

The Thomas Aveling School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137376
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	386082
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2012
Lead inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,120
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Terence Brown
Headteacher	Paul Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2008
School address	Arethusa Road Rochester Medway ME1 2UW
Telephone number	01634 844809
Fax number	01634 818385
Email address	office@thomasaveling.co.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	24–25 January 2012
Inspection number	386082



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2012



Introduction

Inspection team

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

Roger Fenwick

Additional inspector

Jenny Usher

Additional inspector

Jalil Shaikh

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 44 lessons, observed 44 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection and evaluated students' achievement over three years, discussed examples of work with selected students, and reviewed schemes of work, policies, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They considered 175 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 139 responses to the students' questionnaire and 65 responses from staff.

Information about the school

This is a larger-than-average, non-selective school in an area with selective education.. The school exceeds the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. In September 2011, Thomas Aveling converted to academy status.

An average proportion of students is known to be eligible for free school meals. Fewer than two in every ten students belong to a minority ethnic group, and only one in every ten has English as an additional language. The proportion on the school action plus programme or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly above average. Predominantly, these students have behavioural, emotional and social issues or moderate learning difficulties. Few students join or leave partway through their 11–16 education. Post-16 options are extended through local partnerships.

The school has specialist status for technology. It became a Training School in 2006 and is a Mentor School for the Specialist Trust. As part of the Kent and Medway school-centred initial teacher training programme (SCITT), it trains over 20 teachers each year. It leads in training and promotion for the Arts Council and runs management courses accredited by Greenwich University. Its awards include Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark School and the ICT Mark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Most striking is the sense of shared purpose. Staff and students feel personally valued and appreciate being actively encouraged to gain qualifications and develop their skills. Key Stage 4 students summed up the school’s culture and strengths: ‘You’re guaranteed a good education if you’re prepared to put the effort in.’
- Students’ achievement is good because they enter with low prior attainment and make good progress in most subjects. A three-year upward trend has brought the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades or equivalent to above average. Well-directed interventions, based on detailed and accurate analysis of data, are rapidly closing gaps in attainment.
- Teaching is good overall. At its best, it combines secure subject knowledge with an ability to engage and challenge students. However, information about students’ knowledge and skills is not consistently used to set priorities for each lesson.
- Most behaviour is good. Occasional pockets of poor behaviour by a small minority, however, are not always effectively managed. Occasionally, limited experience of living in a multicultural society leads a few to make inappropriate comments, but these do not reflect the prevailing ethos and they are firmly dealt with.
- The sixth form is good overall. Pass rates at AS and A level are broadly average and improving. While the proportion of high grades is low, this represents good progress given students’ relatively low prior attainment. Choices are extended through local partnerships, and the range of academic and vocational options meets all interests and abilities. Sixth formers take on responsibilities and develop leadership skills in school and in the wider community.
- Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers at all levels,

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

including the governing body, know their school well. Response to identified weaknesses has been prompt and constructive, with the impact seen in rising attainment. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and staff well trained. Capacity for further improvement is good. A commitment to inclusiveness and to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development shapes planning and provision. As a parent commented, 'Thomas Aveling inspires children to see their potential and see for themselves they have much to offer.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on recent improvements in attainment and progress by:
 - making consistent and effective use of up-to-date information about students' knowledge and skills when planning lessons
 - adapting plans in lessons whenever appropriate to meet students' immediate needs and to challenge all abilities.

- Eliminate the small pockets of disruptive or inappropriate behaviour by:
 - ensuring consistently high expectations and effective behaviour management
 - enhancing students' appreciation of international culture and diversity through reinforcing those elements within the mainstream and extended curriculum.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

From a low starting point, students make good overall progress. The proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades, or equivalent, with English and mathematics has been above government floor standards for three years. Recent mathematics results have significantly exceeded predictions based on Key Stage 2 levels. Science has been a cause for concern but changes in leadership and staffing and a more rigorous approach to planning and assessment are accelerating progress. In a Year 11 science class, students tested their understanding of electronic structure by constructing models of a given atom. They were then able to evaluate and, on occasion, correct each other's constructions, showing confident progress and useful communication skills. Careful planning had ensured appropriate levels of challenge and assessment opportunities to reinforce students' learning. Success in practical and vocational subjects makes a significant contribution to the upward trend in achievement. Excellent resources and courses well attuned to students' interests ensure high levels of engagement and good results in the specialism – technology, business and enterprise and information and communication technology – and in the visual and performing arts. Scrutiny of students' work showed most making good progress, with work becoming more substantial and well structured over time, although their

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

technical accuracy and range of expression remain uneven.

