

Thomas's Kensington

17-19 Cottesmore Gardens, London W8 5PR

Inspection dates

31 October–2 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and proprietors have created a caring and aspirational culture to ensure that pupils make rapid progress in their learning. Staff morale is high. They place pupils' well-being at the forefront of the school's work.
- The proprietors provide excellent strategic leadership. They use their wealth of experience and skills to successfully oversee this family-oriented and outstanding school.
- The school's values underpin this successful school. The value to 'Be Kind' nurtured by the founders effectively permeates school life today.
- Pupils are extremely well cared for. They develop high levels of self-confidence and aspire to be the best they can be. Parents are highly positive about all aspects of the school.
- Leaders have created a strong culture of vigilance to ensure pupils' safety. Pupils understand how to keep safe and healthy.
- The curriculum is rich and extensive. Pupils enjoy and succeed in a wide range of experiences, including extra-curricular activities such as music, chess and sports.
- Teaching enthuses pupils because it is inspirational, challenging and fun. Typically, most pupils achieve well above age-related standards.
- The checking of pupils' progress is rigorous and accurate. When a pupil's performance falls short of their capability, swift action enables them to catch up.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' high outcomes.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable and they display excellent attitudes to learning. They are extremely polite to each other and adults, and are welcoming to visitors. Attendance rates are high because pupils enjoy being at school.
- Leadership of and teaching in the early years is extremely strong. Children make rapid progress and are well prepared to start Year 1.
- The school works closely with all the Thomas's schools and its charity provides support to others. Leaders are keen to enhance pupils' opportunities to gain a stronger understanding of their environment and local community.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To continue to work collaboratively and share its excellent practice with other schools, including the Thomas's schools.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher, together with senior leaders and proprietors, has established a culture of high aspirations. This leads to success for every pupil, both academically and personally. Outstanding leadership has ensured that the high-quality education identified at the previous inspection is maintained and all the independent school standards are met.
- Despite the school's continuing success, proprietors and school leaders are not complacent. They are relentless in sustaining an ambitious culture for staff, parents and for pupils, including pupils' achievement, as well as their social and emotional well-being.
- The school's values of 'kindness, courtesy, honesty, perseverance, independence, confidence, leadership, humility, respect, givers not takers' underpin this outstanding, family-oriented school. The overarching school value to 'Be Kind' permeates the school's work, so that high expectations and care for others are the norm.
- The systems and procedures in place to manage and develop staff are robust. Leaders place a strong focus on staff progression and emotional well-being. As a result, staff morale is extremely high. Progress towards teachers' individual targets is routinely discussed. Where necessary, support is quickly implemented so that high standards of teaching are maintained. Staff are proud to work at the school and are confident in its leadership. They value their training and receive encouragement to undertake research to develop their professional expertise.
- Leaders analyse pupils' performance data meticulously. They are able to identify small dips in their progress. This prompts swift action, enabling pupils to catch up with their learning very quickly.
- The curriculum offers pupils a breadth of learning experiences. Based on the school's values, the curriculum balances academic subjects with physical, technological, creative and outdoor areas of learning.
- The use of information and communication technology and themed learning activities across the curriculum support pupils' rapid progress. This was seen, for example, in the 'Harry Potter' learning theme that involved work across the curriculum, including in history, physical education and English. Similarly, Year 1 pupils developed their scientific knowledge and skills while exploring different substances 'to make spells and potions'.
- Extra-curricular activities, including a debating club, the arts, and sports provide pupils with new experiences and opportunities to showcase their talents. Pupils achieve strong outcomes across a wide range of disciplines while developing into well-rounded individuals.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a core aspect of the school's work. Pupils actively support charities and have an excellent appreciation of different faiths and cultures in Britain and beyond. Pupils celebrate the musical and artistic contributions of pupils from other schools, which are supported by the Thomas's school's charity. Pupils' high regard for equality and diversity is promoted well through their learning, trips and special events.

- The school prepares pupils exceptionally well for life in modern Britain. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of fundamental British values, including the rule of law, individual liberty, respect and tolerance, also reflects their appreciation of the school's values. For instance, the overarching value to 'Be Kind' supports the work of pupil monitors and the school council who represent and support their peers.

