

TASIS - The American School In England

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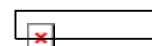
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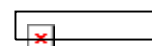
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Introduction and summary

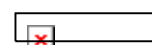


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school



TASIS - The American School in England is an international school which mainly serves the American expatriate community of business and diplomatic families to the west and south of London in Surrey and Berkshire. It was founded in 1976 as part of a family of schools centred on TASIS - The American School in Switzerland established in Lugano in 1956. Two thirds of the students are American but 36 nationalities are represented in the school. For just under a quarter of students English is not their first language. Students choose to study an American curriculum and a great many seek to follow the school's Advanced Placement courses in preparation for American, British and European colleges and universities. The school is jointly inspected and accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the European Council of International Schools. The school also offers an extensive range of summer schools each year.

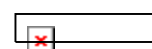
The school currently has 680 students on roll, aged between three and nineteen years, in American terms, from nursery to Grade 13. As a result of family postings, students are at the school for varying lengths of time, many for only two to three years. Most students are of compulsory school age or follow post-16 courses. There are 12 children in the Frog Hollow nursery, 14 in pre-kindergarten and 26 in kindergarten. There are 156 boarders in the Upper School, aged between 14 and 19 years.

The school's college-like site is on 43 acres of Surrey parkland close to Thorpe Park and the M25.

In addition to several purpose-built modern facilities, many of its extensive range of buildings date from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and are historically important and therefore listed. The school has recently changed from proprietorial ownership to non-profit making status under the Swiss TASIS Foundation. During this transition it has established a major development scheme for its accommodation and future.

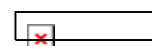
The school aims to provide 'excellence in American education based on the traditional values and ideals of Western Civilisation'. It strives to focus on developing community as well as individual growth, on challenging students to achieve their full potential and enhancing their aesthetic awareness, and on promoting international understanding within its culturally diverse student population. In pursuing academic excellence it also seeks to 'develop individual responsibility and integrity and to instil the qualities of honesty, compassion, fairness and respect.'

Summary of main findings



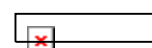
TASIS is a highly successful international school which does well by its students. In turn they and their parents support and contribute to its harmonious ethos and community spirit. The curricular and extra-curricular provision is broad, diverse and stimulating. The quality of the teaching is very good and students respond with keen motivation. Improved provision for students with English as a Second Language in the Middle School and a small number with learning support needs is now underway, but requires even sharper focus. As they progress through the school students achieve well in tests and college placements. They leave as very confident and mature young people with a well-developed social and cultural awareness.

What the school does well



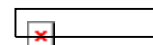
- it has a very strong ethos as an international community which integrates students well and realises its mission statement successfully;
- it provides very good teaching and a highly purposeful climate for learning, based on excellent behaviour and a strong and positive rapport between students and staff;
- it offers a broad and stimulating curriculum which enables the vast majority of students to experience a challenging range of learning opportunities and to achieve and progress well;
- it introduces students to an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities through art, drama, music and sport, and its extensive programme of journeys abroad contributes to students' striking social and cultural development;
- it helps students to proceed to a wide range of colleges and universities through its successful Advanced Placement courses and college preparation programme; and
- it enjoys very strong parental links which sustain and extend the clear community spirit in the school and nurture the well being of its students.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



- ensure that, prior to confirmation of the appointment of all staff, appropriate checks are carried out to confirm their medical fitness

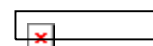
Next steps



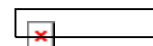
Although not required by the regulations to do so, in its continuing drive for improvement the school might wish to consider the following:

- sharper differentiation in the planning of all teachers to take account of students' individual learning needs;
- improvement of the quality of provision and support for students with English as a Second Language in the Middle School; and
- clear, coherent and consistent expression and recording of all school documentation and communication to assist understanding and implementation.

