

THE THOMAS CORAM MIDDLE SCHOOL
A CHURCH OF ENGLAND VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOL



2011-12

PROSPECTUS



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BERKHAMSTED PYRAMID OF SCHOOLS

The Thomas Coram Middle School, along with Bridgewater Middle School our partner middle school, is at the centre of a pyramid of schools within the Berkhamsted area.

At the base of the pyramid are the six first schools that feed into one of the two middle schools. Pupils then move, at the beginning of Year 9 to Ashlyns Upper School, a Specialist Language College.

Although this three-tier system is different to some other parts of the County, it remains a popular choice providing a phased transition from the primary years where education is class based, to the specialist teaching of the secondary years. It also provides opportunities for Year 5 and 6 pupils to benefit from specialist teaching and facilities within a small school atmosphere.

The results, obtained by middle school pupils in the end of Key Stage 2 National Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs), suggest that pupils who go through the 3-tier system make very good progress compared to similar, 2-tier system pupils nationally.

The Thomas Coram Middle School is a Church of England Voluntary Aided school for pupils aged 9-13 corresponding to National Curriculum year 5 to 8. Situated at the top of Swing Gate Lane in Berkhamsted, the school is set in over 10 acres and occupies excellent purpose build accommodation.

The addition of a new 4 classroom block and enlarged Gym, from September 2010, has significantly enhanced our teaching resources and means that we are now equipped to continue growing and providing a high quality education for Berkhamsted pupils into the next decade.

THE CURRICULUM

When pupils join our school at the beginning of Year 5, they are placed into mixed ability **form** groups and are taught the full range of National Curriculum subjects:

- English and Literacy
- Maths and Numeracy
- Science
- ICT
- Art
- Citizenship
- Design and Technology
- French
- Geography
- History
- Music
- PE and Games
- Religious Education

In subjects such as Design and Technology, Science, **French**, Music and PE, pupils are taught by specialist teachers. In most of these specialist subjects, there are teaching areas designed to cater for the particular delivery and participation needs of the subject. We have 2 Science laboratories, D & T workshop, Food Technology room, Art room, Drama studio & Gym. Only in Maths are pupils placed into ability groups (sets) at the start of Year 5, based on information from the first

schools and our own internal assessments. Our Maths sets change as pupils progress through the school, in order to ensure that every child receives the appropriate level of challenge and support to thrive academically.

There is a strong emphasis throughout Years 5 and 6 on Literacy and Numeracy, which is why reading, writing, spelling and mental maths are all features of the weekly curriculum.

The progress of each pupil is formally checked in each subject on a termly basis and parents/carers are informed and involved in discussions about their child's progress.

From Year 7 pupils are also placed into ability groups for French and English.

Throughout the four years in our school, pupils develop their ICT skills through two dedicated ICT lessons a fortnight. The skills learnt in ICT are used to support learning in other subject areas and at home via our Learning Platform. The school has two ICT Suites as well as computers in other areas of the school. All classrooms are equipped with Interactive Whiteboards.

Music is a strength in our school curriculum and a range of instrumental groups and choirs contribute to events throughout the year. These include our summer production, annual Carol Service and the School's Charter Service. At present over one third of our pupils participate in instrumental lessons with specialist peripatetic teachers.

The school is proud of its strong PE department and the contribution that it makes not only to our broad curriculum, as evidenced by our Sports Mark, but also to our commitment to be a 'healthy school' recognised by our Healthy Schools Award. Four hours of PE/Games are timetabled every fortnight, for all year groups, and a range of team and individual activities are organised after school.

In order to personalise and enhance the learning experience of all our pupils, we have termly Rich Learning Opportunities (RLOs), which are 2 day projects built around cross-curricular dimensions such as sustainability, creativity and enterprise. They provide the opportunity for pupils to develop and practice their learning and thinking skills, as well as putting their learning into a context.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

As a Church of England School, Religious Education (RE) has a central place in our curriculum. All pupils have two hours of Religious Education per fortnight that draws on the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus and uses support materials from the Diocese of St Albans. Although RE is approached from a Christian viewpoint, the aim of the course is to encourage an interest in, and an awareness of, the spiritual dimension to life, as well as an understanding of other major world faiths.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

An act of collective worship occurs each day. On two days of the week, the whole school meets for collective worship; and on the other three days collective worship takes place in key stage, year or form groups.