Governance

- This school does not have a governing body. The proprietors provide excellent oversight and strategic direction, including managing the finances of all the Thomas's London Day Schools. Proprietors are highly effective in ensuring that all independent standards are met. Statutory safeguarding requirements are in place, including a suitable safeguarding policy which is fit for purpose.
- The proprietors know the school extremely well. They systematically challenge leaders and provide necessary support so that there is effective deployment of resources and further enrichment to the curriculum. Together with the headteacher, proprietors take effective steps to strengthen the school's arrangements for the recruitment and appraisal of staff.
- While the proprietors appreciate pupils' high achievements, they continue to plan for further improvements to enhance pupils' opportunities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders maintain a safe and welcoming environment where pupils can learn and develop. The safeguarding policy, published on the school's website, reflects the latest guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Thorough pre-employment checks confirm that all staff are suitable to work with children.
- There is a strong culture of vigilance for keeping pupils safe in the school. Staff know how to spot signs of neglect, possible harm and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Leaders encourage staff to report any concerns that should arise, no matter how small. Staff receive regular safeguarding training so that this priority remains at the forefront of the school's work.
- Strong partnerships with parents, carers and other stakeholders ensure that pupils receive early help should they need it. Leaders rigorously follow up referrals made to relevant services to check that actions have secured pupils' safety. The school's meticulous and timely records show this.
- Parents who responded to Parent View and who spoke with inspectors are confident that their children are kept extremely safe at school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching is highly inspirational, challenging and fun. Teachers successfully impart their secure subject knowledge, enabling pupils to make excellent progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is exceptional.

- Assessment of pupils is thorough and accurate. Leaders use pupils' prior attainment and any additional needs requirements to set aspirational targets from the time of pupils' arrival at the school. Teachers use pupils' assessment information and targets effectively to design tasks that enable all pupils to make consistently strong progress.
- Teaching effectively engages pupils and enables them to develop excellent skills. Teachers are determined for all pupils to reach their full potential. The school's value of 'perseverance' underpins this. Pupils told inspectors that they are encouraged to try their best.
- Most-able pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities receive effective support to achieve their best. Inspectors identified demanding work to stretch the most able and the correct level of support to provide those with extra help when needed. Pupils thrive in their learning because they rise to the challenge and value the additional support.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning. Along with teachers, they systematically check pupils' understanding and provide timely support. Pupils who may be falling behind in their work are able to catch up quickly due to the extra help they receive.
- Teachers work collaboratively with teaching assistants and plan learning exceptionally well. Resources and interesting tasks, including outdoor activities, are coordinated meticulously so that they are matched closely to pupils' abilities, needs and interests.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive. Teaching encourages pupils to explore and learn in a calm and purposeful way. Pupils are highly motivated, as they want to be fully involved in learning that is made enjoyable by their teachers.
- The school works highly effectively with parents. Termly reports and guidance help parents to support their children. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about how well their children are taught at the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- All staff give pupils' well-being a high priority. This is reinforced by the school's personal, social, and health education and citizenship programme, which is taught in all year groups. The school's values underpin pupils' excellent social development.
- Pupils are articulate and very confident. They express their points of view with self-assuredness while showing the utmost respect for the opinions of their classmates. Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes towards their learning and a thirst for knowledge. This was demonstrated in many ways, including pupils asking sensible questions and offering possible suggestions in class discussion.
- Leaders and teaching staff know and value each pupil extremely well. Pupils contribute to their class rules, for example deciding on which charity to support and influencing leaders' decisions via the school council. Pupils have opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles through the vast range of sporting activities on offer; and older pupils make wise choices for lunch.

- The school's pastoral care to promote pupils' physical and emotional well-being is strong. Various enrichment activities including yoga and links to professional services such as occupational therapists and a counsellor make a strong contribution to pupils' welfare. Pupils have opportunities to reflect on their strengths, receive support for any weaknesses and are praised for the efforts that they make.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online, through assemblies, lessons and special events. Pupils say that they feel safe because the building is secure and they can approach their teachers should they need to do so. They understand the different types of bullying and believe it does not exist at the school. The school's records demonstrate that bullying is extremely rare at the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons is impeccable. Pupils are well mannered, respectful to teachers and visitors and supportive to each other. They demonstrate high levels of self-discipline and behave maturely, reflecting the strong moral development provided by the school.
- The school's environment is vibrant, colourful and highly conducive to learning. Pupils are extremely engaged in their work, so incidents of low-level disruption are extremely rare. Pupils are inquisitive and show a genuine interest in their learning.
- Attendance levels are high, and persistent absence is extremely low. Pupils enjoy being at school because they love their learning. Leaders rigorously monitor any lapses in attendance to ensure that pupils are safe and well supported.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Throughout their time in the school, pupils make rapid progress in acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills across a very wide-ranging curriculum.
- Pupils reach high standards in many subjects, including in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils rise to the challenge of work often pitched at higher levels than typically found and achieve very well both academically and personally.
- Pupils are active readers and display a real love of reading. The vast majority are fluent readers with many reading at a standard well above their chronological age. For example, pupils in Year 5 were able to display their creative and reading skills as they recited text from 'Macbeth' with confidence and flair.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics and relish using their mathematical skills to solve a range of problems.
- Pupils write extremely well for different purposes. They write to a very high standard for their age and they take pride in their accurate punctuation and grammar.
- Pupils excel in academic, physical, technological, creative and linguistic subjects, including Latin and French. In science, pupils make excellent progress as they are expected to think deeply about the investigations they do. For example, Year 6 pupils designed their own methodology to test blood flow around the human body.

- The most able pupils achieve extremely well because they are suitably challenged. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make equally excellent progress because of the personalised support they receive.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make the same progress as other pupils. Strong teaching enables them to gain a rapid grasp of English language and so make substantial progress across many subjects.
- Pupils are supported exceptionally well in preparing for the next stage of their education. This is because of their high levels of attainment in many subjects, together with their confidence and excellent attitudes to learning.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children receive an exceptional, nurturing and happy start to their school life. They benefit from highly effective leadership, inspirational teaching and an engaging curriculum. In 2017, 87% of children attained a good level of development. This is well above the national average.
- Children join the early years provision with variable levels of skills and abilities. They make rapid progress because of the excellent teaching they receive. By the end of the Reception Year, the majority are secure in the knowledge and skills required to start Year 1.
- The leadership of the early years provision is extremely strong. There is a real sense of commitment and high aspirations so that children receive consistently rich learning experiences. Areas for improvement are quickly identified and effective strategies put in place to tackle these. For instance, children have opportunities to explore outdoor environments extensively, such as for woodland crafts, in partnership with specialist providers.
- Assessments are accurate. These are based on all adults making and recording high-quality observations to capture children's achievements. Leaders receive and welcome local authority checks to substantiate the accuracy of these assessments.
- Teaching is of high quality and supports purposeful learning. Teachers respond to individual needs, including those of the most able and children who speak English as an additional language, by planning captivating activities. Children enjoy their learning in art, drama, music, French and computing because of specialised teaching. As a result, all children make excellent progress across all areas of learning.
- Children behave extremely well in the early years. Well-established routines encourage the children to learn and help them to be self-sufficient. For example, inspectors observed children effectively developing their skills by choosing engaging activities set by their teachers. One such activity involved children picking up 'treasure' using tweezers.
- Leaders and teaching staff have strong links with parents. Leaders host workshops so that parents can acquire information about their children's learning. This includes phonics, so that parents can support their children with learning letter sounds at home. Parents receive regular information about their children's progress, including 'adventure files' that show their children's development across all areas of learning.
- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards relating to the early years

provision are met. Safeguarding and welfare requirements are in place as children are valued, cared for and well supported.

School details

Unique reference number	100534
DfE registration number	207/6317
Inspection number	10012796

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	382
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Tobyn and Ben Thomas
Chair	Tobyn Thomas
Headteacher	Joanna Ebner
Annual fees (day pupils)	£19,557–£20,760
Telephone number	020 73616500
Website	www.thomas-s.co.uk/Kensington-Home
Email address	kensington@thomas-s.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 June 2011

Information about this school

- Thomas's Kensington is an independent, co-educational, preparatory day school. The Thomas family founded this school in 1981.
- The school is one of four family-run schools, a kindergarten and a primary academy, which are owned and managed by the Thomas's London Day Schools.
- The school aims to offer pupils 'the highest academic standards set within a broad and rich curriculum, which inspires enjoyment, learning and achievement'. To 'be kind' is an overarching value across all of the Thomas's schools.

- This is a Christian school, open to all faiths.
- The school has no governing body. The current proprietors are the sons of the school founders and they provide the strategic direction for the school.
- The school is located on three sites, which are close to each other. From Reception to Year 2, pupils are educated at the lower school located at Victoria Road. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 are taught at the preparatory school situated on Cottesmore Gardens. The third site at St Alban's Grove provides additional facilities, including a theatre, music rooms, a gymnasium and kitchen dining facilities.
- The school does not use any off-site educational provision for pupils.
- There are no disadvantaged pupils at this school.
- The school has a small number of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. There are no pupils with an education, health and care plan.
- The school was last inspected in June 2011, when it was judged to be outstanding.
- The headteacher took up her post in September 2012.

Information about this inspection

- This full standard inspection took place with one day's notice.
- Inspectors conducted a range of activities to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation. Records relating to attendance, the curriculum, assessment and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors visited classes in the lower and preparatory school to observe learning, in some cases with senior staff.
- Inspectors also looked at pupils' books, including 'adventure journals' in the early years foundation stage and listened to pupils read.
- The lead inspector visited a church service attended by all pupils and some of the extra-curricular activities on offer at the school.
- Inspectors met with the proprietors; senior leaders; teaching staff, including teaching assistants; and three groups of pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with parents, before school started, to hear their views of the school. There were 59 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and six text comments.
- Inspectors took account of 61 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Rosemarie McCarthy, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Moore	Ofsted Inspector
Brian Oppenheim	Her Majesty's Inspector

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