

# Thomas's Kensington

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	207/6317
Unique Reference Number	100534
Inspection number	320399
Inspection dates	25-26 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Kanwaljit Singh

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.

## Information about the school

Thomas's Kensington is run by the Thomas family and is one of four schools and two kindergartens. It is an academically non-selective, co-educational and non-denominational Christian independent day school for pupils from 4-11 years of age. It was established in 1981 and now operates from two nearby sites. One building has pupils aged 4-7 years and the other has pupils aged 7-11 years. There are 344 pupils on roll of whom 50 have learning difficulties. But none has a statement for special needs. There are 32 pupils who do not use English as their mother tongue, but are not new to English. This is the first full inspection of the school.

## Evaluation of the school

Thomas's Kensington provides its pupils with an education of outstanding quality. Pupils love their school, enjoy their lessons and grow in confidence. Parents have a very positive view of the school; one summed up the view of many, '*Fantastic School all around*', and inspection evidence confirms this. The curriculum is outstanding as is the quality of teaching. Relationships are strong and pupils' behaviour is also outstanding. The head teacher provides excellent leadership uniting a very strong team and creating an outstanding learning and caring ethos, which supports pupils' personal and academic development extremely well. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and all pupils are taught a very wide range of subjects during their time in the school. Curriculum policies are reviewed regularly, monitored closely and supported by very well planned schemes of work. Pupils' basic skills are carefully developed. Links between subjects are planned with great care and are used to make lessons more exciting. For example a focus on other countries led to Year 2 considering aspects of New Zealand culture with work on ragau stick dancing, making of poi (a form of juggling a ball on a rope), and learning words in Maori, in a way that linked history, geography, music and even design technology.

An outstanding feature of the educational provision is the wide range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities provided for all pupils. These add immensely to pupils' enjoyment of their education, particularly the wide range of sports activities, which are taught at a variety of sporting venues. Within subject areas, creative arts

are a special strength in the school and pupils speak very enthusiastically about participating in annual drama productions for each year group. Work is very well matched to pupils' needs. Those who have learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are new to English make excellent progress similar to their peers. This is because their needs are identified quickly and additional specialist teaching is provided.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. Class teachers and subject specialist teachers have excellent subject knowledge and they plan lessons that are interesting and lively. As a result pupils are keen to learn and they make outstanding progress. Staff have high expectations and pupils are consistently challenged to work to their full potential. Opportunities for speaking and listening through talking partners are used very effectively in developing pupils' ideas and enabling them to be confident and articulate. Through careful assessments teachers have a clear understanding of their pupils' abilities and progress and plan lessons to meet their individual needs. Teaching assistants are well deployed for the benefit of pupils, particularly those who need extra guidance.

Marking is good and pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and as a result pupils are very responsive to instructions, confident to ask and answer questions and offer their views. One pupil said, '*Teachers are friendly and kind. They help you to think for yourself*'. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is impeccable and as a result lessons keep a brisk pace with no interruptions. Assessment of pupils' work is thorough and pupils are effectively involved in assessing their own and their peer's work. Tracking of pupils' progress is rigorous. All performance data is analysed regularly and used effectively.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils feel safe in a well-organised environment and are polite and friendly to each other at work and play. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils understand how they are expected to behave and all staff provide good role models and treat them with courtesy and respect. All pupils enjoy school, as shown by their very good attendance and punctuality. The personal, social and health education programme provides very valuable experiences for pupils to develop social skills and understanding of life skills of value beyond school. They have opportunities to reflect both in assemblies and lessons. In one Year 5 lesson, considering the Amazon rain forest, pupils were visibly moved to see how this unique eco-system was being destroyed. Pupils are strongly encouraged to take responsibility within school such as form captains and vice-captains. They also have a generous perspective on supporting those less fortunate than themselves through enthusiastic fund-raising for charities, especially helping children in Nepal through the Child Aid in Rural Nepal Trust.

