

Thomas's Kensington

Independent school light-touch inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

This was a light touch educational inspection 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 Kensington is owned and managed by the Thomas family and is one of four schools and two kindergartens in the same ownership. It is an academically non-selective, co-educational and Christian independent school for pupils from four to 11 years of age. It was opened in 1981 and operates from three London sites, which are very close to each other. The Lower School (Reception to Year 2) is located at Victoria Road while the Prep School (Years 3 to 6) is based at Cottesmore Gardens. In September 2008, the third site at St Alban's Grove was added, housing a theatre, gymnasium, dining room, music and staff work rooms. There are currently 360 pupils on roll; 60 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage, of whom 25 receive government funding. The school has identified around 10% of pupils who require support for learning difficulties. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. There are a number of pupils who speak English as an additional language, but they are not beginners in English and do not require language support. The school's admission arrangements give first preference to siblings and to those pupils who live in close proximity to the school. This is the third full inspection of the school. The school met all the regulations except one at the last inspection in 2008.

The aim of the school is to provide a positive and stimulating environment in which each child is happy and can achieve the best that he or she is capable within a broad and balanced curriculum.

Evaluation of the school

Thomas's Kensington continues to provide its pupils with an outstanding quality of education and very successfully fulfils its aims. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, particularly improvements to the accommodation to enhance learning. Pupils and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, with pupils making comments such as, 'It's amazing ... it's challenging' and parents say, 'This is an exceptional school ... my children are so happy'. The curriculum is outstanding as

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

is the quality of teaching, resulting in pupils making outstanding progress. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils' behaviour and the school's safeguarding procedures, including welfare, health and safety arrangements are also outstanding. The school has addressed effectively a regulatory failure identified at the last inspection. There is now a suitable medical room in which to treat those who are ill. The school meets all of the regulatory requirements for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum, including that in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is outstanding, as it was at the last inspection. Provision is extensive, covers all of the required areas of learning and meets the needs of pupils of all abilities effectively. Specialist teachers in drama, physical education, science, art, music, French, information and communication technology (ICT), ballet and Latin bring extensive knowledge of their subjects and enthuse and motivate pupils to learn. The school has acquired additional premises since the last inspection. These are used for creative subjects, as a dining room and for physical education. This has enabled the school to utilise the space in other buildings in a more focused way and through this the curriculum has been further developed and extended. It now includes more timetabled personal, social, health and citizenship education, guided reading and the allocation of pupils from Year 2 upwards into ability groups for mathematics. Provision for those pupils with learning difficulties has been extended with an increased number of therapists on site and more specialist provision and space available. Those pupils identified as gifted and talented are now supported by an invitational club and lecture programme. The school prepares pupils very well for the next stage of their education; this now begins in Year 5. Pupils all gain a place at an appropriate school of their choice. The provision for, and the teaching of, ICT has been developed since the last inspection. The school has identified this as an area in which they wish to expand further.

An outstanding feature is the wide range of visits outside school and visitors to school, which add immensely to pupils' enjoyment of their learning and give them many first-hand experiences. These have recently included outings to the Victoria and Albert, and Science Museums and the Saatchi Gallery. Older pupils have the opportunity for residential visits both in this country and abroad. A very large number of clubs both before and after school provide the pupils with a great deal of fun.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. The lively, interesting and engaging teaching inspires the pupils to try their hardest and reflects a real love of learning on the part of pupils and staff. The lessons move at a brisk pace, with pupils very much involved in their learning, discussing topics with their 'talking partner' and self-assessing their work. During lessons, staff skilfully assess pupils' progress and use 'focusing' questioning very effectively to consolidate and extend learning. The pupils are voracious learners; they rise to the challenge created by staff in lessons,

with a pupil commenting when given work he thought less challenging, 'But I can do that too'. The pupils' progress is very carefully monitored by the staff. Pupils of all abilities, including those who need additional help and the gifted and talented, are very well supported and make consistently outstanding progress. The pupils are well informed about their progress, know their targets and understand the carefully constructed comments that staff use in the excellent marking of their work. The planning of most lessons is exemplary, with teachers skilfully sharing the learning objectives with the pupils, which are achieved by an appropriate range of suitably challenging tasks to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. The assessment of pupils' learning in lessons has been improved and staff explain to the pupils how they can improve their work through both their own and peer assessment.

