

Thames Christian College

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	212/6403
Unique Reference Number (URN)	132237
Inspection number	353819
Inspection dates	28 April 2010
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 2002¹, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school: its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Thames Christian College is a non-denominational Christian secondary school for students aged 11 to 16 years of age located in recently refurbished premises in Battersea, in South London. The school opened in 2000 and is owned by Thames Christian College Limited. There are currently 112 students on roll aged 11 to 16 from a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities. A small minority of these have special educational needs and/or difficulties, including specific and moderate learning difficulties, some of whom are placed at the school by four local authorities. At the time of the inspection there were nine students with a statement of special educational needs. A very small minority of students speak English as an additional language.

The school states that it aims 'to provide an education that challenges pupils to strive for personal character growth, academic excellence and spiritual maturity' and that 'staff are encouraged to teach their subject from a Christian worldview'. The school was last inspected in September 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Thames Christian College provides a good quality of education for its students and successfully meets its stated aims. Parental questionnaire responses were overwhelmingly positive about the school. Students say they feel safe in the school's calm and caring environment. Teaching and assessment are good overall and attainment has risen since the last inspection. The good curriculum is broad and balanced and tailored annually to meet the needs and interests of each cohort. Consequently, all students, regardless of ability, background or educational need make good and, for some, outstanding progress. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding. Overall provision for welfare,

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

health and safety is good and safeguarding arrangements are robust. The school complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

Thames Christian College provides a good quality of education for its students and a good and varied curriculum. In Years 7 to 9, students study a full curriculum which includes Spanish and lessons to develop study skills. In Years 10 and 11, students typically study nine GCSE examination subjects including English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT), personal finance, and religious education (RE) for all. They then select three courses from an appropriate range of GCSE subjects which include sports science, history, Spanish, business studies, child development, art and music. Opportunities for students to develop design and technology skills are improving and students commented positively about this development. In addition, there is good provision for both sport and personal, social and health education which includes appropriate sex education and information about substance abuse. Problem solving to develop independent learning and thinking skills has also been recently introduced. Teachers are using their broader professional expertise, such as in art, journalism or business, to provide a new and diverse programme of weekly extra-curricular sessions. These provide good opportunities for students to develop in curriculum areas where they excel or to broaden their horizons and experiences. A reasonable number of trips take place, including an annual visit to Spain, although the majority are related to sport or to the theatre. The schemes of work for all subjects show clear progression in learning. However, there is some inconsistency in their quality, with the best providing clear guidance on teaching approaches and on ways to meet the learning needs of all students. Provision for the students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is outstanding. Teachers, careers interviews and a careers fair help students to prepare well for the next step in their education.

Teaching and assessment are good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use this to plan well-paced lessons which they deliver with enthusiasm. Learning objectives are consistently used to focus and test learning during lessons and questioning is used effectively. The rapport between teachers and students is excellent which leads to safe learning environments. Teachers take care to ensure that the needs of all students are met through a good variety of tasks. However, while students are all willing learners, at times lessons are too teacher-led, so that students do not always have opportunities for more active and practical approaches to their learning. There is improved and good access to ICT through the use of laptops and these are routinely used in lessons to support learning, with specialist software for art and music. There is careful monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning which is supported by an outstanding programme of in-house and externally-run professional development so that teachers are fully aware of the latest GCSE specifications and of current best practice. There is a renewed focus on a consistent whole-school approach to teaching and learning. This is exemplified by

outstanding provision for literacy development which is now embedded in teaching across the curriculum.

A good range of approaches is used to regularly assess students' progress. All teachers mark students' work, although there is some inconsistency in the quantity and quality of written comments which inform students of what they need to do to improve. However, students also receive verbal feedback on both their work in lessons and homework. The school's new virtual learning environment (VLE) is being used to record target grades and assessments, as well as to provide both parents and students with an increasingly wide range of information, including all policies and events. Students were very positive about this feature and particularly value the access to homework tasks and their current levels of performance.

Students make good progress overall. Progress is outstanding both for some students and in some subjects, including English, art, science, literacy and ICT. Students make good progress in all other subjects including mathematics. Students with special educational needs and/or difficulties make good and, for some, outstanding progress from their varied starting points. A very few students speak English as an additional language and they make good progress as a result of well-planned support.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A high priority is placed on developing the whole person and in finding at least one aspect of the curriculum in which every individual can excel. This fostering of individual talent helps build students' self-esteem and their outstanding personal development. As a result, they enjoy school and attendance is good. Students' behaviour is outstanding and they are courteous, articulate and confident. They build strong relationships with each other that are based on mutual respect and support. They are keen to help others, for example, in raising funds for charity or mentoring students at a local primary school. The school's Christian ethos pervades all aspects of school life and forms an excellent basis for students' outstanding spiritual and moral development. Students' cultural understanding and knowledge of British institutions and current affairs is developed well through the good personal, social and health education and assembly programmes. This is significantly enhanced by a wide range of visitors to the school and an increasing number of events and visits, such as International Language Day and a visit to the Cabinet War Rooms and Winston Churchill Museum. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong and are able to maturely reflect on wider issues. For example, during the inspection an outstanding assembly enabled students to broaden their understanding of the current voting system and to consider ways it could be changed in their form groups as a problem-solving exercise. Creative subjects are a strength of the school and these enhance students' cultural development through regular drama productions, after-school clubs in music and art and theatre visits. Students feel that the school does not actively seek their views or involve them in decision making. However, the school council has recently been

reformed and examples of how the school has made changes by listening to students include the new Friday afternoon extra-curricular sessions.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety is good. Staff know their students very well and much emphasis is placed on providing highly effective daily care and support. As a result, students say that they feel safe in school and know that they can turn to a member of staff with whom they can share concerns. Students are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles with excellent opportunities to participate in sport and sessions on healthy eating and lifestyle choices; many of which are given by visiting experts. Students can opt to purchase a daily healthy lunch, provided by a local restaurant, and purchase healthy snacks from the tuck shop. However, despite this provision, a small minority of students felt the school did not sufficiently help them to lead a healthy lifestyle. Particularly careful attention is given to risk assessments, day-to-day supervision and meeting fire and electrical regulations. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place and reviewed annually and all the required checks are routinely undertaken. Risk assessments are carefully undertaken for all aspects of school life, including sporting activities and visits. Discussions with students showed they have an excellent awareness of how to keep safe. The procedures for safeguarding are effective. All staff have received recent training for child protection and around half the staff have current first-aid certificates. The required appointment checks are made for all staff and these are recorded in the single central register. The admission and attendance registers comply with regulations. The school is readily accessible for users with mobility difficulties and a well-focused plan meets the regulatory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

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:

- Improve teaching by including more active and practical learning opportunities in lessons.
- Develop the role of the new school council so that more account is taken of student views.

Inspection judgement recording form

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

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?				
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?				
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?				
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?				

The quality of boarding provision)

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	Thames Christian College		
DCSF number	212/6403		
Unique Reference Number (URN)	132237		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2000		
Age range of students	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Male: 73	Female: 39	Total: 112
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Male: 8	Female: 1	Total: 9
Number of students who are looked after	Male: 0	Female: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day students)	£9,240		
Address of school	Wye Street London SW11 2HB		
Telephone number	020 7228 3933		
Fax number	020 7924 1112		
Email address	info@thameschristiancollege.org.uk		
Headteacher	Dr S Holsgrove		
Proprietor	Thames Christian College Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI		
Dates of inspection	28 April 2010		