Pupils' cultural development is especially strong and they have excellent opportunities to learn about their own culture, institutions and services in England as well as other faiths and cultures in their community and the world. The whole school is a harmonious community in which pupils show tolerance and respect other cultures and faiths.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school's policies promote pupils' health, safety and welfare most effectively. The supervision of pupils and risk assessments are appropriate within school and during off-site visits. For example, when using the local park, staff ensure that pupils know the importance of road safety by walking sensibly and using controlled crossings. Whilst in the park, the pupils show a clear understanding of play areas and boundaries. In school, the pupils take due care when using narrow staircases and corridors. The school offers good quality lunches and implements its dietary policy well as pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. Arrangements for child protection are good and pupils know they can talk to trusted adults. The school's policies for the promotion of good behaviour and for administering first aid are implemented effectively. All accidents and incidents are recorded in detail.

Home-school diaries are monitored closely. The school places a high priority on regular attendance which has a positive impact on the pupils' achievement and future economic well-being. Registers of attendance and admissions are maintained as required. Systematic checks are made on portable electrical equipment and monitoring of fire safety procedures is good. The school has planned well to increase accessibility to the premises and curriculum.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that all members of staff are fully checked for their suitability to work with children. The school has a single central record of all staff checks.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school's accommodation is good. The buildings are in a very good state of repair both inside and out and the standard of decoration is very good. They provide a safe and effective learning environment. The availability of specialist rooms, such as those for science, music, information and communication technology, pottery and art help to extend the curriculum and successfully support pupils' creative and aesthetic development. The indoor areas are made attractive by stimulating displays of pupils' work and other learning resources. The main hall is too small to have all the pupils for school assemblies and other gatherings. However, the school makes good use of the nearby church for these purposes. The outdoor area for Reception age children is small but used well to extend the curriculum.

The school does not provide an appropriate area for pupils who are ill during the day. Outdoor areas for both the sites are very small. The school compensates for the limited accommodation by taking pupils to a close-by sports centre for regular physical education lessons. There is no place for pupils other than Reception children to use for break times except their classrooms; however, the school makes considerable efforts to take them out to a nearby park and tennis courts. The school has firm plans to improve its accommodation.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information meets all requirements. The school maintains very good contact with parents by regular telephone calls, e-mails, face-to-face meetings and home-school diaries. After consultation with the parent-teacher association, the school now issues weekly electronic bulletins via its intranet, which is open to all parents via the school's informative website. New and prospective parents are invited to look around the school and are also given a useful handbook. Throughout the year at appropriate times, parents are invited to meetings to discuss their children's progress and hear about the planned learning experiences for their children.

Written progress reports, issued twice a year are of good quality and although they do not yet contain assessment test data in terms of National Curriculum levels, or space for pupils' views, they do give a clear picture of how effective the provision has been in addressing the pupils' academic needs. The school's prospectus contains all relevant information. Approximately one quarter of all parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and of these the overwhelming majority were entirely satisfied with the quality of information received and education provided. Some parents chose to add comments such as, 'This is a fabulous school'; another writes, 'my child is sad when she can't attend'; some stated that, 'academic development is not compromised by its nurturing ethos'. A minority voiced concerns of which the school is aware and has addressed successfully. The school recently sought the views of parents and has used this feedback to improve its work further.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a detailed written complaint policy that sets out the procedures to follow in the management of a complaint and is fully compliant with regulations. This policy is available to parents in the school handbook and is also on the school's website. There have been no formal complaints from parents.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (Schools Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

## School details

Name of school	Thomas's Kensington
DCSF number	207/6317
Unique reference number	100534
Type of school	Preparatory
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1981
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 157    Girls: 187    Total: 344
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 10,245 – 13,935
Address of school	17-19 Cottessmore Gardens London W8 5PR
Telephone number	0207361 6500
Fax number	0207361 6501
Email address	dmaine@thomas-s.co.uk; kensington@thomas-s.co.uk
Headteacher	Mrs Diana Maine
Proprietor	Mr NTL Thomas and Mr BVR Thomas
Reporting inspector	Kanwaljit Singh AI
Dates of inspection	25-26 February 2008