

Thomas's Clapham

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

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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}

Information about the school

Thomas's Clapham is a large selective co-educational preparatory school, based on Christian principles but open to children of all faiths, for up to 586 pupils aged four to thirteen, which opened in 1993. It is one of four schools and two kindergartens of the same name owned by the proprietors in the London area. The school is housed in a large four-storey Victorian building in Wandsworth, which was formerly a girl's grammar school and has a modern, purpose-built block for the Reception classes. There are currently 566 pupils on roll, with 81 children in the Reception classes, 46 of whom are funded under the government's nursery scheme. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school was last inspected in January 2008.

The school's stated aims are: 'To offer a broad, balanced, stimulating curriculum which focuses on enjoyment, learning and individual achievement simultaneously.'

Evaluation of the school

Thomas's Clapham continues to provide an outstanding quality of education for its pupils and now also for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and very successfully meets its stated aims. Pupils of all ages are highly articulate and confident, their behaviour is outstanding, and they are extremely enthusiastic about their learning and the exceptional breadth of opportunities in the outstanding curriculum. Notable improvements have been made since the last inspection so that teaching and assessment are now both outstanding. Excellent resources, the 'be kind' ethos and attention to outstanding arrangements for pupils' welfare, health and safety create a secure and purposeful learning environment. Consequently, pupils' progress across the school, both academically and personally, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and all of the regulations are now met.

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

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding, so pupils develop a love and enthusiasm for learning from the very start. It is exceptionally varied and stimulating for pupils of all ages, with excellent opportunities for academic, physical, and aesthetic and creative learning. The range of subjects and specialist teaching both increase as pupils move up the school. High focus is placed on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy. Well-written schemes of work and joint planning support pupils' progression in learning, including for the most able, across the lower, middle and upper schools. Links between subjects enables pupils to further broaden and develop their knowledge and understanding. An exceptional range of trips, visits, activities and events significantly enrich the curriculum both within the school day and beyond. Pupils' personal, social, cultural, health and careers education is extremely well planned and is incorporated into school life as well as through lessons and subject teaching.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. Teachers throughout the school are enthusiastic and make use of their excellent subject knowledge to provide exciting and well-paced lessons to engage and interest pupils. Consequently, pupils thrive, enjoy learning and make significant progress. Considerable improvements have been made in tracking pupils' performance and the use of assessment data. Pupils now have very specific learning targets in each subject and these help teachers to plan well-structured lessons that cater effectively for pupils of all abilities. Success criteria are integral to all lessons so that pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn and how well they are achieving. Teachers incorporate frequent opportunities to check and promote learning through exceptionally skilful questioning. Pupils develop confidence and independence in their learning through individual, paired and group work which often involves assessing their own or others' work. Pupils learn well because they are actively involved in lessons and enjoy the relevant, varied and often practical tasks and activities that are set for them. These enable them to successfully develop the vocabulary, skills, knowledge and concepts that underpin each subject. All teachers have good access to information and communication technology (ICT); however, some teachers use it more effectively than others as an aid to learning.

The learning enrichment team has been strengthened and, as a result, the progress of pupils with special educational needs is carefully tracked, appropriate interventions are made and their needs are better met in the classroom. Marking is consistent across all subjects. Good use is made of praise and teachers indicate clearly to pupils the most successful elements of their work. A key factor in pupils' better progress is the quality of teachers' very specific advice on how they can improve. Older pupils, in particular, act on these comments and track their progress towards their learning targets.

Pupils' high attainment and success in the 11+ and 13+ public examinations, many at the highest grades, reflect the outstanding progress made by most in their time at

the school in most subjects, including mathematics and science. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve a place at a selective school, and a significant proportion win scholarships and awards, for example in music.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their high attendance and enthusiastic participation in lessons. The exceptional range of clubs, events and activities provides excellent opportunities, enabling everyone to find something to excel in. Pupils' excellent personal development and knowledge of British institutions and public services is also supported by the well-planned personal, social, health and careers education programme and enriched by visiting speakers, such as the local Member of Parliament or parents and carers who talk about their jobs. Pupils have frequent opportunities for reflection in circle time, assemblies and church services, at which their choirs often perform.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding at all times and contributes significantly to their learning in lessons and how well they get on with each other. They develop excellent leadership and team skills and make exceptional contributions to school life, for example as school councillors, anti-bullying or sustainability committee members and in helping younger pupils. This desire to make a difference extends beyond school, in particular at local and international level together, such as the Nepal day, so pupils develop deep understanding of other cultures. For example, everyone participated in the 'Make a difference' day, with older pupils helping in a range of local organisations such as children's nurseries or homes for the elderly and younger pupils making decorations for a local hospice. Pupils routinely support schools in Nepal through the Child Aid In Rural Nepal (CAIRN) Trust and others each raised over £100 to provide ICT equipment to take to a South African township school during their hockey tour.

Pupils' self-confidence, respect for others, ability to be articulate and willingness to take responsibility, together with their high attainment and excellent ICT skills, ensure that they are exceptionally well prepared for their next schools.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding, as a result of the school's excellent attention to detail and the ongoing improvements in practice. Pupils are extremely well supervised at all times. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and staff show exceptional levels of care for their pupils. In turn, pupils feel safe and well cared for. Pupils are rightly proud of the playground code of conduct which they helped to write and which reflects the school's ethos to 'be kind'. Pupils show high levels of concern for others and they are clear about the effectiveness of the work of the anti-bullying committee, the classroom 'ABC' mailboxes and the role of the elected class representatives. Consequently, they are

very confident that, on the rare occasion bullying occurs, they can turn to staff for help.

