

# The Thomas Coram Middle School - Church of England Voluntary Aided

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117559
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326649
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 July 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Jones HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	386
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs J Griffiths
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr E Delasalle
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 June 2006
<b>School address</b>	Swing Gate Lane Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 2RP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 866757
<b>Fax number</b>	01442 865467

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The school was invited to provide a nominee to the inspection team and the headteacher accepted this responsibility.

## Description of the school

The Thomas Coram Middle School is a smaller than average middle school and the pupils' social and economic backgrounds vary but are above average overall. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is half the national average. The number of girls and boys in each year group varies annually. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national figure and the number of pupils whose first language is not English is low.

Attainment on entry is broadly average. The proportion of pupils registered by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above average although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is low.

Thomas Coram is part of a cross-phase pyramid of schools that serves Berkhamsted and the surrounding villages. The school has received the following national accolades: Healthy Schools Award, Eco-School Bronze, and the Sports Mark.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. Standards are significantly above average and pupils make good progress in both key stages. Pupils' personal development is good. Attendance is above average and overall behaviour is good, although some parents and pupils expressed disquiet regarding the negative attitudes of a small number of individuals. However, a significant number of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed complete satisfaction with the school and many took the time to offer a personal insight into what they regarded as the dedicated care and support provided by the school. Care, welfare and guidance are good overall, with effective support for those who find learning difficult.

Teaching and learning are good; all staff were observed teaching and nearly three quarters of lessons were judged good. In a minority of lessons the tasks provided did not always match the learning needs of all pupils or place sufficient emphasis on pupils' involvement and independent learning.

The curriculum is good, with a strong programme of rich learning opportunities where topics such as 'sustainability' are investigated in depth. Community cohesion is good overall although the national dimension has not been addressed in sufficient detail. Community cohesion at a local level is good and the international dimension is being developed within the context of the rich learning opportunities programme.

Leadership and management are good overall. Good progress has been made on the areas for improvement given at the last inspection, standards have risen, the pupils' personal development is more consistent and the quality of provision is good. The school meets current government requirements with regard to safeguarding. Governance is good; the governing body has secured funding from the diocesan authorities and the local authority for a new teaching block. Governors set senior staff challenging targets and encourage development.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop the quality of teaching by focusing on learning outcomes and develop stronger independent learning skills in the pupils.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Standards and achievement at Key Stage 2 are good, attainment has been significantly above average in English, mathematics and science for the last two years. Similarly, the overall educational value added has been significantly above average during this time, although the pupils' performance in mathematics and science is more consistent than in English. This pattern is repeated in Years 7 and 8 where a review of the outcomes of the non-statutory tests indicate that standards are above average and pupils continue to make good progress, often reaching the level expected nationally of pupils in Year 9.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good overall, with outstanding elements, for example, where independent learning opportunities are provided. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils reflect regularly in lessons and assemblies on challenging

issues, when organising charitable work and through the efforts of the School Council. Some are elected as Youth Councillors on the local council and others serve as prefects, house captains, sports leaders and peer mediators. Pupils generally make healthy choices when eating and many take part in the varied and well-organised sporting opportunities.

Pupils feel safe in school and always know who to go to for help. They enjoy coming to school and taking part in lessons, particularly when they work in collaborative groups, for example, when taking part in a newsroom simulation or investigating the concept of forensic science. Attendance is above the national average. Peer group cooperation in class is strong, few pupils are withdrawn from lessons for poor behaviour and the rate of both exclusions and persistent absence is low. Pupils develop good workplace skills using the school's good computer facilities and, through the school council, play a role in the allocation of resources to the school's leisure and sports facilities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good and, as a result, most pupils make good progress. The most successful lessons have a variety of interesting activities that maintains the challenge and pace of work suitable for the needs of all pupils. In these lessons the teachers facilitate the learning process, encouraging independent learning. Lessons are less successful when they are mainly teacher-dominated with the whole class doing the same work; on these occasions the tasks provided do not always match the learning needs of the different groups of pupils.

In a few lessons, opportunities to develop pupils' higher level thinking skills through focused questioning or by involving the pupils in self or peer evaluation were missed. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and use questions effectively to make the pupils think about their work and move them on. They know the pupils well, have good relationships with them, and so create an environment in which the pupils are ready to learn.

Senior managers were involved in the joint observations of lessons with inspectors. An evaluation of the outcomes of this exercise revealed the need for a greater focus on the quality of learning.

Teaching assistants are often effective instructors in their own right; however, not all staff manage the time and support of these colleagues productively.

The school has been focusing on the quality of marking, and where this is most effective the comments indicate the level achieved as well as ways in which the work can be improved; however, opportunities to provide key literacy guidance are sometimes missed in the foundation subjects.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The school provides good opportunities for all learners, including those who find learning difficult, to progress and perform well.

The curriculum provides additional enrichment activities, for example, staff from the neighbouring upper school provide tuition in a second foreign language. This takes place in the upper school and provides opportunities to ease Year 8 transition. A programme of extra

activities provides challenging and stimulating opportunities. Those involved in the Roman feast that took place during the inspection enjoyed cooking and eating 'Roman style'.

The programme of rich learning opportunities supports the regular curriculum with a variety of themed events lasting two to three days. These activities allow topics to be studied in depth and draw on the expertise of a wide range of visitors to the school. The fortnightly interest groups develop additional skills and pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles, creativity, technology, media and world issues. Regular extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport, support the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Effective transition procedures ensure Year 5 pupils quickly settle into the school and that Year 8 pupils are confident about transfer. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are secure. Vulnerable pupils receive effective guidance and support. Individual education plans are appropriately written and regularly reviewed.

The range of assessment information available is extensive and the new computer-based system currently being commissioned is intended to further refine the effective support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress are effective and are often used well at senior management level, although this is not consistently the case in the classroom. Support staff work well with individuals; parents and pupils comment appreciatively on this help. Good use is made of external agencies to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; as a result, many achieve well. Pupils feel safe and note there is always someone to turn to if they need help. The younger pupils appreciate the support of peer mediators whilst older pupils feel that staff generally deal effectively with any instances of bullying and the inappropriate behaviour of a small number of pupils.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The leadership and management of the school are good. The improvements secured by the senior management team in standards and achievement are linked to effective curriculum provision and good teaching. The school provides good value for money. Quality assurance procedures are robust and the use of assessment information to inform management decisions is good. The development plan is very clear, reflecting agreed priorities; resource management is good and the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Senior staff took a positive view of the opportunities for improvement presented by inspection, consistently seeking an insight into how the school might improve in the future. Community cohesion is good overall but the key efforts have been locally focused.

Senior managers direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through good care, guidance and support. Governance is good and the governing body works positively with colleagues in local schools.

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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
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<sup>1</sup>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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

10 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Thomas Coram Middle School, Berkhamsted, HP4 2RP.

Some of you will remember that inspectors visited the school at the beginning of July and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the manner in which you contributed to the process. Thomas Coram is a good school, you achieve well and many of you reach the standards expected from older pupils. Good teaching, together with your very positive attitudes to learning, are helping you to progress on many personal levels. It was a pleasure to meet so many of you during the two days; the good manners and courtesy evident was a credit to you all.

I have asked the headteacher to examine ways in which the school can provide greater independent learning opportunities for all of you. In the lessons where inspectors saw teachers provide these challenges, you made good progress.

Some parents and pupils noted that there is some bullying in the school; you can help to eliminate this concern by discussing the matter with your teachers.

It was a pleasure to see you involved in and enjoying your education and I look forward to meeting you again.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector