

Thomas's Preparatory School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	212/6398
Unique Reference Number	130398
Inspection number	320400
Inspection dates	22-23 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley 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).

Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and framework Act 1998.

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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 is a selective, co-educational preparatory school. It is one of four schools and two kindergartens of the same name owned by the proprietors. This school was opened in 1993 by the current headteacher and this is the first full inspection of the school. This is a big school with 557 pupils, occupying a large, four-storey Victorian building in a residential area within the London Borough of Wandsworth. The Reception children moved into their new, purpose-built block on the same site a few weeks ago. As part of this inspection, the Reception classes were inspected by Ofsted's Children's Services.

Evaluation of the school

Thomas's Preparatory School provides its pupils with an outstanding quality of education. Pupils are extremely happy, confident and enjoy their learning. Although this is a large school, pupils are not overwhelmed by its size because staff work well together to produce a cohesive and caring community within three departments. The dedication and drive of the headteacher creates a purposeful learning environment within which the 'be kind' ethos of the school supports pupils' personal development extremely well. The curriculum is very broad and impacts significantly on the good progress that pupils make. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. Pupils are taught a very wide range of subjects, many from an early age. The development of basic skills is well mapped through the three stages of the school so that pupils progress seamlessly. The vast majority of pupils participate in a very full programme of trips and engagements within and beyond the school day. There are strengths in all areas of the curriculum but the sporting, aesthetic and creative are the most outstanding. Some subjects, including science and geography, have taken the lead in tracking in detail pupils' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills in order to plan for changes and improvements in the curriculum. Curriculum planning in most subjects ensures that higher attaining pupils can be set work from the outset that challenges them fully. Curricular links between subjects are well established so that pupils of all ages understand how their learning fits into the 'big picture'.

The personal and social development of pupils, and health and careers education are well planned into subjects and wider areas of the curriculum. There are many opportunities to promote social and moral development through charity work and other community involvement locally and abroad.

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers, support staff and pupils share a clear enjoyment of learning. Teachers plan lessons well, making very good use of the schemes of work. Their excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm for teaching has a significant impact on the good progress that pupils make. Lessons include planned opportunities to assess pupils' work and a particular strength of the teaching is the way in which pupils are actively involved in their learning. They respond very well to teachers' skilful use of questioning, discussion in pairs and groups, and expectations to explain how they have approached a task. Pupils are equally confident to work through concepts that they have not fully understood. In this way, in addition to acquiring knowledge, pupils are encouraged to consider how to learn best and to use strategies for study so that they can transfer their skills between different disciplines.

As a result of good assessment procedures both in lessons and through tracking of attainment, teachers have good information about how well pupils are doing. Pupils have targets and these are reviewed regularly. The learning enrichment team supports teachers well with information about how best to help those with additional learning needs. In some lessons teachers do not make the most of this information to plan different tasks that will challenge all levels of ability. Staff are very proficient at analysing data and evaluating reasons for different levels of performance for individual pupils as well as for each subject taught. This ensures that actions taken to improve performance are well-founded and effective. Linking pupil performance with expectations for attainment is better developed in some departments and subjects than in others. At its best, assessment is used to track and predict rates of progress in addition to attainment. All schools within the company are working together to establish baselines from which to more effectively measure pupils' progress.

As a result of the outstanding provision for the curriculum and teaching, pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Pupils attain very high standards in their work and in public examinations. The vast majority of pupils gain top grades in 11+ and 13+ examinations and all go on to the school of their choice, a significant proportion with scholarships and awards.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. Pupils' spiritual needs are well met by using the opportunities provided for reflection such as in circle time and attendance at church services. Robust procedures to reinforce appropriate behaviour and an effective curriculum ensure that pupils develop the social skills necessary to get on well with each other and contribute to the school community. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. The elected school council,

the prefect system, the anti-bullying committee and the sustainability committee all contribute effectively to the development of roles of responsibility and empathy for others. For example, older pupils speak highly of the opportunities provided to help younger pupils read. Pupils support the Child Aid In Rural Nepal (CAIRN) Trust and take part in decision making and the running of fund-raising activities.

Personal, social, health and careers education is well coordinated, providing many opportunities to discuss issues such as peer pressure, in groups or on an individual basis as part of the tutorial system. This is complemented by the wide variety of extra curricular activities that enrich the pupils' experience of growing up, and because of the high take up, benefits the majority of pupils. Visiting speakers, such as the police liaison officer ensure that pupils understand their roles and responsibilities in the wider community. Pupils have opportunities to be involved in their local community, for example through sports coaching with pupils from local primary schools.

Pupils' appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures are well developed, for example through celebrating various religious festivals, world culture day and black history month. Pupils are well prepared for life beyond the school in many ways. In addition to the very high standards reached in academic subjects, pupils also have highly-developed information and communication technology (ICT) skills, good decision-making skills and can express themselves well and with confidence.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Pupils are very well known as individuals by their staff, and pupils say that staff show exceptional care and concern. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent, and the quality of supervision is high. Pupils feel safe from bullying and have confidence that it will be dealt with constructively should it occur. Each class has appointed a representative for the anti-bullying committee whose members show concern for those who are experiencing problems. Pupils say that this works well. They can also identify adults to whom they would turn if they had a problem.