Sixth form entry requirements are being raised, for example in mathematics and in science, and students respond well to recent changes in teaching and learning. In a Year 13 creative and media diploma class, for example, students led the session very effectively, taking it in turns to evaluate short videos of presentations they had each made to promote schemes for attracting young people to Chatham's historical dockyard. Several Year 13 students hold offers for competitive courses such as law in leading universities. Almost all students progress to further education or training.

Careful monitoring of progress by disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those still in the early stages of English acquisition, leads to well-targeted interventions, such as small-group teaching, individual tuition and in-class support. This is narrowing the gap in attainment between these students and their school contemporaries. In a Year 9 numeracy session, for example, 12 students with special educational needs made good progress, practising a variety of skills that included negotiation and decision-making as they worked in pairs on money-based calculations. A daily literacy class during tutor time gives those still below Level 4 in English concentrated practice in basic skills. In the session observed, students made good progress from simply using 'and' to link two statements to constructing sentences with more than two elements and a variety of connectives.

Almost all parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire were confident that their children's individual needs were being well met and their progress was good.

Quality of teaching

Most teaching is good or better. The school's enterprise in training new teachers and providing opportunities for established teachers to acquire leadership training and qualifications has created a culture of self-review and professional development. Teaching strengths include: enthusiastically communicated subject knowledge; effective use of assessment to reinforce learning; the ability to capture students' interest and build their confidence; enterprising use of resources; clarity about what is to be learnt, and how; and support for students as independent learners. In a Year 13 information and communication technology lesson, for example, students responded imaginatively to the challenges of designing a computer game with cartoon turtles, using Java coding. In a Year 7 Italian lesson, the teacher engagingly combined extensive use of the target language with helpful visual aids and increasingly demanding questions. The students bounced with eagerness to respond and displayed a confident grasp of vocabulary and basic grammar that was impressive after only three weeks' introduction to the language. Teachers routinely take advantage of opportunities to bring themes and resources into their subject teaching that make a positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They also support out-of-the-classroom activities, such as the Eco Club and drama performances for patients in a nearby hospice.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Weaknesses in less effective lessons include: patchy use of information about students' current knowledge and skills when planning lessons, so that not all are appropriately challenged; limited opportunities for independent learning; lack of detail in feedback; and inconsistencies in the management of the few who become distracted and distracting. Close monitoring by senior and subject leaders ensures that problems are quickly identified and teachers given carefully managed support.

Almost all the parents and carers responding to the questionnaire expressed justifiable confidence that their children are well taught and are being helped to develop skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The great majority of students and their parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire judged the school to be a safe place, where students are well taught, well looked after and happy to be. Attendance by all groups is steadily improving as a result of rigorous monitoring and well-targeted interventions, and is now in line with national averages. Members of staff are scrupulous in recording inappropriate behaviour onto a central database, enabling senior leaders to identify emerging patterns in group or individual behaviour and to respond promptly. There have been no permanent exclusions for four years. The school's firm response to disruptive behaviour is reflected in the number of fixed-term exclusions. The generally good behaviour observed in lessons and around the school indicate the effectiveness of this approach. Increasingly, students at risk of exclusion are being successfully managed and supported in the 'Inclusion Zone' and through the 'Lilac Learning Project', which supports vulnerable students through one-to-one mentoring. In lessons, such as science, sport and design and technology, students show that they are aware of potential risks and they behave responsibly.

