



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Thames Christian School

April 2022

Contents

School's Details	3
1. Background Information	4
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection	5
Preface	5
Key findings	6
PART 1 – Quality of education provided	6
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	6
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils	6
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	6
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools	6
PART 6 – Provision of information	7
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled	7
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools	7
3. Educational Quality Inspection	8
Preface	8
Key findings	8
Recommendations	8
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements	8
The quality of the pupils' personal development	10
4. Inspection Evidence	13

School's Details

School	Thames Christian School
DfE number	212/6403
Registered charity number	1081666
Address	Thames Christian School 12 Grant Rd London SW11 2FR
Telephone number	0207 228 3933
Email address	info@thameschristianschool.org.uk
Headteacher	Dr Stephen Holsgrove
Chair of governors	Mrs Marie-Louise Wells
Age range	11–16
Number of pupils on roll	171
Inspection dates	26 to 29 April 2022

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Thames Christian School is an independent co-educational day school. It is owned by Thames Christian School, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The directors of the company are also the charity's trustees and the school's governors. The school, which was opened in September 2000, has recently moved into purpose-built premises close to Clapham Junction.
- 1.2 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims for pupils to understand their innate value, both as an individual and as a member of the community, so that they become well rounded and compassionate young people, who embrace good character, personal responsibility and academic excellence. It intends for pupils to become wise leaders who nurture their skills and talents in preparation for life beyond school.

About the pupils

- 1.4 The majority of pupils live locally, while the remainder travel from within a 12-mile radius of the school. The pupils reflect the many different cultural, social and economic backgrounds of the local area around Clapham Junction. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 35 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, most of whom receive additional specialist help. It supports three pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language for eight pupils, of whom one receives support for their English. The school has identified 88 pupils with a particular academic gift or talent in sport, music or art. Their needs are met through personalised learning plans.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. In addition the standards relating to curriculum, including sex and relationships education, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behaviour are also included. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 Pupils take GCSE level examinations in their final year at the school. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages, but inspection evidence confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are

maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils, including those with SEND, make good and often excellent progress from their starting points, benefitting from carefully targeted, individual learning programmes.
- Pupils show highly positive attitudes to their learning.
- Pupils are highly effective communicators.
- Pupils value the opportunities they are given to pursue interests beyond the classroom and many achieve success in them.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils show real compassion for each other and have a genuine appreciation of the strength of the school community.
- Pupils value the non-material aspects of life very highly.
- Pupils develop strong self-confidence and self-worth because they feel accepted for who they are.
- Pupils have high standards for their own behaviour and encourage the same of their peers.
- In this diverse community pupils demonstrate high levels of cultural awareness and celebrate each other's differences as well as everyone's common humanity.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements.

- Enable pupils to take a more active part in leading their own learning within and beyond the classroom to enhance further their progress and attainment.
- Enable pupils to develop and use their own initiative in choosing and undertaking charitable and community endeavours.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Pupils display excellent attitudes to their learning across the curriculum. They are well motivated to succeed and say this is because teaching supports their individual needs highly effectively and enables them to develop the confidence to aim for long-term success. Pupils new to the school assert that they are actively engaged in their learning and can perceive their own rapid progress in many subjects,

some of which had previously caused them difficulties. All pupils have a strong understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to good effect as they make progress towards their GCSE and IGCSE examinations. They monitor their own progress carefully and know what they need to do to improve their outcomes. School leaders and governance contribute strongly to the success of pupils by creating an environment in which every individual is valued and nurtured in line with the school's aims.

- 3.6 Pupils enter the school with a wide range of ability and there is considerable variation in overall ability levels year-on-year. The small number of examinations taken by pupils prevents reliable comparison with national averages, but results have shown marked improvement especially over the last two years when centre- and teacher-assessed grades have been awarded. In the years 2018 to 2020 a half of grades awarded were grades 9 to 7. In 2021 this increased to 70 per cent and in a few subjects all pupils achieved these top grades. Pupils, including those with SEND, consistently achieve at a higher level than suggested by their starting points because of the extremely effective support they receive both within the classroom and in specialist support sessions. A strong contributory factor to these long-term outcomes is the school's thorough and effective tracking system which is used in all subjects and leads to the prompt implementation of strategies to support pupils who are falling behind their expected levels of progress.
- 3.7 Pupils demonstrate high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to their abilities because they respond positively to enthusiastic, energetic and innovative teaching in many subjects. For instance, they acquire advanced vocabulary from an early age to raise their levels of textual analysis in English and the humanities due to skilled teaching. GCSE pupils studying poetry could recognise linguistic techniques such as enjambment and caesura and younger pupils extended their understanding of 'mercurial' as a character descriptor in a Shakespeare play by considering the scientific qualities of mercury. Pupils effectively build on previous knowledge to move their understanding forward, as demonstrated in their effective GCSE biology presentations on DNA replication, which applied knowledge already acquired from earlier work. Across the curriculum, they extend their knowledge, skills and understanding in response to well targeted work including challenging maths problems for the more able, exploring the theme of light in art or neo-classicism in a twentieth century symphony in music. Pupils develop their learning skills rapidly as they move through the school. They improve physical skills during physical education lessons in response to effective coaching and discover how to create different tones of colour when using water colours in art. They also respond positively to strategies provided to aid revision for forthcoming examinations. Pupils understand that skills developed in one area are transferable to others and they can apply them across the curriculum to improve their academic outcomes. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses almost all the parents agreed that teaching, including any online provision helps their child to make progress.
- 3.8 Pupils are effective communicators, both orally and in writing. They have responded enthusiastically to the school's recent emphasis on oracy since returning from periods of lockdown and are improving their communication skills further in opportunities provided to practise during tutor periods as well as in lessons. They are comfortable expressing their views in public and when speaking to each other and adults. Despite their natural exuberance, they are also attentive and supportive listeners during discussions and debates. Younger pupils talked enthusiastically about books they enjoy and many pupils write effectively in different styles, such as for persuasion or explanation, as well as creatively in response to stimuli provided. Pupils exhibit high levels of fluency when communicating in additional languages such as in French, where they compared the benefits of an English and French education in the target language. During lockdown many pupils extended their communication skills by setting up virtual radio stations known as *Thames Radio*, working collaboratively with others to make programmes for broadcast. They created a wide variety of radio styles including music shows and current affairs programmes and delivered them to the school community, relying on their verbal communication skills and learning the importance of planning a suitable script.

