

Tiffin School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102605
Local Authority	Kingston Upon Thames
Inspection number	308067
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1056
6th form	337
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Taylor
Headteacher	Mr Sean Heslop
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2002
School address	Queen Elizabeth Road Kingston Upon Thames KT2 6RL
Telephone number	020 8546 4638
Fax number	020 8546 6365

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Tiffin School, a specialist Performing Arts College, serves students from the local area and two adjacent boroughs. Just under half of students come from a wide spectrum of minority ethnic heritages but none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is low as is the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Tiffin School is an exceptional performing arts college that provides its students with an outstanding quality of education. The overwhelming majority of parents strongly supports the school's drive for excellence. Parents are very pleased with the current communication opportunities afforded them through the 'Head's question time'. They consider that the students receive 'a fantastic well-rounded education'.

A lynchpin of the school's sustained success is its vision to be 'a leading creative community' with 'an enduring love of learning'. Students of all ages show very high motivation to achieve as well as possible. As a result, standards are high and academic progress exceptional from Year 7 to Year 11. Over 90% of Year 11 regularly move into the sixth form where they also make excellent progress with over 80% of students regularly gaining the highest available A2 examination grades. The school's emphasis on a caring, inclusive ethos results in all groups of students achieving equally well.

Students' personal development is outstanding as a result of the exceptional range of 'wider opportunities' on offer, not least through the school's performing arts specialism. The carefully considered recent changes to the excellent curriculum ensure scope within and beyond the school day for students to participate in numerous sports, musical activities, dance, drama, travel and overseas work experience. Students thoroughly enjoy the extended lunchtime, for example, because of the very numerous and worthwhile clubs. A current favourite is the magicians' circle. Because students 'are enthused by school', they attend very regularly, behave maturely, and take individual and collective responsibility for a range of school events. The school council is rightly proud of its success, for example, in promoting a harmonious school community through the 'eastern extravaganza' evening. Students give generously of their time in charity fund-raising and in participating in productions, including some in the Royal Opera House. The impressive range of healthy foods in the school's catering facilities is much appreciated by students of all ages and take-up of school meals is high.

'Tiffins' supports and guides its students particularly well, ensures they are safe, and prepares them very successfully for the next stage of education or training. Vulnerable students are especially well nurtured as are the few who decide not to participate in higher education. Nine out of ten students achieve their first choice of university while others get a really good start in employment. Careful checks on students' progress in learning underpin the strong pastoral care and very good relationships throughout the school. Nevertheless, the school recognises that some students would benefit from more regular and worthwhile feedback on their independent study tasks because this is not always regular enough or sufficiently detailed.

The excellent vision and commitment of the headteacher, well supported by the senior leadership team and the majority of middle managers, has been at the heart of the school's further development since the last inspection. Supportive but robust governance has also contributed well to the school's progress and clear sense of direction for the future. Honest self-evaluation supports the significant rise in the proportion of the highest GCSE and advanced level grades as do exceptional classroom experiences. The school has used its performing arts specialist status well to sustain standards and to enhance links with local schools and the surrounding communities. The school has very strong capacity to improve further because of its 'can do' approach, its strong emphasis on the professional development of staff, and its determination that 'each student be given the widest opportunities to succeed.'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

'Tiffins' sixth form is outstanding. The school has sustained and improved even further the already high standards at the last inspection. Standards are high and students achieve exceptionally well, meeting their challenging academic targets. Particularly successful subjects include mathematics, physics, history, modern foreign languages and music. The strong emphasis on regular checks on their work, the supervised study and the high level of personal care contributes very effectively to post-16 success. Students new to the school are well inducted into the sixth form and nurtured through careful team building. All groups of students achieve very well, including those for whom English is an additional language.

The overwhelming majority of Year 11 students move on to the sixth form, remain to complete their courses and continue to higher education. Students enjoy the broad curriculum, especially the 'wider opportunities' to develop their personal attributes and skills. They much appreciate the individual academic and personal support and guidance that contributes so well to their future social and economic well-being. Exceptional careers advice helps most students gain the university places of their choice or find the best available work opportunity. Excellent subject knowledge characterises students' classroom experiences and they have nothing but praise for the scholarly teaching they receive. Students' positive relationships with teachers and with each other in the very ethnically diverse sixth-form community ensure their willingness to shoulder many in-school responsibilities and make a difference to others. The sixth form is very well led and this together with its sustained success over many years demonstrates its strong capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all students benefit from regular and worthwhile feedback on their independent study tasks.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding both in the main school and in the sixth form. Students enter the school with very high starting points and all groups of students make excellent progress throughout. The school has sustained and improved further the already excellent results at the last inspection. Year 9 test results are well above average with most students attaining the highest possible levels. Variations in students' achievements in English, mathematics and science are the results of some Year 8 students taking the national tests early.

All students attain five or more higher GCSE grades that include English and mathematics. The proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades has risen steadily over the past three years and is well above national expectations. In 2007, these higher grades accounted for approximately three quarters of the results. English, mathematics, physics, and some modern languages are particularly successful, as is music, reflecting the school's performing arts specialism.

The school's robust checks on students' progress towards challenging targets through the 'landmark assessments' indicate that current students are also achieving exceptionally well.