Students understand their role in tackling the various forms of bullying and are confident that problems will be resolved quickly. The introduction of vertical tutor groups across all years has encouraged older students to act as mentors and role models for younger ones. A small number of responses to the inspection questionnaires raised concerns about disruptive behaviour; most behaviour observed during the inspection was good.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, vigorously communicate an ambitious vision for Thomas Aveling's development into the community's school of first choice. They present a realistic perspective on challenges, such as further raising attainment, and they share a commitment to maintaining the school's inclusiveness and its role as a centre for teachers' professional development. The past two years have seen improvements in teaching and learning. Efficient software designed by a member of the senior leadership team enables subject leaders to monitor and improve the impact on students' progress of teaching and assessment and of curriculum initiatives. Each department works to challenging

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

targets, closely monitored by senior leaders and by the governing body. In-school professional development focuses on areas for improvement identified during this monitoring. Teachers appreciate time each fortnight for collaborative planning and sharing of best practice within departments. Teaching and support staff are given opportunity to work towards further qualifications. Morale is extremely high, not least because relationships between all groups in the school are mutually supportive. The school has a happy, lively atmosphere. A new teacher observed, 'You feel like a person who matters.' A member of the curriculum support team added, 'People are very generous with their knowledge.' A parent governor emphasised that, 'There's real ownership by all concerned.'

The curriculum is good; its breadth and flexibility to meet most needs successfully are demonstrated by the high proportion of students going on to further education or training. Partnerships with schools and colleges and involvement in community projects valuably extend students' options and develop their confidence and sense of social responsibility. In all departments, themes and activities designed to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are threaded through schemes of work. Examples observed over two days included: a Year 7 exploration of the cultural legacy of the Roman occupation of Britain; a Year 8 debate on the ethics of fighting for one's country; a Year 10 exploration of the prejudices and stereotyping associated with dialect and accent; and a Year 13 discussion of sin, retribution and mortality in Jacobean tragedy.

Systems to ensure students' safety and well-being are rigorous and regularly reviewed. The school's commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination is demonstrated, for example, in action taken to engage families who would not otherwise have the confidence or motivation to become involved in their children's education. Successful projects include family literacy and numeracy courses. Mutual respect and an appreciation of the importance and value of diversity are strongly promoted at every level and shape strategic planning, curriculum development and deployment of resources. The Year 8 curriculum, for instance, prompts students to look at equality and diversity in British society, and to consider the impact of prejudice and stereotyping. The progress and well-being of vulnerable groups and individuals are closely monitored and effective action taken when needed. Several parents and carers spoke of the school's success in helping their children, for example: 'My son has achieved very well at this school... It finds something good about a student whether it is practical or mental minded and works with the child. It gets the best out of them. He has done so well with the support of the school. He is well mannered, works hard and has been encouraged to improve every step of his learning.'

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Thomas Aveling School, Rochester ME1 2UW

Thank you for the openness and good humour with which you responded when my colleagues and I came into your lessons and when we asked you to tell us what it is like to be a student at Thomas Aveling. We agree with you that yours is a good school with a strong culture of mutual respect and support.

We found that most teaching enables you to achieve results that prepare you well for further education or training. The curriculum combines the academic subjects you need with varied options to meet your abilities and ambitions. It is no surprise that so many of you now choose to stay on into the sixth form and that the great majority of leavers go on to university, college or further training. You rightly say that you learn best in active and practical ways. We were pleased to know that, despite the occasional disruption caused by a handful of students, you feel safe and are happy to be at school. We could see why so many of you spoke to us of the valuable support given to you by your teachers and those responsible for your well-being. Senior students also make an important contribution by taking on responsibility for others, for example as mentors and mediators.

So that Thomas Aveling goes from strength to strength, we have asked your headteacher to ensure that:

- up-to-date information about your attainment and progress always influences lesson planning, and everyone who teaches you responds to the different ways in which you learn
- disruptive or inappropriate behaviour is dealt with firmly and consistently
- even more is done, both in the classroom and beyond, to build up your appreciation of what it means to live in and make a positive contribution to a multicultural society.

Each of you can make a difference by having high expectations for yourself and working steadily to achieve them.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.**