A wide range of assessment procedures is used effectively to monitor pupils' progress throughout the year and, from Year 3, pupils take the school's own examinations. The school reports to parents and carers with two detailed written reports each year with regular opportunities for parental consultation. The reports include the National Curriculum levels their children have attained and their standardised reading scores.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils, and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is outstanding as it was at the last inspection. The school rule of 'Be kind' underpins the school's ethos. The school is a very happy, welcoming place and the pupils confirm that they enjoy coming to school, as confirmed by their excellent attendance. All relationships are very positive and each pupil is very well known as an individual. Pupils' spiritual awareness is increased when they learn about world religions and festivals. The school is effective in raising awareness of other cultures, for example by celebrating 'World Week' with a focus on different traditions, food, languages and costumes. This is a very sociable community with all the pupils mixing very well together. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they move around the school buildings with care. They have helped to devise their own simple school rules and these are followed. The pupils are adamant that there is no bullying and they are all friends together.

Older pupils have the opportunity to take initiatives in various ways as house captains, school council members and monitors. Their knowledge of themselves and their self-esteem and confidence are developed effectively. Pupils enjoy and participate enthusiastically in the full range of school activities and take part in school productions, with Year 6 enthusiastically rehearsing for 'Bugsy Malone' at the time of the inspection. The school encourages a good awareness of political issues and British institutions, and, in the run-up to the general election, entered a national competition inviting children to write letters to the Prime Minister. They won a trip to 10 Downing Street which effectively reinforced this learning. Pupils are enthusiastic about their involvement in various charities, such as Nepal Day or organising a Pyjama Day in aid of the Red Cross. They have excellent cultural awareness, and are

confident, friendly and respectful. They are keen to help others who are less fortunate than themselves. All of this is very effectively encouraged by the school. Pupils' basic academic and personal skills, together with their awareness of public services and institutions, prepare them well for their future working lives. This is a cosmopolitan school and racial harmony is very effectively promoted with pupils from different backgrounds and cultures mixing very well.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school continues to make outstanding provision to safeguard and promote the welfare, health and safety of the pupils and the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The very friendly and caring ethos in the school ensures that pupils feel valued and safe. Pupils know that staff care for them well. The school has devised, and effectively implements, a very wide range of policies that minimise the health and safety risks to pupils. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are exemplary. The school has an appropriate child protection policy and all staff, including the designated member of staff, have received appropriate training. Thorough checks are completed prior to the appointment of new staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. All of the required information is held on a single central register. The school's arrangements for ensuring that the health and safety of pupils meet the regulations are fully implemented. There are robust arrangements for fire safety; fire drills are held regularly and recorded; a specialist company checks fire-fighting equipment and a comprehensive fire risk assessment is in place. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, both through their healthy eating choices in their lunches and their enjoyment of physical activity. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act and has a three-year accessibility plan in place.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children usually enter the Reception classes with skills and capabilities in line with those expected for their age, although a few have some speech and language difficulties. The outcomes are outstanding and children make excellent progress to reach well above the expected levels in most areas of learning. Children's outstanding behaviour contributes successfully to their positive attitudes towards learning and creates a very warm welcoming learning environment where staff and children are able to work in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Children are very polite and courteous to visitors. Children enjoy the learning environment and demonstrate independence in managing their own learning. Warm and supportive relationships contribute very well to their excellent personal development and well-being. Consequently, children feel very safe and valued and are able to ask for help if they need to. They develop a good understanding of personal hygiene and make healthy choices about what they eat and drink.

The provision is outstanding and the learning environment is bright, attractive and welcoming. Planning fully supports all of the required areas of learning. The outdoor space is used imaginatively to provide valuable learning experiences, to help children to rehearse their own learning and to enable them to learn at their own pace. Staff are very well deployed to support the children's learning, operating effectively as a team to share ideas and respond to the needs and interests of the children, although at times staff involved in self-chosen activities do not always give sufficient guided steps to move the learning faster. Nevertheless, they provide children with a variety of stimulating learning opportunities and a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated play.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff work as a close team and have high aspirations for quality which is supported by a good programme of professional development. They complete assessments on the children as required. They have a high commitment to equality and diversity. Staff work very well with parents and carers, ensuring a smooth start to school life and a good transition to Year 1. The school takes robust steps to ensure that the school site is safe and secure. Vetting checks are rigorous to ensure that those working with children are suitable people.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- implement the planned expansion of the use of ICT.

Inspection judgements

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

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Date school opened	September 1981		
Age range of pupils	4–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 170	Girls: 190	Total: 360
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16,545		
Address of school	17–19 Cottessmore Gardens London W8 5PR		
Telephone number	0207 361 6500		
Email address	kensington@thomas-s.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Diana Maine		
Proprietor	Mr T L Thomas, Mr B L Thomas and Mr & Mrs D L Thomas		