Staff have undertaken the appropriate training in matters of safeguarding pupils' welfare, but the nominated child protection officer has not yet completed the required training. All other policies and procedures are robust. Risk assessments are regularly completed across all aspects of school life. The school's rigorous attention to health and safety is supported by a suitable policy and accurate records are kept of regular fire drills and testing of fire equipment. The testing of electrical equipment is due for renewal shortly. Provision for first aid is comprehensive and any accidents are properly recorded and reported. Pupils are reminded of aspects of safety and hygiene within lessons as necessary, for example in science. The very positive code of conduct underpins the high expectations contained within the behaviour policy, and staff are excellent role models in this respect. Pupils say that teachers are fair

with rewards and punishments. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Encouragement is given to pupils to follow active and healthy lifestyles, and they appreciate the benefits of exercise through their regular access to sporting activities. On Wednesdays, most pupils who live within a reasonable distance walk to school. Snacks, such as pieces of melon, are provided at break time, lunch meals are nutritious, with a good choice of healthy options, and water is available throughout the day.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Effective safeguards are in place to ensure that pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment procedures are rigorous, and are recorded on a centralized register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's accommodation is outstanding, ensuring pupils' safety as well as the enjoyment of their education. Recent building work has resulted in excellent accommodation for the Reception classes. There are well-equipped specialist teaching rooms for science, ICT, design and technology, art, music and drama. A multi-purpose hall is used for productions, concerts, music rehearsals and assemblies. All classrooms offer very effective learning environments, enhanced by bright displays of pupils' work. The school makes good use of local community facilities to support sporting activities. The outdoor play area provides well for pupils educationally and recreationally, and an unusual feature is the climbing wall, which, together with other play equipment, develops pupils' physical skills. A new garden is in the process of construction. The provision of a lift and stair lift indicates that good account has been taken of making the school accessible for all current and prospective learners. A medical room is available in each main area of the school for those pupils who become ill during the school day.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a wealth of information for parents and carers. The prospectus, an information booklet for parents of new and prospective pupils, and transition booklets for each of the lower, middle and upper school departments give very good information on school procedures and policies. Parents and carers are kept well informed of their child's progress, although some expressed the wish to have more information and meetings with teachers. There are two reports each year for those in the lower and middle school and five for those in the upper school department. Almost two-thirds of parents and carers responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and the large majority are pleased with all aspects of the school's work.

Procedures for handling complaints

Although a significant proportion of parents said in the pre-inspection questionnaire that they did not understand the procedure for handling complaints, the school has a very clear policy. It is made available to parents when their child is admitted to the school and is on the web-site. There have been no formal complaints over the past year.

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 one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure that the person with designated responsibility for child protection completes the required training (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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:

- make better use of assessment information so as to track expected progress more thoroughly.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The provision is good.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and children achieve well as a result. Teaching staff in the reception classes work well together, sharing skills and experience, and demonstrate a keen commitment to ongoing improvements and training in the Foundation Stage. The enthusiastic staff team provide well for each child's interest and ability through a busy but broad and fun curriculum including times when children enjoy physical development, ballet, music and drama groups.

Accommodation and resources are outstanding and support the development of a free flow system. Planning is informed through careful observation of the children during play. Staff demonstrate that they know how young children learn, for example, by offering pertinent and open ended questions, and the children respond well with growing confidence and fluency. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered appropriately, independence is encouraged and their behaviour is good. Classroom walls reflect many examples of the children's early literacy and the children show a fondness for books which they often self select. Mathematics is carefully woven into the children's activities and the children show an increasing ability to problem solve, count and understand number operations.

Children demonstrate confidence and proficiency using computers and technology to support learning, and good opportunities arise for children to build and construct using sets and found objects. Their creativity is reflected in art and craft activities, often linked to core subjects, and they enjoy pretend play and dressing up where they can explore their ideas and feelings. Staff are endeavouring to create more balance between staff led and children's self initiated ideas through further training in this area.

Partnership with parents and carers is good and parents offer positive feedback. They are well informed about their children's progress and are encouraged to further support their children's learning at home. Leadership and management is good and managers regularly evaluate practice and support change and improvements to the curriculum. Training is regularly sourced and positive links have been made with the local authority in order to maintain the high standards achieved thus far. The needs of all children are being met.

Recommendations or actions to improve the funded nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of the nursery education the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

- develop ideas to enhance the balance between staff led and child initiated learning.

School details

Name of school	Thomas's Preparatory School		
DCSF number	212/6398		
Unique reference number	130398		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY240354		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 1993		
Age range of pupils	4-13		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 278	Girls: 279	Total: 557
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 20	Girls: 24	Total: 44
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,995 to £12,435		
Address of school	Broomwood Road Wandsworth London SW11 6JZ		
Telephone number	020 7326 9300		
Fax number	020 7326 9301		
Email address	cevelegh@thomas-s.co.uk		
Headteacher	Carol Evelegh		
Proprietors	Tobyn, Ben, David and Joanna Thomas		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Childcare inspector	Alison Romanczuk		
Dates of inspection	22-23 January 2008		