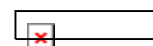
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



The school follows an American curriculum adapted to the particular phase requirements of the Lower School (nursery, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and Grades 1 - 5, Years 2 - 6), the Middle School (Grades 6 - 8, Years 7 - 9) and the Upper School (Grades 9 - 13, Years 10 -13). Overall this provides students with appropriate experience of the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative areas of learning. There is a good emphasis on literacy and numeracy and students' oral and social skills are given prominence. There is no specific provision in design and technology, although information and communication technology (ICT) is an important dimension to students' courses as they progress through the school and subjects such as art occasionally provide opportunities for design applications and modelling. The curriculum provides very good breadth and balance throughout and is particularly diverse and stimulating in the Upper School, which enables students to graduate with high standards and successful college placements.

Schemes of work for each subject make clear what has to be taught in terms of course content and offer outline guidance on course policy, aims, key resources and, to a more limited degree, approaches to teaching and assessment. In the Lower and Middle schools the long-term planning is being developed alongside the Core Knowledge programme and in the Upper School it is focused primarily on following the programme set out in course texts. Subject guidance provides little on

pedagogy, for example in relation to supporting the small number of students with special learning needs, who are withdrawn for individual help from a few lessons.

The Frog Hollow nursery has a broad and experiential early years programme which ensures an excellent start to school life. In the Lower School, from pre-kindergarten to Grade 5, students follow most aspects of the Core Knowledge Sequence, an American curriculum appropriate for the age range. The component strands have been adopted year by year, with the mathematical strand introduced this year. Physical education (PE) and history are especially varied and the latter is adapted well to make good use of local sites and primary sources.

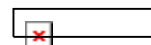
The Middle School curriculum is interesting and appropriately challenging for the ages and aptitudes of the students. It aims to develop 'a community of learners' with the study of five core academic subjects daily: English, mathematics, science, history and geography, and either French, Spanish or a basic language arts course. The English curriculum develops students' basic and higher order literacy and oracy skills and promotes their appreciation of different genres of literature. Students study British history in Grade 7 and American history in Grade 8. There is a developing health education course in Grades 7 and 8 which builds on the short drug education programme in Grade 6. Students choose an elective, or option course, each term from art, music and drama. All students have PE twice a week in addition, and the varied programme enables them to develop physical and social skills and to work together as a team. Students are required to develop their ICT competencies in the Middle School, where it becomes an integral part of the curriculum and enhances teaching and learning across many subjects. Elective courses extend to photography, journalism, and fiction and film. Higher attaining students have opportunities to work alongside students in higher grades and in Grade 8 may substitute two elective courses with Latin.

For its Upper School students the school offers a diverse and balanced four-year American college preparatory education based on the liberal arts. Students are encouraged to take further responsibility for their choices and their learning. In order to graduate from the school, students follow a curriculum based on the accumulation of credits for courses studied. The basic curriculum covers courses in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, history and the humanities, the arts, physical education and sport, and an assignment in community service. Students register for at least five full credit courses per year from the basic curriculum and other credits from a good range of electives. They may bring credits gained at previous schools with them, and are expected to accumulate 19 credits over four years for the college preparatory courses. These are based on a rich programme of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which broadly equate to English advanced level. Students with ESL follow specially adapted International level courses and ESL at different levels which are successful in helping them develop their English skills for their academic courses and move into mainstream classes.

An important provision to underpin students' academic and personal development are the daily sessions timetabled with advisors and the opportunity to use the tutorial period to continue homework and independent research or to seek advice and guidance from individual teachers. Boarding students also have defined study and counselling sessions. In the Upper School this is extended by events such as a careers day and very well-planned programmes of college counselling.

A distinctive feature of the school is the extensive range of extra-curricular activities offered to students on and off the school campus which extend the learning experiences of both boarders and day students very successfully. In addition to a very wide range of after-school clubs and sporting activities the school is successful in competitive team games. A varied programme of musical and dramatic productions attracts the involvement of large numbers of students throughout the school. Stimulating exhibits and master classes by visiting artists and writers are regular features of the art gallery and library, and are used as extensions of the curriculum. There is a particularly rich programme of school travel abroad. For example, visits to study art and architecture in southern France, classical civilisation in Italy, Spain, Greece, and Sicily, history and community service in Russia and sculpting in Scotland are organised as an integral dimension of students' curricular experiences. This adds greatly to their learning and development in their chosen courses and broadens further their international awareness