We encourage pupils, staff, governors and clergy, as well as visitors from the community, to lead and participate in our collective worship.

At Thomas Coram, we view collective worship as an important part of the learning experience, and we would not normally expect parents to exercise their right to remove their child. If this is being considered, please contact the Headteacher.

SEX EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

We aim to help our young people understand their own developing bodies and sexuality, in a supportive and open atmosphere that helps them on their journey from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood.

Sex education is mainly taught as part of the Year 7 Science and Years 7 and 8 Personal, Social and Health Education courses. However, some information is sensitively presented to children in Years 5 and 6, which is matched to their stage of development, by the School Nurse.

Sex and relationships education aims to help children develop attitudes and values based on Christian morality. It places care, respect and responsibility at the heart of family life.

Parents have the right to withdraw their child from sex education, except when it is part of the Science curriculum.

INSTRUMENTAL TUITION

We are proud of the many opportunities for pupils to develop their musical talents. Instrumental lessons during the school day are provided by visiting teachers from the Hertfordshire Music Service. They offer tuition for a range of woodwind, brass, string, percussion and keyboard instruments and children are encouraged, when appropriate, to prepare for and enter Trinity College or Associated Board examinations.

LEARNING SUPPORT AND INCLUSION

Gifted and Talented Pupils

We continually seek to develop our many gifted and talented pupils through clearly differentiated work in lessons, and through open-ended activities including The Primary and Junior Maths Challenges and Technology Tournaments.

Pupils are also encouraged to develop their aptitudes through the wide range of extra curricular activities, such as Science Days and County organised master classes, arranged locally. Our school

is an active participant in the Young Gifted and Talented programme operated by the Department for Education.

Additional Support and Inclusion

The school aims to be totally inclusive and to ensure that all pupils fulfil their potential and succeed.

We have an experienced Inclusion Support Co-ordinator (INCO), a Specialist teacher for pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) as well as a team of Teaching Assistants who provide a range of targeted support for pupils with additional educational needs. This support is mainly in class, but where appropriate small group and individual support work will take place.

All teachers are aware of the range of learners in their class and not only differentiate work to match the needs of individual pupils, but also adopt individual strategies for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Teachers regularly liaise with the INCO and parents/carers to review the effectiveness of strategies.

ASSESSMENT AND RECORDS

Throughout each child's time at The Thomas Coram Middle School, his or her work will be assessed on a regular basis.

It is standard practice that teachers assess a particular assignment, and exercise their professional judgement, to determine the National Curriculum level reached by the pupil. Sometimes the assessments will be carried out through written standardised tests, which happen at the end of Years 5, 7 and 8, in the core subjects of Mathematics and English.

The aim of all these assessments is to enable the teacher to identify the progress that each child is making, and to tailor new work to provide appropriate challenge and for further progression. Assessments also provide opportunities for teachers to discuss pupils' learning and to help pupils identify their next steps in learning.

Towards the end of Year 6, all pupils sit the SATs in English and Maths.

In order to keep you informed of your child's progress against their targets, a review and target summary is provided in the Autumn term, which is followed by a full and detailed report that is issued at the end of the year. For Year 6 pupils, this also includes the results of their SATs and for Year 8 pupils their end of Key Stage teacher assessments in the core subjects.

We hold consultations each term, when you can talk to your child's teachers about their progress. This year they are:

- Autumn - Pastoral Consultation with form tutor
- Spring - Curriculum Consultation with subject teachers
- Summer - Consultation with form tutor following the Annual Report.

If you wish to discuss your child's progress at any other point in the year, apart from the consultation, do not hesitate to contact your child's form tutor or Learning and Personal Development Co-ordinator (LAPD).

Please contact the school office if you wish to see your child's records.

