils take their faith very seriously. They are proud of the way in which they worship together and care for those in need within the school community and beyond. Pupils have a developing sense of the wider world, other beliefs and cultures. They are developing strong links with their peers in a school in Bangalore and have raised funds for resources in the school. In addition, pupils contribute to the Cafod Lenten appeal. A concentration camp survivor addresses pupils at assemblies on Holocaust Memorial Day. Chaplaincy Prefects support the Chaplain in preparing the impressive chapel for sacramental celebrations, liturgies and prayer gatherings. In order to aid these pupils to develop additional leadership skills, the school should explore ways in which to actively involve them in Chaplaincy Team planning and consultations. Senior Prefects oversee the supervision of pupils very effectively in the dining hall to the extent that proceedings are carried out in a disciplined and efficient way. This leads to a calm atmosphere in the dining hall. A Year 10 pupil showed initiative by interviewing, unprompted, the new intake of Year 7 pupils and reported back in writing to the Headteacher. Such occasions indicate the strong sense of community within the school and that pupils take on responsibilities and participate constructively in the Catholic life of the school. There are many occasions where pupils do so in their own time. For example, the pupil members of the Charity Committee meet after school and Year 7 pupils delivered Harvest Festival food packages to the Passage Homeless Centre. A group of pupils joined their peers from Sacred Heart on the weekend Eight Bridges Walk in London for nominated year group charities such as Demelza, a charity for children with limited life expectancy, Diabetes UK and Cabrini.

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

Attainment in Religious Education does not yet match the improved standards achieved in English. Pupils' starting points are well below average when they arrive in Year 7. At Key Stage 3, only 36% of Year 9 pupils obtained attainment level 6 or above in Religious Education with 10% gaining attainment level 7 or above. At this key stage, regular moderation of assessments and national levels of attainment is now a feature. The school is confident that, through forensic analysis of the data, the current Year 9 cohort's levels will improve significantly this academic year, in keeping with the progress experienced in the other core subjects the previous year. The forecast is that around 70% of this year's cohort will achieve level 6 or above. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment for the top eight subjects, including English and Mathematics, takes the school into the top four schools in the local authority. This is in stark contrast to the 2012 results, where the school was situated near the bottom of the sixteen schools in the performance tables. Last term, Key Stage 4 results in Religious Education at grades A\*-C were below the national average and did not match the impressive rise of 30% in the best eight at these grades. However, with the assistance of an advanced tracking system introduced in the Summer term, the analysis of data is more robust than previously. Therefore the school forecasts that, given the strengths of the newly formed Religious Education team, the national average will be comfortably exceeded in Summer 2014. This is likely to mirror the notable improvement of the eight subjects, including English and Mathematics, experienced this Summer. The standard of religious literacy is high. For example, during a Year 10 lesson on 'Prayer and Gethsemane', a pupil spoke of God being 'omniscient', using the expression deftly and in context. In a Year 7 lesson on 'Abraham's Faith Being Tested', a pupil understood and applied the word 'omnipotent' to the nature of God. The Catholic ethos and Gospel values are particularly evident in the excellent relationships the pupils have with members of the department. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. This is promoted across the school and, as a whole-school policy, features in every department's schemes of work and in the school's lesson observation forms. During the inspection, the vast majority of pupils consulted said that they rated Religious Education highly and enjoyed the subject.

## How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in Masses and other acts of worship. They show interest and say that they enjoy the challenge of many themes. They especially appreciate the contribution of the 'Chamber' and 'Gospel' choirs during the Mass and other liturgical celebrations. These choirs have been invited to take part in the music ministry at the local parish by the parish priest. Pupils are extremely respectful of pupils from other faiths and Christian traditions during times of prayer and collective worship. Many are skilled in their knowledge of scripture as evidenced in the lessons observed by the inspectors and in meetings arranged on the inspection days with various groups of pupils. Pupils are respectful of religious artefacts and, where appropriate, use them as an aid to prayer. In a good Year 10 assembly on 'Remembrance', pupils were asked to pray for and remember former pupils, staff and family members who had died. A slide show of a list of names helped to create a prayerful atmosphere in which the pupils were reverent and responsive. The Head of Year, himself a former pupil, shared memories of pupils who had died and the year group were extremely attentive. Three members of the year group led intercessory prayers and read John 3:16 during the assembly. There was a moment for reflection for all gathered following a story the Head of Year read out about wealth, success and love, he himself stressing love as the overriding factor and placing it in the context of 'the Golden Rule'. During prayer opportunities offered in form periods, pupils were familiar with routines and were aware of the focal point of the crucifix in the room.