The quality of the teaching and assessment



The overall quality of teaching is very good, with significant strengths in the nursery and the Upper School. Teachers come to know their students well very quickly and the very positive climate for learning owes much to the strong rapport and excellent relationships between teachers and their students. These are trusting and respectful, as teachers are well qualified and their very good subject knowledge enables them to bring subjects to life for the students. They provide very good opportunities for students to apply their physical, creative and intellectual skills. As a result, students develop into confident, articulate and informed learners. From an early age they are encouraged to take responsibility as independent learners, for example through homework tasks and also their own research on individual projects.

In the nursery, teachers provide good role models and ensure that students' experiences are very good and that they are secure and happy. Their skills of independence are fostered well and they are encouraged to explore and investigate exciting classroom resources and the outdoor environment. Cooking and theme work, such as that on 'light and dark', prompts students to use all their senses. Students' learning and social skills are given a very good start, although the continuity and progression of their independent learning are not always as fully sustained in pre-kindergarten.

Teaching in the Lower School is good, and sometimes it is very good. Teachers ensure that basic literacy and numeracy skills are grasped securely. There is a consistent approach to phonics which ensures students' reading development. The most effective lessons draw successfully on students' own experiences, such as their observations of birds and their discussions of each others' writing on feelings. In lessons that were satisfactory rather than good or better there was an over-reliance on class reading of the textbook, with insufficient supplementary resources and too little reference to students' first-hand experiences. Speaking and listening and the development of social skills are given due priority and are monitored closely in all classes for all students, including those with ESL and particular learning needs.

In the Middle School, teaching is also good, with a significant proportion being very good. The best lessons are characterised by dynamic and even inspirational teaching. In these lessons, teachers make very effective use of a broad range of teaching and learning strategies, which take into account the different ways in which students learn. Consequently, they remain motivated and enthused throughout the lesson, as in a French lesson which made very effective use of visual aids and explanation to show how to use contractions and conjugate verbs. Students practised and applied new skills and understanding in pairs and on their own, with sensitive encouragement and reinforcement of grammar and basic skills from the teacher. In volleyball, ICT was used very successfully to enable students to observe and evaluate achievement on a laptop, and to identify possible improvements in skills.

Most students in the Middle School make good progress, achieve well and are very well equipped for the next phase of their education. However, weaker features in around a third of the teaching in the Middle School resulted from insufficient account of the individual needs of a small number of students in teachers' planning. This restricted the range of activities and resources used. In some lessons there were insufficient strategies to motivate and engage all students, for example through discussion of their understanding of the work, or too few opportunities to work collaboratively or use visual aids. In a few lessons there was not enough teaching of key vocabulary to support lower attaining students and those with ESL. Resources for ESL students are insufficient in the Middle School.

Teaching in the Upper School is very good, with very clear strengths which are particularly evident on the AP courses. Despite a wide range of aptitude and need in some classes, courses are pitched at an appropriate level. The pace of lessons is always purposeful and is frequently exhilarating, incorporating demanding levels of challenge and high expectations. Teachers encourage students

to participate fully and bring new arrivals or the less confident into the group supportively. They introduce new topics with helpful clarity, emphasising learning points effectively. Just occasionally, connections between topics and specific activities lack clarity and the progression intended for the student is not made clear. The use of timed tasks and a range of stimulating resources, including ICT, pictorial sources and the library, focus students' efforts and interest, for example in English and history. Students have many opportunities to offer opinion, to question the teacher and one another, to interject and to argue their corner, as in drama, mathematics, statistics and science. They relish such challenges and rise to them. As a result they progress rapidly to achieve very well in tests and college placements.

Within this very positive picture of teaching in the school there are features in need of further improvement. For some students presentation of their written work does not always match the high quality of much of its content. The school has already begun to address the provision and resources for ESL students in the Middle School and support for those with special learning needs throughout the school. There is a substantial amount of subject expertise in the school; however, there are insufficient strategies to ensure the communication and dissemination of very good practice across and between the phases.