Child protection procedures are secure and all staff have undergone appropriate training, including the two named child protection officers. All policies and procedures relating to pupils' safeguarding, welfare, health and safety are robust and fully adhered to. Detailed risk assessments that cover all aspects of school life, including educational visits, accurate and evaluative records of fire drills, risk assessments and equipment testing, and regular testing of electrical equipment, reflect this rigorous approach. Procedures for first aid are detailed and all accidents are appropriately recorded and analysed for patterns. Expectations of pupils' behaviour are high and clearly explained in the school's behaviour policy and code of conduct.

Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles and personal safety within lessons and around school, such as in science, physical education and ICT, or when eating their healthy lunch or break-time snacks. Consequently they make healthy choices in their food and they participate enthusiastically in a wide range of activities including sport, ballet, drama and music. They are encouraged, if possible, to walk to school on Wednesdays. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school's procedures for the recruitment of staff are secure and meet the regulations. All staff, supply staff, volunteers and staff who work for the Thomas's group of schools and regularly work on site have been subject to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and are listed in the well-kept single central record.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's accommodation is outstanding. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils can enjoy their learning in well-decorated and resourced, purposeful and safe learning environments. Outstanding displays, both in classrooms and around the school, show pupils' work, support learning, share experiences and celebrate achievements. All classrooms and the specialist teaching rooms for science, ICT, design and technology, art, music and drama are well equipped and appropriately furnished. A large hall is used for productions, performances and assemblies. Pupils have good opportunities to learn and play outside. The large and secure hard-play area is well equipped, with two climbing walls, play equipment and marked-out areas for different activities. Pupils particularly like the new and exceptionally attractive garden area which provides a tranquil space in this busy residential area. Local facilities are used well to provide access to a wider range of sporting activities. A medical room is available to any pupil who becomes ill during the school day. Although the accommodation is spread over four floors, all areas are accessible through the provision of a lift and stair lift.

Provision of information

A very wide range of information is provided for parents and carers; much of this is tailored for each of the lower, middle and upper schools, such as the curriculum booklets. The school website, prospectus, and an information booklet all provide much detail on school life, procedures and policies. Parents and carers are kept well informed of their child's progress through email correspondence, regular meetings and informal discussions, and three reports each year for those in the lower and middle schools and five for those in the upper school.

The large majority of parents responded to the parental questionnaire. Most showed that they are pleased with all aspects of the school's work, with overwhelming agreement in some areas. However, a few raised concerns about aspects of the school's work, including the amount of homework set, and how well their views are taken account of and how unacceptable behaviour is dealt with. The school is aware of many of these views and is taking action, and inspectors agree that in some areas, not all parents feel fully informed.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The very clear policy fully meets requirements. It is regularly reviewed, published on the website and made available to parents and carers with other information when their child is admitted. Despite this, a significant proportion of parents indicated in the inspection questionnaire that they did not understand the procedure for handling complaints.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision, outcomes and overall effectiveness of the setting are now outstanding, so children make a superb start to their education. From starting points that are broadly expected for their age, children make outstanding progress, so by the end of their Reception Year, most achieve very high standards in all six areas of learning. The accommodation is outstanding, classrooms are vibrant and excellent use is made of the outdoor areas, enabling free-flow activities.

Outstanding teaching, an excellent mix of child-initiated and teacher-led activities, and very strong partnerships between teachers and teaching assistants support children's learning extremely well. Teachers are well qualified and highly skilled at assessing children's learning and development through observation. Activities are recorded well in 'Learning Journals', although there are few opportunities for children's own written contributions. Assessment information is used very effectively and sensitively to plan activities which meet children's needs, based on a skilfully planned and imaginative curriculum. Visits broaden children's experiences and promote their excellent social development. Children are highly enthusiastic and independent learners. They willingly share resources, take turns, listen carefully and are supportive of each other. They understand the need for personal hygiene, eating healthily and taking exercise.

Excellent induction arrangements build very strong relationships with parents before children start school and make a significant contribution to the very safe, healthy and caring learning environment. Use of specialist facilities and involvement in whole-school activities support the very smooth transition into Key Stage 1. Leadership and management are outstanding because both leaders and teachers are highly reflective and strive constantly to ensure children's safeguarding and welfare.

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 points for development.

- Continue to build on the improvements in teaching and use of assessment, for example by helping all teachers to make the most effective use of ICT in their lessons.
- In the Reception classes of the Early Years Foundation Stage, extend children's written contribution to their 'Learning Journals'.

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 school		
Date school opened	1993		
Age range of pupils	4–13		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 286	Girls: 280	Total: 566
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
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)	£12,600 to £14,310		
Address of school	Broomwood Road, Wandsworth London, SW11 6JZ		
Telephone number	020 7326 9300		
Email address	ceveleg@thomas-s.co.uk		
Headteacher	Carol Eveleg		
Proprietor	Tobyn, Ben, David and Joanna Thomas		