

Thomas's Fulham

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	205/6402
Unique Reference Number	130239
Inspection number	330442
Inspection dates	24 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Thomas's Fulham is an independent, preparatory, co-educational day school in south-west London for pupils aged between 4 and 11 years. It is part of a family-run group of four schools and two kindergartens. Thomas's Fulham, which opened in September 2005, is the most recent school to open within the group. In line with the group's admission policy, the school is selective. There are currently 324 pupils on roll, 163 boys and 161 girls. The majority of pupils come from a White ethnic background. Eighty-one pupils are in receipt of state-funded nursery provision. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs but the school provides additional learning support to 14 pupils.

Although not affiliated to any religious body, the school has a Christian ethos. It aims to 'create an ethos of kindness and understanding, in which pupils' strengths are identified and developed, whilst their weaknesses are identified and supported'.

The school was last inspected in June 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Thomas's Fulham offers a good quality of education for its pupils and is an exciting place in which to learn. The determined leadership of the senior managers has ensured some outstanding features in the quality of care, pupils' behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The quality of teaching is good; pupils are well motivated by learning and achieve well. There are significant strengths in the Early Years Foundation Stage provision, which is also good and provides an excellent start to school. Progress since the last inspection has been good and all the regulations for independent schools are now met in full.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and meets the learning needs of pupils of all abilities effectively, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. While it provides a strong focus on pupils' academic development, their emotional and social development is not neglected. Pupils have very good access to a wide range of subjects, including French, drama and ballet. Art, physical education and music also have a high profile,

and pupils achieve considerable success in these subjects. The quality of the curriculum in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology also ensures that pupils do well in these subjects. The curriculum helps pupils to have an excellent insight into their own community and the wider world and addresses well the recommendations from the last report in this respect. The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of additional activities, clubs and visitors. All year groups have a programme of educational visits to support their learning and the residential visits for those in Years 4 and 5 enrich pupils' personal development greatly.

Teaching and assessment are good overall. Assessment arrangements have been strengthened since the last report and are having a satisfactory impact on pupils' progress. Lessons are planned well, and are practical and fun. Together with the pupils' excellent attitude to learning, this accelerates their progress and results in good achievement. The teachers' subject knowledge is often excellent. The purposes of the lessons are made clear but not routinely revisited to gauge success. Learning support assistants make valuable contributions to the lessons; they are well briefed and have clear roles when working with groups or individuals. Excellent classroom management and high expectations of behaviour are used sensitively from the earliest years. In the outstanding lessons there are highly effective strategies for encouraging pupils to think and reason. In one mathematics lesson, groups of pupils were set problems that were extremely well matched to their stage of development and a variety of challenging questions pushed the pupils' thinking and reasoning skills forward. This is not always the case, however, and in some lessons the questions asked of pupils do not always help develop independent learning.

The school management understands the importance of monitoring pupils' achievements and effective assessment procedures are in place for carrying out well-planned assessments throughout the school. All records and reports are carefully focused and detailed. However, the use of assessment to inform teachers' planning is inconsistent and there is not yet an accurate match of expectations in all lessons to ensure good progress. This is most evident in the match of work to an individual pupil's specific needs and affects progress in the longer term. Teachers are becoming better at recognising individual pupils' learning needs but pupils' targets for improvement are often too broad and the marking of work does not draw pupils' attention to them sufficiently. Assessment procedures do not always ensure clarity as to the next steps for pupils as they move through the school; the school is aware of the need to draw these together further. Assessment information is used effectively to address gaps in pupils' learning by sensible adjustments to the curriculum, particularly in relation to writing and mathematics and those with special educational needs.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. They are very confident and welcoming. Their behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and in the playground. Pupils are courteous and well-mannered. A simple but effective set of rules, 'be kind, listen carefully,

‘speak nicely, move calmly’ is adhered to by all pupils. Pupils’ attendance is above average, they enjoy school immensely and they have very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are happy and parents overwhelmingly endorse this with comments such as, ‘my child loves the school’ and ‘learning is fun at Thomas’s Fulham, every day brings a new challenge’. One pupil summed the views of others with, ‘school is really fun and makes me feel happy’.