Pupils prayed well together from PowerPoint slides. Pupils confidently led prayer in the majority of acts of collective worship observed and their peers responded reverently. Pupils reported to the inspectors that they particularly appreciated opportunities for their own intercessions and would like to see these increased. The school now needs to progress from prayer styles which are routine and limited in variety to further developing, where appropriate, prayer opportunities which include a mix of intercessions and thanksgiving, either prepared by the pupils or spontaneous.

Publication date ... 7 January 2014

## **How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

The leadership of the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. Leaders at all levels are empowered to develop robust monitoring and evaluation processes due to the strategic steer of the governors and the senior leadership team. The partnership between the Executive Headteacher and the Headteacher is a strength of the school. Their vision is extremely well articulated and endorsed by the school community. This is reinforced by the school improvement plan where Catholic ethos is the first priority listed in the document. Members of staff, interviewed during the inspection, made special mention of the October Federation in-service training (INSET) on 'The Catholic Ethos of the School and Catholic Social Teaching', which they felt was of high quality. The Vice-Chair of Governors also attended and emphasised how well the staff from both schools bonded, facilitated by the expert input of the keynote speaker. A member of staff, who is new to the school, also commented positively on the staff induction programme, particularly the unit within the programme relating to the Catholic ethos. He said that he was able to subscribe to what the leadership had in its plans owing to the clear messages arising from both interventions. Self-evaluation accurately reflects areas for development and, together with robust planning and targeted interventions, provides a strong impetus for school improvement. Governors act as critical friends, giving a well-balanced focus between support and holding school leaders to account. The Executive Headteacher and the Headteacher, together with the members of the senior leadership team, are aware of the challenges for school improvement. They are vigorously pursuing a meticulous plan of action through consultation, target setting and professional development. Staff and pupils have a clear understanding of this drive for improvement and subscribe to the school's aims and objectives. One Year 10 pupil said, "Things have improved a lot since I was in Year 7. I'm now glad that I'm a student at this school because the teachers give up their time to help us succeed." Opportunities are provided for pupils to make suggestions to the senior leadership team through the Student Council and senior prefects. As a result of this dialogue, for example, the school is in the process of building a prayer garden near the entrance. Parents and carers are kept well informed of the Catholic life of the school and Religious Education through 'Chaplaincy Corner', together with other sections of the high quality, fortnightly newsletters and through letters to parents and carers. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers surveyed were positive about the school. One parent commented, "The College medium of communicating with parents is very good. The College newsletter is informative and educating. The use of text messages and email are equally commendable." Another observed, "I feel the school has always offered the best Catholic education and has got even better in later years."

## **How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils**

A new Head of Religious Education took up post at Easter and is a member of the senior leadership team. He is also the only subject leader who is line managed by the Headteacher. Hence the governors, the Executive Head and Head of School are placing an emphasis on Religious Education being at the heart of the curriculum. There is strong collaboration between the Head of Department and his counterpart at the Federation partner school. This is excellent practice and has assisted in the marked improvements in