The students' achievements in this high performing school go far beyond examination results because of the constant stimuli to ensure students progress to the very best of their ability.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development, is outstanding. Relationships throughout the school community are harmonious and this is reflected in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between students and between staff and students. Behaviour is exemplary and the school offers a safe and orderly environment within which individuals can flourish. As a result, students greatly enjoy school, are proud in its praise and attend very regularly.

Students respond well to the school's expectations on accepting responsibility. They try to eat healthily and are very active participants in the extensive sports programme. The well-established school council, thoroughly representative of all groups within the school, provides a ready forum for students to air their views and make positive recommendations, for example on site security, and recycling. Students make a strong contribution to the wider community through their charity fund-raising and through their participation in national cultural events. High numbers are involved in the wide range of musical and drama activities. Students prepare well for their future economic success through their enthusiasm for learning and through their willingness to avail themselves of work-related learning and careers education and guidance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Since the last inspection, the school has improved teaching and learning from the reported very good level through the 'observation team'. Clear guidance, regular monitoring linked to training activities, by both senior and middle managers, and accurate judgements on the quality of teaching and learning bolster the school's progress.

Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and personal enjoyment of their subject areas is a common strength at 'Tiffins'. This is reflected in students' avid response to tasks and in their genuine enthusiasm for learning. 'I just love French,' and 'algebra is such fun,' were comments from Years 8 and 9. Skilful and challenging questioning regularly develops and extends students' knowledge and understanding, as do the variety of activities and learning styles in the most successful lessons. Teachers' high expectations are rewarded regularly with strides in students' independent learning. Relationships between staff and students are excellent, and teachers are readily available to provide additional support as required. Some students, however, do not receive sufficiently regular and worthwhile feedback on their written independent study tasks so that they always know just how well they are doing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding curriculum meets the needs of students very well. In Years 7 to 9, the mainstream curriculum is enriched by a range of modern foreign languages as well as by extensive opportunities in music, drama and dance. Older students are actively encouraged to extend their horizons beyond that of the 'taught curriculum' and to share in the truly exceptional range of 'wider opportunities'. Students have access to up to eight languages, accelerated courses, exciting work experiences at home and abroad and a vast range of musical and sporting events. Social and moral development and the recently introduced 'circle time' contribute much to the development of students' personal and strong communication skills. Strong links with the Royal Ballet and The Royal Opera House have been developed and maintained through the performance arts specialism.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students and parents are extremely appreciative of the school's emphasis on the development of the 'whole person'. Arrangements for promoting students' health and safety are well considered and very secure. Students say they are confident in turning to adults and sixth formers when need arises. They are particularly confident in their house and form tutors. Vulnerable students are extremely well supported through the arrangements co-ordinated by the inclusion manager, for example, 'Dramatherapy' is used very effectively from the early years in the school.

Systematic whole-school procedures are used well to check very regularly on students' academic progress. Directors of learning are alert to any underachievement and rapidly intervene to limit failure. These checks on students' progress do much to promote their success in learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The impact of the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, well supported by his senior team and fast developing middle managers, is evident in the school's sustained improvements since the last inspection. Students are achieving exceptionally well in examinations but at the same time participating in a very extensive range of 'wider opportunities' both within and outside of the school day. The revised curriculum enables students to really enjoy learning and fulfils well one of the school's aims 'to foster life-long learning'. Students' progress is now rigorously monitored through the recently introduced 'landmark assessments'. Parents and students have nothing but praise for the new opportunities that allow them to make their views heard.

Changes to senior and middle management structures have promoted a real sense of collective accountability for school improvement and have led to greater consistency in students' learning experiences. The school is rightly proud of its efforts to maintain an inclusive ethos, clearly

seen in the very good progress of all groups of students. The performing arts specialism is very well led and offers students exceptional and unusual opportunities, particularly in music and dance. Governance is good. Led by an able chair, governors strike a successful balance between holding the school to account and not unduly disturbing its efficient running.

A strong culture of self-evaluation pervades all areas of the school but is especially incisive at senior level. Areas perceived as less than good are examined reflectively to determine how they can best be improved, including written feedback for some students on their independent study tasks. The school clearly demonstrates that its capacity for further improvement is very strong.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Tiffin School, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 6RL

After our visit to 'Tiffins', we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your exceptionally friendly welcome and for taking time to talk to us. You tell us that the school is 'fantastic' and we agree with you. 'Tiffins' is an outstanding school. We are very pleased that you enjoy it so much, attend very regularly, and make the most of the wide opportunities available to you. You are very appreciative not only of the exciting teaching, but are also really keen on sport, music, drama and dance and the wide range of clubs. 'Something for everybody', you told us. That, we think, sums up 'Tiffins' well!

The school looks after you exceptionally well. You are fortunate to learn in an environment with such a scholarly ethos. You tell us that you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to when you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a difference to your peers through the school council, through house duties and through the prefect and buddy systems. Because of the hard work of your excellent headteacher, of the governors, and of your many very committed teachers you are achieving exceptionally well. This opens the door to a wide range of further educational and training opportunities both at Year 11 and at the end of the sixth form.

Because you co-operate so well with what your school is trying to do for you, we are convinced that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts and go from strength to strength in developing your personal skills as well as your academic prowess. We have asked your teachers to work more on your independent study tasks so that each one of you gets regular and worthwhile feedback on the next steps.

We wish you and 'Tiffins' a very successful future.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector