

School inspection report

21 to 23 May 2024

Thomas's Kensington

17–19 Cottessmore Gardens

Kensington

London

W8 5PR

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors have comprehensive oversight of the school. They ensure that leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities to meet the independent school standards consistently.
2. Leaders accurately identify the school's strengths and areas for development. They are supported and challenged by both governors and external agencies. Leaders implement rounded and well-informed improvement plans across the curriculum.
3. Pupils make good progress from their starting points and achieve high outcomes in writing. The majority of pupils achieve above age-related expectations in standardised assessments.
4. Leaders have developed a suitable broad curriculum which meets the needs of pupils and which is regularly reviewed. Lessons are carefully planned and most teaching helps pupils to gain new knowledge, skills and understanding. However, sometimes teaching is less effective because tasks are not well matched to pupils' needs and explanations are not clear enough.
5. The recently updated behaviour management policy is not always followed consistently. Where this is the case, off-task behaviour is not dealt with effectively, resulting in some pupils being less focused on their learning.
6. Leaders maintain a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the early years foundation stage framework and ensure that the youngest children are supported to meet age-related expectations. From a young age, pupils learn to understand and regulate their emotions. Leaders ensure that provision is in place for those who need additional emotional support. Consequently, pupils feel safe, supported and valued.
7. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and facilitate reasonable adjustments whenever necessary. Policies and procedures are aligned with the latest statutory guidance. Important information is readily accessible on the school's website.
8. Pupils behave well around the school. They are polite, considerate and respectful of other people. Through a range of guest speakers, trips and charitable initiatives, leaders ensure that pupils develop a broad social and economic education and understand the valuable contribution they can make to their local community and wider society.
9. The school has a robust approach to managing risks. Leaders have identified risks within school and in the local area and have implemented appropriate measures to mitigate these risks. Health and safety arrangements, including fire safety, are comprehensive and comply with current regulations.
10. Leaders have developed an effective safeguarding culture. Staff, including those with specific safeguarding responsibility, are appropriately trained and knowledgeable. Leaders take advice from local safeguarding partners, and make prompt referrals to them, as necessary. Pupils feel safe and are confident that they can approach a trusted adult for guidance and support, when required.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should ensure that:

- the behaviour management policy is consistently implemented by all staff in lessons
- teachers' explanations are clear and that tasks are matched well to pupils' needs and abilities so that high-quality teaching is consistent across the school.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Governors and leaders work as a cohesive team to plan and deliver a strategy which actively promotes pupils' wellbeing. Governors bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the role, such as in safeguarding and educational leadership. They visit the school regularly and offer both support and challenge to school leaders by analysing termly leadership reports and collaborating over school improvement targets. Governors assure themselves that leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities, so that the Standards are met consistently.
12. The school's aims and ethos are promoted and work well in practice. School values are widely displayed, made accessible for the pupils and form part of the everyday language used by both pupils and staff.
13. Leaders use a variety of data, including assessment scores and pupil surveys, to develop a broad understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. A strategic plan is in place to ensure that pupils' wellbeing is actively promoted. As a result, pupils make consistently good progress across the curriculum.
14. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A clear and detailed accessibility plan and individual education plans (IEPs) ensure that reasonable adjustments are made, as necessary. Leaders review the curriculum and monitor lessons and activities to ensure that teaching is inclusive.
15. Policies and procedures are aligned with the latest statutory guidance. Leaders regularly review how effectively and consistently policies are implemented and whether they are understood by staff and pupils. For example, leaders reviewed and made amendments to the school's behaviour policy, following feedback received from pupils, parents and staff.
16. The school provides parents with a wide range of useful information. Leaders regularly upload the latest versions of documents onto the school's website so that parents are kept up to date. Leaders provide local authorities with appropriate information related to education, health and care plans (EHC) plans. Parents are well informed on their children's progress and attainment through a programme of regular and detailed academic reporting.
17. The school operates an effective complaints procedure. Parental concerns are taken seriously and dealt with in an open and timely manner in line with school policy. Governors and leaders regularly review the complaints log and, if appropriate, any lessons are learned, recorded and acted upon.
18. Governors and leaders have a strategic approach to identifying and managing the risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing. This includes creating effective links with external agencies such as local safeguarding partners and medical professionals. There is a robust risk management culture that influences decisions at all levels, especially in relation to safeguarding and overseas trips. Risk assessments are thorough and regular staff training takes place to enhance their knowledge and practice. In addition, regular external auditing supports the school in developing an effectively implemented site improvement plan.
19. Early years leaders have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They have a detailed understanding of the requirements of the early years framework and ensure that the additional safeguarding and welfare requirements for early years children are all in place.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Leaders plan the curriculum so that all pupils undertake a wide and varied programme of lessons and activities appropriate to their ages and aptitudes. Specialist teaching and suitable resourcing in areas such as science, creative arts and computing foster interest and self-motivation in pupils. The curriculum is enhanced through additional activities, for example, pupils take part in regular music recitals, share their world views at Hyde Park's Speaker's Corner or plan collaboratively for a sustainability award.
22. Pupils enjoy success across the curriculum and make good progress. The majority of pupils successfully secure a place with their first-choice senior school, a number of which have selective admissions criteria. Recent cohorts have been awarded a range of entry awards including academic, music and sports scholarships.
23. The majority of pupils are working at or above age-related expectations in relation to their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils make particularly notable progress with their writing. From an early age, pupils learn to write at length with creativity and technical accuracy. By the time pupils reach Years 5 and 6, their writing shows a mature tone and commanding use of language.
24. Teaching is generally effective. Teachers take pupils' needs into account well when planning what to teach and how to teach it, including the needs of pupils with high prior attainment. As a result, pupils acquire new knowledge and skills in line with their aptitudes. Pupils apply effort and intellectual curiosity in their learning. Teachers use a range of strategies, such as asking well-chosen questions to specific pupils, to check understanding and to encourage deeper thinking. Staff give pupils opportunities to explain their understanding and they encourage pupils to use interesting language, including technical vocabulary.
25. However, in some cases, teaching is less effective. For example, at times, pupils are given tasks to do that are too easy for some and too hard for others. Sometimes, teachers do not explain things clearly enough, so pupils do not understand their learning or the tasks they are given to do. Occasionally, the recently updated behaviour policy is not followed consistently in lessons and off-task behaviour is not dealt with effectively. When this is the case, learning time is lost and lessons are less productive.
26. Clear frameworks offer detailed guidance regarding support mechanisms for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Pupils on the SEND and EAL register are consequently well known to teaching staff and reasonable adjustments are made in most lessons to account for their needs. There is good oversight in place and leaders monitor the progress of each child with additional needs, initiating further support whenever needed.
27. The development of communication, literacy and numeracy skills is given a high priority within the early years setting. The vast majority of children either meet or exceed the early learning goals for these areas. This is as a result of a well-planned curriculum and effective system of assessment. Individual needs and next steps are identified early and interventions put in place to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