delivering the subject. Since Easter, there has been rapid progress in the evaluation, planning and delivery of the subject. The improvements in lessons have been noted by pupils and shared at meetings with the inspectors. The support for Religious Education by the Governing Body and senior leaders is considerable and is evident from the way in which finances have been made available to the department. The Governors' Ethos and Pastoral Committee oversees the Catholic life of the school, whilst the Curriculum Committee oversees Religious Education. Monitoring and evaluation of every aspect of the Religious Life has been a real focus of the school since the Federation was formed, as shown by its prominence in the school improvement plan and the implementation of strategies. The link governor for Religious Education is a priest of the Diocese. He ensures that school leaders are both held to account and supported in the subject, particularly in the area of pupil achievement, staffing and resourcing. Reports are regularly reviewed at Governing Body meetings so that governors are fully informed and aware of progress within Religious Education lessons as well as the Catholic Life of the school. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is taught throughout the school and is set in the context of the Church's teaching and values. The SRE policy has been ratified by governors and endorsed by the parents. Revised schemes of work are being developed across the whole school curriculum on a term-by-term basis. The Religious Education department plan to extend mapping to other curriculum areas, including SRE and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), from Key Stage 4 to the Key Stage 3 schemes of work. In the Summer term, the school invested in a new system to track pupil progress incorporating a 'live feed' capability. This has greatly assisted progress, with monitoring and evaluation becoming more rigorous and coherent since the last inspection. This has led to teachers being far more confident in setting appropriate targets to drive forward the plans for improvement in this subject area. Once the new developments in the department are embedded, they should have a considerable impact on pupil achievement. The Religious Education department is well resourced and funded as a core subject in the school. Priorities for the current academic year and beyond have been set and high quality planning and processes are in place to ensure improvement in achievement. The impressive tracking system is one such example. The school has strong links with the Diocese, with senior leaders regularly attending meetings and training offered by the Diocesan Education Commission. Pastoral care is an outstanding feature of the school. The pastoral team are aware of pupils' needs through scrupulous monitoring and consultation with colleagues and outside agencies. For example, in times of bereavement, families are referred to the Chaplain, who is a trained counsellor and, in certain instances, to the local authority bereavement service. The pastoral team leads on interventions appropriate to pupils with additional educational needs (AEN) and successfully support colleagues in assisting pupils to overcome barriers to their education. As a result the gap is rapidly closing in attainment between AEN pupils and their peers, as seen in the school's analysis of examination results and levels of attainment. 'Restorative justice' is practised successfully throughout the school and is facilitated by staff, senior prefects and mentors.

### The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good with pupils making good progress. Planning is of a high order and results from effective assessment procedures and tracking of pupil progress. Presentation slides are used effectively to scaffold pupils' thinking as exemplified in a Year 11 lesson on 'Christian Views on Homosexuality'. Planning is used skilfully to promote higher order thinking responses from pupils. This was seen to good effect in a Year 10 lesson on 'Prayers in Gethsemane' where pupils were asked to compose their own questions about Jesus' identity. One pupil asked, 'If Jesus is a member of the Holy Trinity, why should he pray to God?' Hence pupils are reflective and enquiring owing to the opportunities provided in their lessons. Teachers employ very good behaviour management strategies which promotes a secure climate for learning. The well-qualified members of the department use their expertise to motivate and challenge most pupils. They incorporate varied teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their pupils. This makes a positive contribution to pupils' progress. Pupils' progress is regularly monitored and specific groups targeted where underachievement is identified. Books are regularly marked, using the school's assessment framework to indicate to pupils what went well and clear guidance on how work can be improved. In some instances, teachers directed pupils to complete any unfinished work in their books but this was not always followed up. This requires further development to ensure consistency across the department. There are three dedicated Religious Education classrooms, each with electronic whiteboards. Displays relating to the Religious Education programme showcase the current theme and pupils' work is often used as exemplars of good practice. For example an attractive display on 'Discipleship' helped pupils to build on their prior knowledge and make links to progress their understanding. Electronic whiteboards are used to good effect in all lessons as a projector for slideshows and online video clips. As a further advancement, pupils would greatly profit from experiencing the interactive capabilities of the whiteboards and this expertise can be found in other departments in the school.