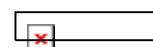
The assessment of students' progress and attainment is good. A coherent framework for assessment enables teachers to test students' achievement regularly and to evaluate their efforts. Teachers track and monitor students' progress over time and identify areas for improvement. Students understand the system and find it helpful to gauge their success and to move their work forward. Where it is most effective, assessment is reflected in teachers' planning and takes account of students' progress and needs from the preceding lesson. However, not all teachers differentiate sufficiently to ensure that all students, despite the generally small size of groups, are meeting their full potential, especially those with learning difficulties.

Classwork, homework and tests are carefully marked. Sometimes this is limited to ticks and the award of marks only, and too often the presentation of work is left uncorrected. Mostly, however, teachers ensure that students are provided with specific corrections or alternative suggestions, as well as compliments and encouragement and advice on how to improve.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students



Students' social and cultural development is excellent and their moral development is very good. Despite the usual separation of religion and education in this American school, a good range of opportunities are found to foster students' spiritual development through the curriculum and school life and through awe and wonder at the world around them. Throughout the school, but especially in the boarding community, students' different cultures and convictions are affirmed and celebrated. Sensitive modifications to behaviour and attitudes are encouraged on the rare occasions when cultural values differ from those established by the school.

Students enjoy a very wide programme of cultural activities. These range from local trips to Reading Museum to full use of London's facilities and attractions such as the National Gallery and West End theatres, as well as mounting their own productions in school. Upper School students visit European countries for a week's study of a local area and its heritage and art. A recent trip to the south of France, for example, developed their painting and photography skills as well as their appreciation of Cezanne and other impressionists and resulted in a very high quality display upon return. The

school has been successful in winning national art awards.

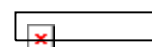
Socially, students develop very confidently. Student leadership in the Upper School is a particular strength and students provide good role models for their peers, for example, as prefects and student councillors. The 'buddy' system works well to integrate new students. Extremely high standards of behaviour and conduct are evident throughout the school. The use of the 'core virtues' programme in the Lower School supports the clear expectations and well-established values of the school community. At the local and national level students are involved in community service and support for charities. For example, Lower and Middle School students send Christmas boxes to Romanian orphanages.

Students have ample opportunities to reflect on what is meant by concepts such as respect, responsibility, courage, honesty and justice. A speaker at the boarders' community dinner visited these themes in a thought-provoking speech in preparation for Remembrance Day. Students reflected on the nature of humankind and our recurring tendency to engage in warfare. Such occasions also allow opportunities for students from different cultures and ethnic groups to share their cuisine and national customs. The forthcoming theme for Thanksgiving is 'gratitude'. Such events help to integrate students as a relaxed and harmonious international group and prepares them for the wider world when they leave for college in a range of countries.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the students



The school is a thriving and vibrant community in which students mostly feel valued and safe. They are confident that their views will be considered and that there are clear avenues for them to seek help and advice if the need arises. These range from extra support from their teachers to support from the counselling service if matters are more complex. The nursing staff ensure very good coverage for First Aid and effective care for those who are ill. They take a rounded view of welfare and encourage students to adopt a responsible approach towards their own health.

Students transfer from a wide range of countries, cultures and academic backgrounds. Nonetheless they are helped to settle well into the orderly and friendly community and are guided effectively through the school. Student and staff handbooks ensure that everyone, including parents, understands what is expected, and school rules are clear and explicit. Relationships are exceptionally good, with an informality that successfully blends mutual respect and genuine care and concern for all. Incidents of bullying are low and are dealt with effectively. However, the terminology used is not entirely consistent, for example with 'harassment' sometimes being used instead of 'bullying' in documents.

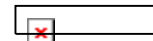
There are good systems to assess risk and to promote health and safety at all levels of the school, including the boarding community and school visits and travel abroad. Any issues identified are dealt with promptly. Fire drills are held regularly and are logged; they include late night drills to ensure the safety of boarders.