Pupils respond positively to the excellent provision for their personal development. Their knowledge of themselves and their self-esteem and confidence are developed effectively. Pupils feel safe and well cared for, and instances of bullying are rare. They talk confidently about safety procedures and the ways they can keep themselves and each other safe. They demonstrate an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles, both through their healthy eating choices and their enjoyment of physical activity. Most pupils walk or cycle to school on Wednesday. All pupils, including the very young, develop a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong and show consideration for one another. Relationships at all levels are excellent and contribute positively to the stimulating learning environment. Pupils from all different backgrounds work and play in harmony and show respect for their different cultures and traditions. They are also eager to support those who are less fortunate. For example, they regularly raise money for charities, and are involved in building a school for a community in Nepal. Pupils respond particularly well to the excellent provision for sports, art and music and this contributes well to their spiritual and cultural understanding.

Pupils make a very positive contribution to their own school community through their roles as school councillors, the anti-bullying committee and the green team. Pupils’ ideas are taken seriously, for example, about the need for a quiet area in the playground. They actively participate in local team sports and public performances in dance, singing and playing musical instruments. Pupils’ basic skills, including their personal skills, together with their awareness of public services and institutions, prepare them extremely well for their future working lives.

Safeguarding pupils’ welfare, health and safety

The school makes outstanding provision for safeguarding the welfare, health and safety of its pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. All regulations are now met. The staff create a happy family atmosphere that engenders a positive sense of well-being amongst the pupils and they exercise vigilant supervision throughout the day. They have devised and implemented a carefully thought out range of policies which are fully supported by thorough risk assessment of all activities both within school and on visits outside school. The safeguarding officers are trained to meet current guidelines and all staff have subsequently received training. There is a large number of first aid trained staff, including those with paediatric training, and all accidents are recorded meticulously. The school is alert as to fire safety, all systems are under constant monitoring and regular fire drills are held and recorded. The welfare, health and safety of the staff and pupils is overseen diligently by the very competent staff members in charge and results in a safe environment for all, both staff and pupils. The school has an accessibility policy

which fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002. The school has checked all staff for their suitability to work with children and holds the information on a single central register.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, as it was at the last inspection. The leadership is good because staff work together as a close team and are encouraged to further their professional development by identifying strengths and acting upon their weaker features. This results in creating a stimulating professional environment in which staff strive to develop their skills to a very high standard. Good assessment procedures are in place to record and monitor children's progress, including the good use of photographs. Although assessment information is used to plan worthwhile and stimulating activities both indoors and outdoors, it is not completed consistently each half term and then used to inform the next term's planning.

Children start in Reception above expectations and they make good progress in all areas of learning; all of them exceed the early learning goals by the end of the year. The staff have a good understanding of child development and put this knowledge into effective use in devising activities appropriate to the children's age and developmental stage. There is a good balance of play and exploration both in and out of doors, with activities both led by adults and initiated by children, which results in active learning. Currently outdoor provision is limited by a lack of all-weather covering. The children have good opportunities to choose their activities from the wide range available. They play well together and on their own and with others and communicate readily in their learning. They have a good understanding of what they are learning and have many opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. For example, during the afternoon outdoor activities which the children had helped to initiate, they dressed up and acted out scenarios relating to the topic of animals which they had been following, others found 'jewels' in the sand or used paint rollers to create their own works of art on the playground surface. They are given good support by the staff, who are very good at extending their language. For example, during a numeracy session where the children were using positional language such as first, second and third in their imaginary horse racing, another group discussed how they should prepare the medals for the winners.

Their excellent personal development and enjoyment are reflected in their high level of confidence, respectful relationships, exemplary behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. The children report that they enjoy their time in school, saying 'I like my school...I have lots of friends.' Each child is very well known to the staff and their welfare is promoted very successfully. The school has established effective links with parents and carers, who responded positively in the pre-inspection questionnaire.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure greater consistency in how teachers match work for the next steps in pupils' learning and how they challenge pupils through questions
- sharpen the identification of the best practice in teaching and the effective sharing of such practice throughout the school
- record at regular, planned intervals, assessment information on the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- provide an all-weather cover for the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor area.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	√			
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		√		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		√		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	√			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	√			
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		√		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		√		

School details

Name of school	Thomas's Fulham		
DCSF number	205/6402		
Unique reference number	130239		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2005		
Age range of pupils	4-10		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:163	Girls: 161	Total: 324
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12,382		
Address of school	Hugon Road Fulham London SW6 3ES		
Telephone number	020 7751 8200		
Fax number	020 7751 8201		
Email address	adobson@thomas-s.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Annette Dobson		
Proprietor	Mr Toby Thomas		
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI		
Dates of inspection	24 March 2009		