HOMEWORK

We believe that homework is an important part of education, providing opportunities to consolidate learning and develop new skills such as researching information. Homework also enables children to become independent learners. The frequency and amount of homework that is expected from each year group is set out in our Homework Policy.

- Years 5 and 6 are expected to do up to 30 minutes per day with an emphasis on developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Years 7 and 8 are expected to do between one and one and half hours per day.

Pupils record their homework in a planner. We ask parents/carers to check and sign the planner on a weekly basis and to use it as a vehicle for communicating with the form tutor, who also monitors the planners each week.

A timetable is published and sent home to parents/carers each year, as well as being available on our website.

SCHOOL HOUSES

We have four houses: Cook, Drake, Frobisher and Nelson. Pupils are placed into one of these houses when they join the school in Year 5. Each house has a male and female pupil captain elected by the pupils.

For the majority of activities in school, pupils are organised in year groups and forms. There are occasions when, in order to give them opportunities to work in mixed aged teams, we organise them into vertical house groups particularly for sports, musical activities and other competitions.

PASTORAL - BEHAVIOUR, CARE, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

We have high expectations of all pupils in terms of behaviour and attitudes.

We expect everyone to feel safe, valued and be able to learn and work unhindered in our school. This means that we expect everyone to show respect and consideration towards others in the school community, as well as to those outside.

Our aim is to encourage self-discipline and self-respect and our Behaviour Policy and framework sets out how we aim to do that. We believe that it is important to model, recognise and celebrate good behaviour, as well as to support those children who need additional help in order to behave consistently, in an acceptable way. Bullying or racist behaviour is taken very seriously and dealt with promptly. There are clear rewards and sanctions within our behaviour management framework and, wherever possible, good behaviour and good manners are rewarded through commendations, praise postcards or our KS3 leadership scheme. Inappropriate behaviour is dealt with at three levels according to our behaviour policy.

If you have any concerns relating to your child, your first point of contact with the school should be your child's form tutor. They, along with the LAPD Co-ordinators, are the heart of our

pastoral care system and are always fully aware of any issues of concern relating to behaviour, attendance or attitude.

Pupils who are going through a difficult patch will often respond more easily to someone of their own age. Therefore, we train a number of peer mediators each year. These mediators are able to provide a sympathetic ear and word of support - very often from a perspective of personal experience. We also have a professional counsellor who can offer a confidential service, with your permission, to pupils on a self-referral basis.

PUPIL RESPONSIBILITIES

School Council

The School Council is an important part of the decision making process within our school community. We believe that everyone in our school community should have a chance to contribute to decisions that affect them. Consequently, we make significant efforts to find out what pupils think about their school, through questionnaires, small group conversations and the School Council.

The School Council not only provides a way of gauging pupils' opinions, but also for modelling the democratic process, and providing them with opportunities to develop their social and communication skills. Each form group elects one representative to sit on the Council, which meets weekly.

Agenda items are identified by the pupils and Council discussions are fed back to the rest of the pupil population via the form representatives and the School Council notice board.

The School Council has control over its own budget, which is used to action some of its decisions.

Head Boy, Head Girl and School Prefects

In addition to the School Council pupils have the opportunity to influence and support how the school family works by taking on other responsibilities.

Each year a Head Boy and Head Girl are elected to lead a team of school prefects, who represent the school on public occasions and undertake specific tasks around the school.

Other pupils give up their free time to support their peers by becoming Peer Mediators or Reading and Maths buddies for younger pupils.

SCHOOL MEALS

The school meals service is second to none! Hertfordshire Catering, who provides a wide range of quality snacks and main meal options each day, produces meals within our own kitchens. The choices reflect our commitment to encourage healthy eating and to being a healthy school. Each day, in addition to the main meal, there is a range of hot and cold snacks, salads, sandwiches and fruit.

The majority of pupils who have school meals use our new biometric system, which eliminates cash transactions and the need for pupils to bring large amounts of money to school. This works in conjunction with “Wisepay” which allows parents to pay in advance, on line, for pupil meals.