28. Extra-curricular provision is broad and caters for a full range of interests from coding to Latin. The 'Unicorn Award' sets out a framework for personal achievements during pupils' time at the school. The pupils proudly progress through their bronze, silver and gold badges.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

30. The wide range of physical activities and sports provided enables pupils to be active, develop a healthy lifestyle and broaden their interests. Pupils share pride in representing their school in team fixtures. Sports captains present on their passions and inspirations in assemblies, encouraging others to follow their example. Pupils attend a wide range of active clubs including ballet, table tennis and skateboarding. Pupils also have opportunities to explore their physical abilities and self-awareness in a range of outdoor environments, for example, pupils have opportunities to spend breaktimes in the local park and to grow vegetables in their kitchen garden at the local church.
31. From an early age, pupils learn how to better understand and monitor their own health and wellbeing. Pupils use the school's 'mood meter' to communicate how they are feeling to the adults in the room. In Reception, children use their 'colour monster characters' to help themselves feel better when they, for example, feel upset. 'Chatterbox' interventions, where pupils are given dedicated time to speak with a trusted adult in a quiet area, are put in place to support pupils to improve their confidence. Where necessary, a formal programme of emotional support is put in place and trained school counsellors are made available. Pupils consequently feel safe, supported and valued.
32. Pupils are well supervised by appropriate adults. Pupils and staff share warm, respectful relationships and, as a result, pupils move around the school in a calm and considerate manner. Bullying is not tolerated. In the rare instances when it occurs, it is dealt with promptly with careful consideration given to all involved.
33. Staff in the early years help children to feel at ease and to enjoy their activities. Children feel secure in their environment as a result of the caring relationships and positive attitudes modelled by staff. Visiting medical professionals talk to the children about healthy bodies and minds. As a result, children consistently reach goals in relation to self-care and self-awareness.
34. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme ensures pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of the features of a respectful relationship. Parents are consulted and kept informed regarding any curriculum updates. The curriculum is well delivered across the age groups.
35. The school site is maintained to a high standard, with robust health and safety procedures in place. There are regular fire evacuation drills. Training for staff, including in fire safety is thorough, up to date and suitably recorded.
36. There are appropriate procedures and suitable accommodation is in place to care for pupils who are injured or become unwell. First aid is provided by suitably trained staff. Pupils with specific medical needs are well known to staff and receive suitable care. Any medicine is appropriately administered and stored securely.
37. Admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained and regularly reviewed to monitor patterns of absence. Staff are vigilant and follow up on unexplained absences promptly. Staff understand local reporting procedures in relation to children missing education. They report pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition times to the local authority, as required.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