The school has due regard to its duties under discrimination, race and gender legislation. It is proactive and forward-thinking in addressing issues for those with disabilities, including students who board.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



The school undertakes rigorous checks prior to confirmation of the appointment of new staff. These include confirmation of their identity, qualifications, and previous employment and the take up of professional references. The school is also registered with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm the suitability of staff to work with students, including staff with responsibilities for boarders. However, systems to check the medical fitness of staff before their appointment are insufficiently thorough and are not documented.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

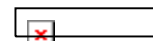
No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that appropriate checks are carried out to confirm the medical fitness of staff prior to their appointment (paragraph 4(c)).

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The campus blends many listed buildings, several skilfully restored, with well-designed modern, purpose-built facilities on a very large and attractive site. The premises and grounds meet the school's needs very effectively. They are carefully maintained and form a peaceful backdrop to the busy life of the school. The nursery has its own quiet building and safe play area. The sporting facilities are outstanding and include extensive games pitches and an American-style gym and a very well-equipped fitness centre. The facilities for sports and the arts contribute significantly to the high achievement in these areas. The school's 'master plan' for future development includes a new boarding area.

Classrooms are of a good size for the generally small groups. They are conducive to learning and are mostly very well resourced. Lively displays enrich classrooms and a striking feature throughout the school is the extent and quality of the art displays, which enhance all the buildings. The ambiance provided by the premises strongly reinforces the school's mission statement with regard to aesthetic appreciation.

The school is currently awaiting receipt of a report on the very recent inspection of its boarding provision. The high return rate of boarders in recent years suggests that it meets students' needs very effectively.

Decoration, furniture and fittings are of a high standard throughout the school. Repairs are dealt with promptly. The dining rooms are clean and attractive. Food is prepared under award-winning standards of hygiene and with very good regard to providing healthy choices for students. This combines with the extensive sports facilities to contribute greatly to the overall well-being of

students and their readiness to be active learners and members of the school community.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

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The school is highly proactive in its communication with parents. Parents receive regular and informative emails, telephone calls and community newsletters. As a result, they feel valued members of the school community, able to share their skills and expertise and contribute to school life.

There is an extensive and informative range of documentation for parents and prospective parents. Information about the school is also available from the school's website and on a DVD. There are separate handbooks for each phase of education at the school, including boarding. The staff profile booklet gives helpful information about each member of staff, including a summary of their qualifications. The school is in a transitional period and will need to update its information following the appointment of a substantive head for the school. Information about the curriculum is clear and includes academic choices available to students during their time at the school. Detailed information about some school policies is not always consistent between the phase handbooks. The 'trouble-shooting' handbook for parents of students who board is particularly helpful and thorough.

Parents are kept well informed of their children's academic progress and achievement. Reports to parents provide high quality and detailed evaluations at regular intervals throughout the year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

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The school's complaints policy was recently revised to ensure the inclusion of an independent member on any panel hearing and to emphasise confidentiality for the complainant. The policy now meets the requirements in full. It is helpfully worded for parents to understand. It makes clear the timescales for the different stages of both informal and formal complaints and advises complainants of additional adjudication available through the local authority.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

School details

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Name of school:	TASIS - The American School In England		
DfES ref number:	936/6532		
Type of school:	American international school		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of students:	3 - 19 years		
Gender of students:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students):	Boys 333,	Girls 320,	Total 653
Number on roll (part-time students):	Boys 19,	Girls 8,	Total 27
Number of boarders:	Boys 82,	Girls 74,	Total 156
Annual fees (day students):	£4,990 (nursery)		
	£5,800 (pre-kindergarten)		
	£12,500 (kindergarten to Grade 3)		
	£13,650 (Grades 4 to 8)		
	£14,600 (Grades 9 to 13)		
Annual fees (boarders):	£22,500 (full)		
Address of school:	Coldharbour Lane		
	Thorpe		
	Egham		
	Surrey TW20 8TE		
E-mail address:	headmaster@tasis.com		
Telephone number:	01932 565252		
Fax number:	01932 560493		
Interim Headmaster:	Mr Fernando L Gonzalez		
Proprietor:	The TASIS Foundation		
Lead Inspector:	Roger James		
Dates of inspection:	8 - 11 November 2004		