For those pupils who wish to bring a packed lunch, we would expect them to bring a balanced meal. Pupils bringing packed lunches eat in the dining room, along with the rest of their year group. You should ensure that packed lunches do not contain any nuts, in order to comply with the school’s Health & Safety Policy and are suitable for un-refrigerated storage until required at lunchtime.

ATTENDANCE

Full attendance at school is essential for your child to make the progress of which he/she is capable. Consequently, we expect, barring ill health and unavoidable medical appointments, children to be in school for 190 days of the year, and we aim to work in partnership with you to facilitate this. Our attendance is consistently over 95%, which is well above the national average. Our Attendance Policy sets out the procedures for notifying us about absences due to illness. Please telephone the school on the morning of the first day of absence. This should then be followed up by a letter, explaining the reason for the absence on the day of the child’s return. If the absence is for longer than 3 days you will need to contact the school office again.

If no call is received on the morning of the first day of absence by 9.30am and we are unaware of the reason for the absence, the school office will attempt to contact you on the telephone number that you have provided, to clarify why your child is not in school.

If your child has a dental or doctor’s appointment during school time, please let us know beforehand in writing when he/she is to be collected and by whom.

The school has a duty to classify all absences as either authorised or unauthorised. In the above cases, and for music/dance examinations, the school will normally authorise the absence. However, authorisation of absences for other reasons is entirely at the discretion of the Headteacher. The maximum block of time that can be authorised in any one year is 10 days.

No leave of absence will be authorised unless a request has been made at least three weeks beforehand. A ‘leave of absence form’ is available from the school office or from the school website but only in exceptional circumstances, such as a close family bereavement, will the request be authorised.

Our Attendance Policy also sets out our punctuality expectations. Pupils are deemed late if they arrive in school after the register has been taken (8.55am) but before the register is closed (9.15am). If this happens, the pupil should report to the school office to get a late mark and sign in before going to their classroom. After 9.15am any absence is recorded as an unauthorised absence, unless there are extenuating or mitigating circumstances to explain the lateness.

Any pupil who is late twice in a week, without good reason, will receive a lunchtime detention.

CHARGING POLICY

No charges are made for any activity that is a normal part of the school curriculum.

On the occasions when we organise events such as day and field visits or have visiting performers in school, we would ask that a voluntary contribution is made to help cover the cost of these curriculum enrichment activities. However, no pupil will ever be excluded from such an activity because a donation is not received.

We have access to a few, small charitable trust funds which we use to make discretionary allowances where families are facing difficult financial circumstances.

The Governors' Charging Policy sets out in detail the items that are charged for, but in summary they are:

- residential visits
- materials and ingredients used in Art and Technology where the final product goes home
- instrumental tuition
- deliberate damage to school property.

UNIFORM AND EQUIPMENT

Our uniform consists of a blue v-neck sweatshirt with embroidered red logo along with grey skirts or trousers and black shoes. Our uniform is of great importance to us as it identifies each pupil as a member of our community. We expect every child to wear this school uniform and to come to school looking smart and ready to work.

Also included with this prospectus is a list of equipment that your child will need for school. Some of these items, for example pens, pencils, calculators, can be bought at discounted prices from the school shop held in the school dining room and is open weekly at break time.

The school keeps a small stock of little used, second-hand uniform, which can be purchased at advertised times throughout the year.

There is also some limited help available to parents who are experiencing financial difficulty in purchasing uniform. If you would like more information about this please contact the school office. Your enquiry will be dealt with in total confidence.

SCHOOL DAY

Children allowed on site	8.30am
Registration in form groups	8.45am
Period 1	8.55am
Period 2	9.55am
Morning break – hot and cold healthy snacks available	10.55am
Period 3	11.15am
Period 4	12.15am
Lunch break – pupils go into lunch according to a daily rota	1.15pm
Registration in form groups	2.05pm
Assembly and collective worship	2.10pm
Period 5	2.25pm
Dismissal in form groups	3.25pm
Home	3.35pm

TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL

The majority of our pupils walk to and from school. This is strongly encouraged and is reflected in our school travel plan.