39. Leaders ensure that the curriculum supports pupils to develop respect for other faiths and cultures and to take an interest in the wider world. The PSHE curriculum is enhanced through whole-school participation in a number of national events such as anti-bullying week, black history month and global diversity month. Pupils are proud to share their cultural backgrounds with one another and consequently grow a strong appreciation for the diversity of their community. This theme is consistently revisited throughout the year so that respect for others is embedded.
40. Leaders promote a respect for British society, institutions and values and the school's equality, diversity and inclusion committee actively promote pupils' tolerance of and respect for the diversity of modern British society. Leaders also organise regular excursions to a wide range of museums, monuments and landmarks in the school's locality. As a result of this cultural immersion, pupils value the voice they are given at school and take their democratic responsibilities seriously. For example, pupils feed back to staff through pupil surveys and vote for a wide range of pupil committees, from the school council to the 'wellbeing unicorns'.
41. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their future roles in society. From an early age, pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to lead and support their school community, be it as 'be kind monitors' or 'green unicorns', looking after other pupils or caring for the environment. Pupils learn that their views are valued and their voices listened to. Changes are made in response to issues raised by pupils, such as the introduction of a new rugby club for girls and a gymnastics club for boys.
42. Leaders support pupils to be able to distinguish right from wrong and to develop a respect for public services and the rule of law. For example, local leaders, including members of the House of Lords and the Metropolitan Police regularly lead workshops around issues such as community responsibility and road safety. As a result, pupils are respectful and considerate both in and out of school.
43. Leaders ensure that pupils increasingly develop a commitment to charity and service. The Thomas's Foundation links pupils with children from a diverse range of other settings, including a school in Nepal. Pupils develop their awareness of the lives of others through social interaction and joint competitions. Leaders also seek local partnerships to broaden pupils' experiences. For example, pupils collaborate with the Chelsea Pensioners on joint projects such as a local art exhibition and a chess club.
44. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of future pathways and financial management. In the summer term, Year 6 pupils take part in enrichment days to prepare them for senior school life. Alumni regularly return to share their experiences. The school offers a dynamic careers programme with guest speakers ranging from a mountaineer working in Snowdonia to a broker demonstrating how to analyse the stock market. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are exposed to financial management by planning charity events and being charged with making budgetary decisions. Some pupils set up their own businesses at the Christmas market and consequently develop an understanding for managing stock and making a profit.

45. The early years environment is deliberately organised to encourage social interaction. For example, pupils have daily opportunities to collaborate through play and problem-solving activities. Children are also given a voice from the outset, for example, when choosing the class book.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. There is an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school. A formal annual review of the school's safeguarding policy and procedures is supplemented by regular oversight and challenge. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of the school's safeguarding arrangements and any specific risks. Clear and comprehensive risk assessments and procedures are in place to mitigate these risks.
48. The school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance and is a central feature of new staff induction. Staff receive regular training, both in-person and online, organised by a suitably qualified and experienced safeguarding team. As a result, staff have a robust understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures as well as the staff code of conduct and whistleblowing policy.
49. Safeguarding records are carefully managed, regularly reviewed to analyse any trends and cross-referenced with the school's bullying and behaviour logs. Pupils deemed to be at risk or with an identified need are closely monitored. Records demonstrate that staff are confident in reporting concerns about other adults and making self-disclosures whenever necessary.
50. Safeguarding leaders readily engage with local agencies for guidance and support. As a result, they are aware of when and how to make referrals relating to staff conduct, early help assessment, child-on-child abuse, children missing education and extremism. Referrals to children's services, the police or other agencies are made in a timely manner.
51. Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe, including online. The online safety curriculum includes password protection, stranger danger, appropriate online behaviour and managing your digital footprint. Arrangements for the monitoring and filtering of online technology are effective and leaders respond to alerts promptly. Pupils understand how to report concerns and appreciate the multiple channels available to them. For example, in addition to speaking to a trusted adult, pupils can disclose a concern via the virtual 'worry box' and choose any member of staff as the recipient.
52. Governors and leaders ensure there are robust recruitment procedures in place that reflect the latest statutory requirements. Checks are recorded fully and accurately on the single central record of appointments. Staff involved in interviewing candidates are trained in safer recruitment.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 53. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Thomas's Kensington
Department for Education number	207/6317
Address	17-19 Cottesmore Gardens, London, W8 5PR
Phone number	0207 361 6500
Email address	kensington@thomas-s.co.uk
Website	www.thomas-s.co.uk/thomass-kensington/
Proprietor	Thomas's London Day Schools
Chair	Mr Ben Thomas
Headteacher	Mrs Kelly Miller
Age range	4-11
Number of pupils	346
Date of previous inspection	4 to 6 February 2020

Information about the school

54. Thomas's Kensington is an independent co-educational day school in Kensington, London. It is part of Thomas's London Day Schools, which is a limited company. The school has three sites, located within 500 yards of each other. The school consists of a lower school and a prep school. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
55. There are 59 children in the early years comprising of three Reception classes, based in the lower school.
56. The school has identified 42 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
57. English is an additional language for 204 pupils.
58. The school states its aims are to offer an exceptional education to young people which is forward-thinking and outward-looking, with kindness at the core. It aims to ensure that every member of the school community learns and lives by a strong set of values and to enable its pupils to achieve academic success through a broad curriculum and a four-dimensional approach to education which develops knowledge, skills, character and metacognition.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

21 to 23 May 2024

59. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

60. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

61. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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