### The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The Religious Education Curriculum is matched to pupils' needs and the 'Revised Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools'. At Key Stage 3 it is based on 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' Religious Education programme. This is supplemented by a wide range of online resources which are fit for purpose. These include video clips and slide shows which have been well-researched by the department on an ongoing basis and finalised at their weekly departmental meetings. Since the last inspection, the curriculum time dedicated to this subject has increased from 6.6% to 8%. Senior leadership has set aside an additional hour to Year 9 in their curriculum plan for next academic year, which will mean that 8.7% of curriculum time will be dedicated to Religious Education at Key Stage 3. This has been endorsed by the Governing Body. The school needs to continue its drive to increase the curriculum time in the subject beyond the following year so that the Bishops' Conference requirements of 10% will be met. Pupils follow the Edexcel Religious Studies GCSE syllabus for the 'Religion and Life' and 'Mark's Gospel' units at Key Stage 4. The curriculum time now meets the Bishops' Conference requirements of 10% at this key stage, which was one of the key issues highlighted in the previous report. During the INSET on the Feast of St Thomas the Apostle in July, the department worked collaboratively with other departments. For example, a Holocaust Day unit was an area developed with the History department, whilst the Religious Education team worked with the Science department on Medical Ethics. Planning ensures that the variety of pupils' different faith backgrounds is celebrated in Religious Education lessons as well as the

richness in cultural diversity of pupils who attend the school. In order to enrich the Religious Education curriculum even further, the school now needs to develop a programme of visits to other places of worship and invite guest speakers from different religious backgrounds to share how cultural diversity and their faith traditions impact on their lives. A parent with sons in Year 11 and Year 7 wrote, "RE has improved tremendously and personal relationships, behaviour, responsibility and attitudes of the pupils is now excellent."

### **The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school**

Collective worship is at the heart of the Catholic life of the school. There is a comprehensive programme of Masses and liturgies which follows the liturgical calendar and links to the Religious Education programme. Pupils are actively involved in Masses as servers, choristers, musicians, lectors and bidding prayer readers. Pupils highly commended the Chamber and Gospel choirs for aiding the quality of worship during Masses and liturgies. Assemblies and tutor group meetings are also linked to the liturgical calendar and Religious Education programme. The quality of assemblies is good. The themes for these are clear and topical and they make a strong contribution to the pupils' moral development. Pupils' responses and behaviour during the assembly and form periods linked to the theme of 'Remembrance', observed by the inspectors, were outstanding, even though one of the three form periods was beset by an electronic whiteboard malfunction. In this instance, formal prayers took the place of themed prayers with the whole group praying together. This highlighted the need to develop contingency plans for such occasions with, for example, the introduction of personal prayers or reflections based on the theme of the week. In the other acts of collective worship observed, pupils took an active role in leading prayers to which their peers responded extremely well. These opportunities were assisted by high quality electronic resources, developed in partnership by the newly appointed Chaplain and the Religious Education department. Quiet periods of prayer and reflection were included to further enhance pupils' opportunities to connect with their spiritual and moral development. The Chaplain leads the 'Oasis' daily prayer and reflection sessions in the chapel for groups of pupils on a rotation basis, ensuring that this is an entitlement for all pupils. Although this did not seem to take place during the inspection, pupils were able to verify that these prayer opportunities did occur. Attendance by parents and carers is facilitated and encouraged by the school when appropriate. For example, during Open Evenings and Expectations Evenings there are opportunities for the whole school community to come together to pray. Parents and carers are also invited to the Year 7 induction Mass and the Year 11 leavers' day. The October INSET day and the partnership with the Sacred Heart school community supports the regular review and planned improvement to the provision of collective worship at the school. The Executive Headteacher feels that this is of mutual benefit to both institutions. Chaplaincy is developing very well. There is now a comprehensive plan in place for a programme of retreats across all year groups for this academic year and beyond. This commences with a Year 7 retreat to Aylesford during Advent. The Chaplain, Head of Religious Education and the Headteacher have formulated an effective chaplaincy policy which reflects the school Mission Statement. The Chaplain liaises with the local parish priests who are regular visitors to the school, celebrating Mass and liturgies for the benefit of the school community. The Chaplain provides Heads of Year and form tutors with support in the form of a prayer book and online resources. There are traditional prayers in student journals. These prayers could be developed further to include, for example, selected themes from the Religious Education programme and the liturgical calendar.