If you really need to bring your child to school by car, we would ask that you drop them off before reaching the school gates. The area immediately in front of the gates is reserved for the two school buses. The approach road becomes particularly narrow and dangerous to children who are walking if cars are parked bumper to bumper along the road. Details of the bus routes are included along with this prospectus.

The school regularly hosts cycle training. Pupils are encouraged to cycle to school, with the Headteacher's permission, provided they wear approved cycle helmets and have passed the Bikeability (Cycling Proficiency) Test. There is a shelter for cycles in the school grounds where cycles can be left during the school day.

SAFEGUARDING

Whilst we always undertake to work in partnership with parents/carers and liaise on issues concerning your child, there may be occasions when we have to contact other agencies before we contact you.

The Children's Act clearly requires schools to be in the vanguard of procedures to safeguard children. If concerns are raised with the school, or a child reports a situation involving possible abuse, we would refer the matter to Social Services as required by legislation and Hertfordshire County Council policies.

SECURITY, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The security and safety of all the children and adults who work on the site is of paramount importance to us. We take our duty of care very seriously and have installed CCTV cameras and recording equipment, plus an entry phone system on the main door at the school.

If you are visiting the site, you are asked to go to the main entrance, which is clearly signed, and report to reception. You will be required to sign in and display a visitor's badge for the duration of your visit. On leaving, you are asked to sign out at reception.

The school has a comprehensive Health and Safety Policy with procedures designed to ensure the safety of our pupils. One such procedure is for the emergency closure of the school which is activated in response to severe weather, prolonged heating failure etc. We operate a text messaging service alongside our website and the local radio stations to make parents aware of the situation. You should agree with your child what they need to do in such an emergency, where they are to go and with whom. If the school is unaware of these arrangements, and/or is unable to verify them, we will keep children in our care until parents/carers can be contacted and arrangements made for their collection.

VALUABLES AND LOST PROPERTY

The school does not accept liability for pupils' personal property, neither does Hertfordshire County Council. All personal property is brought onto the site at the owner's risk. This means items like MP3 players, iPods, computer games and other valuable items are not permitted in school. If your child needs to bring money into school for a particular reason, it should be in a named envelope and handed to the form tutor or school office for safekeeping.

If a mobile telephone is brought into school, it should be named and deposited with the school office at the beginning of the day and only collected at the end of the day. Under no circumstances are children permitted to carry mobile telephones during registration or lesson time. If this rule is broken, the telephone will be confiscated and returned only to the child's parent/carer, in person.

Unclaimed items are stored in class areas and wherever possible, we will assist parents/carers in trying to track down missing items, providing that the item is named. We invite parents/carers on a termly basis to inspect lost property in order to try to reunite children with their lost items. Any items remaining unclaimed at the beginning of each term are disposed of.

IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT

As a school, we strive to ensure problems and concerns, should they arise, are dealt with swiftly and effectively through early and meaningful dialogue between parents/carers and your child's teacher. However, there may be times when this communication and resulting action does not fully resolve the issue to your satisfaction.

On those occasions, you are asked to contact the Headteacher, either in writing or by telephone, to explain the problem.

In the unlikely event that a problem or concern remains after this step, then the Chair of Governors and the mediation service of Hertfordshire County Council are available to resolve the issue.

A copy of our Complaints Policy is available from the school office.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

Our aim is to work in close partnership with parents/carers. To do this, we believe that good home-school communication is essential. For each new cohort of pupils, and those who join us through the year, a copy of our Home School Agreement setting out this partnership with parents/carers is sent to each home. You are invited to sign and return it as an indication of your commitment.

We use a range of new and traditional methods to develop this partnership with you. There is a weekly email bulletin to give information on forthcoming events and keep you up-to-date with news, in addition to year group letters that provide information about programmes of work and extra-curricular activities. Newsletters to celebrate recent achievements and review life of our school community are also issued.

Face-to-face meetings are the most valuable: there are planned consultation evenings when you can talk to your child's form tutor and subject teachers. We also encourage informal contact throughout the year with form tutors, either in person or by telephone, to discuss individual concerns, should they arise. There is a Headteacher's drop-in surgery each Monday evening for one hour (5.30-6.30pm) for parents who find making appointments during the school day problematic. Parents should contact the school office to make an appointment.