- 3.9 Pupils enter the school with very varied levels of competency in mathematics and make good and often excellent progress from their starting points. Younger pupils say that their confidence in numeracy has increased rapidly since their arrival and that they enjoy mathematical challenges now. They respond very positively to learning environments which stretch the most able whilst also supporting those who find numeracy difficult. Senior able mathematicians relish the opportunity to pursue further maths at GCSE; those who take up the opportunity achieve at the highest level. Pupils can apply their numeracy skills effectively in other subjects such as when executing climate graphs in geography, calculating scientific results in physics and chemistry or analysing accounts in a business plan. For some less numerate pupils these applications across other subjects help them to understand the value of numeracy in their daily lives and thus encourage them to focus on acquiring the mathematical skills they need, even if they do not always find it easy.
- 3.10 Pupils are highly competent in their use of information technology (IT), which is effectively embedded into their learning. All pupils have their own digital devices. Some, including those with SEND, use them in all their lessons and others choose to use them in a more targeted way, often for research, word processing and digital collaborative work. Pupils can move seamlessly between different ways of working and say that the school's IT provision, strongly supported by leadership and governance, is a significant factor in aiding their learning. Their skills of video conferencing and online collaboration improved rapidly during periods of remote learning, where examples include innovative ways of performing a set text together from home, delivering monologues and educating each other in the joys of Indian cookery. Pupils are continuing to develop many of these skills now that they are back in school.
- 3.11 Strong IT skills and a determination to succeed are factors which enable pupils to develop their study skills highly effectively as they progress through the school. They willingly assess each other's work and assist one another during lessons when doing paired or group work. They also respond positively to written comments about possible improvements in written work, adding their own responses to show they have understood. Pupils clearly enjoy any opportunities they are given to participate in enquiry work, such as planning geography fieldwork or science experiments. In the most effective lessons pupils are inspired to extend their learning independently and their progress is rapid. However, in some lessons an over emphasis on teacher-led approaches can restrict the progress made by pupils.
- 3.12 Pupils of all ages achieve success within and beyond the curriculum in a variety of different fields. Sporting opportunities have been expanded recently as the school has moved into new premises and, although the number of pupils is small, they are now participating and sometimes achieving success in many more fixtures in football, netball and rugby. Individual pupils have been successful in regional cross country and athletics competitions, in premier league football youth academies and in female touch rugby. In creative subjects there have been successes in drama and art competitions and pupils speak very positively about their opportunities to take part in the annual school musical, recently reinstated following the pandemic. Some pupils have gained awards in national biology Olympiads and the UK Maths Challenge. All such successes are celebrated by the whole school community.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils develop strongly as individuals as they move through the school and show excellent levels of self-knowledge and resilience. They describe the sensitive academic and pastoral support they receive from caring and knowledgeable staff as being instrumental in enabling them to develop greater self-awareness and confidence. They build notably strong and supportive relationships with each other. Older pupils support younger ones by mentoring them, and in lessons pupils are quick to assist one another if they understand how to solve a problem and can help a peer do the same. Pupils assert that this is a school where all are accepted and encouraged to do their best. They state that staff believe in them and help them to believe in themselves, thus fulfilling the school's aim to provide a

personalised education for all. Expressing their views to their peers in public, debating and challenging each other's behaviour are all ways in which pupils increase their self-confidence and build the strong sense of community which is valued by all. Pupils with SEND are supported individually by teachers, and in some cases, dedicated learning support assistants. This holistic support is a strong contributory factor to the personal development of these pupils who therefore thrive in this caring environment. Almost all the parents in their pre-inspection questionnaire responses agreed that the school helps their child to be confident and independent.