We also organise workshops and family learning events, where you are invited to join in the learning experience with your child, so that you can gain a greater awareness of what and how they are learning.

Up-to-date information about the curriculum is on our school website, which contains a range of useful information for parents/carers, including a list of all current school policies. A copy of any policy may be requested from the school office.

In addition to our website and email, we send urgent or important information via SMS text messaging. With the introduction of smart phones and many people now receiving social media updates directly on their personal devices, we tweet regularly – follow us @thomascoram – and update you via our official Facebook page 'The Official Thomas Coram Middle School' – www.facebook.com/officialthomascoram. (You are reminded of Facebook's age policy, which states that users must be over the age of 13. You should exercise care when using social media websites and follow the site's safety policy. Information on Internet safety is available on www.thinkuknow.org)

Parents can also make payments (for example, to your son/daughter's dinner money account or for a forthcoming school trip) securely online via our payment system, WisePay. This system also allows parents/carers to check account balances and review individual pupil's spending at lunchtime.

As you can hopefully tell, we are committed to working in partnership with you, and employ an expanding range of face-to-face, paper and electronic methods to help achieve this.

PARENTAL HELP

We welcome and value parents'/carers' help within the school and are always looking for new ways of involving you. For instance, we are always grateful to parents/carers who volunteer to accompany visits and help with after school clubs and teams.

We would value your support in listening to pupils read, supporting children in practical lessons and by joining our existing band of parents helping to keep our gardens and courtyards tidy or fund raising through the activities of the Friends' Association.

We would be delighted to receive your offers of help and would ask that you contact us well in advance so that the required clearances (Enhanced Disclosure Form from the Criminal Records Bureau) can be obtained.

FRIENDS OF THE THOMAS CORAM MIDDLE SCHOOL

The school is extremely fortunate to have an active band of Friends who give freely of their time to organise a range of fund raising events throughout the academic year.

These events, such as quiz and bingo nights and a summer fair, raise significant amounts of money that are used to enhance the resources available to the pupils in our school.

The Friends also maintain a useful collection of hardly worn second hand uniform.

ADMISSIONS PROCEDURE

In order to help you make this all important decision about your child's next school, we invite you to visit us on our open evening or morning in December, when you will be able to get a more comprehensive picture of our school community than this prospectus can provide. Should you be unable to visit on one of these occasions, please contact the school office and we will do our best to arrange a mutually convenient time.

If after visiting the school you decide to apply for a place for your child you will need to complete and return a supplementary information form. Our Admissions Policy, also included with this prospectus, sets out the criteria we use to admit children to The Thomas Coram Middle School in the likely event of oversubscription. Our admission number varies slightly from year to year and is determined for each Year 5 intake by agreement between ourselves, Bridgewater Middle School,

Hertfordshire Student Services and governors. For the academic year 2012/13 our admission number for Year 5 is 110.

Children are admitted to other years, both at the beginning of the academic year and throughout the year, if places become available, as In-Year Admissions. More details are available about In-Year Admissions from the school office.

If you wish to apply for your child to join us in Year 5, you must complete the Hertfordshire County Council application form on line at www.hertsdirect.org/admissions or ask for a paper application form by telephoning 0300 1234043. In addition, you should complete our Supplementary Information Form which is attached to this prospectus, or available from the school's website www.thomascoram@herts.sch.uk or from the HCC website detailed above. If you are applying for a year other than Year 5 please contact the school office.

We have strong links with all the first schools in Berkhamsted, Potten End and Northchurch which ensure a smooth transition from first to middle school. To help new pupils settle in as quickly as possible, we arrange visits in the summer term for the children to visit and meet their new teacher. We also arrange an evening meeting for parents to receive further information.

SUMMARY

The Thomas Coram Middle School is a thriving, forward looking, dynamic, learning community, committed to providing the very best of learning opportunities for all of its pupils. If you would like to visit our school, meet our pupils and dedicated staff, as well as experience for yourself our emphasis on learning and success, then please contact the school office for an appointment.