- 3.15 Pupils are very clear that the decisions they make for themselves have a direct impact on their attainment and future success. They feel supported by teachers who know them very well and they are acutely aware of their desires and aspirations which are often very high. Some of the youngest pupils confidently explained how they had made the decision to try very hard in mathematics in order to improve and achieve their career aspirations. When choosing subjects for GCSE, pupils say that they are given much advice and that they therefore feel they make wise choices. The oldest pupils deciding sixth-form destinations are given the necessary support to explore different and appropriate alternatives. Pupils choose to stand for election to the school council and deliver effective speeches to their peers about the changes they wish to see. Prior to recent periods of lockdown, the school council has been effective in contributing ideas about the new school building and changes to uniform. Recently lockdowns and the move to the new school site have limited school council meetings and pupils are looking forward to them taking place more regularly. School leaders are committed to developing this forum as a means of engaging pupils in the process of school development.
- 3.16 Pupils also make positive choices to behave appropriately and to encourage their peers to do the same. These wise choices are a sign of the appreciation of right and wrong among the pupils in a school which places a strong emphasis on good behaviour and individual responsibility, making wisdom one of its core values. Pupils understand the need to reflect on any poor behaviour because experienced and dedicated pastoral staff take time to explore with them what happened and any reasons for it. They challenge their peers if they see poor behaviour, regarding it as their responsibility to uphold the strong sense of community within the school. Pupils behave well around the school, coming into assembly in silence and creating a sense of quiet calm, socialising sensibly in the courtyard spaces during breaks and behaving responsibly in the dining room at lunch. They appreciate the large spaces of the new purpose-built school and the drive of the school leadership which has made it possible. They are excited to be in this new environment and are treating it with the respect it deserves. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, most pupils agreed that the school expects them to behave well. Pupils are developing their moral understanding as a result of the effective well-being programme, including sex and relationship education (SRE), and critical thinking. They appreciate relevant age-appropriate content on the rule of law, democracy and respect and tolerance for all as well as issues such as consent in relationships and respect for protected characteristics.
- 3.17 Pupils develop high levels of spiritual awareness in response to the very strong Christian ethos which is at the heart of the school. They understand the values which are strongly emphasised across the school which include compassion, respect, courage, openness, and diligence. Pupils come from many faiths and none but all can identify with these Christian values and they do so actively and translate them into tangible care for each other. Pupils engage willingly in discussion about religious and ethical issues in religious studies, in tutor time and in critical thinking sessions. Some pupils improve their spiritual awareness by taking up opportunities which are offered to explore Christianity in more depth. They say that they are not told what to believe but educated so that they can find out for themselves and make their own decisions as to what they think. Pupils value one-minute silences before some lessons to pause their busy lives. They have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life and their experiences in music, art and drama make a considerable contribution to their sense of joy in the world.
- 3.18 Pupils across the school demonstrate high levels of social development. They form effective relationships within their tutorial and teaching groups and across year groups in this small school

community where everyone knows most other people and shares a strong sense of purpose. They develop skills of teamwork and collaboration through partaking in sports teams, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, the school musical and chamber choir and charity endeavours. Pupils of varying ages publish their own monthly school newspaper, the *Thames Times* and express their views on a wide variety of school, local and global issues within it whilst also gaining journalistic and design skills. They speak enthusiastically about the charities they support. These include the longstanding link between the school and a Tanzanian charity for which they have raised large sums of money and which they visit to carry out voluntary work with local schools and communities. These visits have recently been impacted by the pandemic but a trip is planned in the near future. Pupils say they would value more opportunities to use their initiative in deciding on charities to support or local communities to engage with in the future. Inspectors agree that this would develop their social skills and enable pupils to be more in charge of these endeavours.

- 3.19 Pupils celebrate the diversity of their school community in all its aspects and are extremely accepting of difference of any kind, recognising the common humanity of all as well as everyone's uniqueness. They feel privileged to be so diverse and if any intolerance is shown they are quick to act themselves as well as to report any prejudice. Pupils are now beginning to enjoy a more wide-ranging curriculum following an audit by the school to assess how more diversity can be built into departmental schemes of work. Year 8 pupils were highly engaged in a recent introductory history lesson on the topic of slavery and in art and design pupils have produced exciting and stimulating responses to aboriginal designs. In many subjects, including their well-being and critical thinking sessions, pupils grasp opportunities to discuss stereotypes and generalisations and they can argue cogently while expressing their views.
- 3.20 Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and the importance of good diet and exercise. They are enjoying the improved opportunities to take part in a variety of sports and they use local parks and recreational facilities to good effect for sports sessions. As there is now a food and nutrition classroom in the new building they are looking forward to cookery and nutrition sessions. They say that they are well educated about the challenges of online safety and are appreciative that their parents are also well informed by the school about the challenges of the digital world. They speak very positively of the pastoral and academic support they received from all adults in the school community during recent lockdowns. Some pupils have struggled with their mental health since returning to school but report that they are well supported in school and that action is taken when appropriate.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and an assembly. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas and considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Kate McCarey	Reporting inspector
Mrs Sarah Gillam	Compliance team inspector (Headteacher, IAPS school)
Mr Rob Thornton	Team inspector (Headmaster, ISA school)