

# Thomas Wolsey School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	137838
<b>Local authority</b>	N/A
<b>Inspection number</b>	393751
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 February 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Judith Charlesworth

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>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	94
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Evan Edwards
<b>Headteacher</b>	Matthew Brakenbury
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	29 June 2009
<b>School address</b>	Defoe Road Ipswich IP1 6SG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01473 467600
<b>Fax number</b>	01473 462525
<b>Email address</b>	office@thomaswolsey.com

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<b>Age group</b>	3–16
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	23–24 February 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	393751



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth

Additional inspector

Christine Mayle

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Eight individual lessons were observed, taught by seven different teachers. Three learning walks also took place to observe five Thomas Wolsey pupils attending lessons in the co-located high school, and to observe mixed-aged creative activities taking place in Thomas Wolsey. Some of these observations were conducted jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Meetings were held with governors and staff, and informal discussions took place with pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including that relating to pupils' learning and behaviour, safeguarding, teaching and self-evaluation. They considered the responses to questionnaires from pupils, staff and 38 parents and carers.

## Information about the school

Thomas Wolsey Academy is a day special school for pupils aged three to 16 years who have complex needs associated with physical disabilities, medical needs and/or sensory impairment. The school converted to academy status in February 2012. Many pupils have multiple difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder. All have statements of special educational needs. The school is a little larger than most similar schools. Slightly above average proportions of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and to come from minority ethnic groups. Since the previous inspection, an authority-wide reorganisation has led to the establishment of separate sixth form provision, and there is no longer a sixth form at Thomas Wolsey. There are 94 pupils on roll, 48 of whom are dual registered with their local mainstream school or nursery. Attendance in these settings ranges from one session to four full days per week. The school's outreach service supports these pupils as well as others who are not on Thomas Wolsey's roll. The school also hosts and manages the Suffolk Communication Aids Resource Centre Service and Information and Communication Technology Assessment Service. The school moved to new purpose-built premises three years ago, located within Thurlestone High School, which was renamed Ormiston Endeavour Academy in January 2012.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>

### Key findings

- Thomas Wolsey is an outstanding school. This is not only because of the excellence of its own practice but also because of its inclusive ethos and the impact it has on the achievement, personal development and well-being of numerous pupils in other schools.
- Outstanding leadership and management are evident at all levels. The school is ambitious and aims to widen its influence further with the help of its new academy status. Rigorous self-evaluation and effective systems monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school’s work in order to identify areas for further improvement. For example, senior staff are not yet satisfied that pupils’ small steps of progress are sufficiently well recorded and evaluated, and are currently implementing a new system to do this better. Nevertheless, learning and progress are carefully tracked and the information gained is used effectively to implement interventions.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. The professional capacity of all staff is effectively underpinned by performance management, professional development and support. Staff have very high expectations of pupils’ achievement, participation and independence. The team work between staff from all disciplines is excellent. Teaching is supported by a very well-planned, flexible and creative curriculum which pupils enjoy. Teaching, the curriculum and the school’s ethos provide extremely well for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils’ achievement is outstanding. They make particularly rapid progress in English and communication, and personal development. This is due to the emphasis on these areas and to the school’s communication specialism.
- Pupils’ behaviour and safety is outstanding. They feel safe in school and their behaviour in class and around the school, and their attitudes to learning, are exemplary. The school has numerous robust and well-implemented policies and practices to safeguard pupils’ health, safety and welfare.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The school should use the information gained from its new system for assessing and tracking pupils' small steps of progress to:
  - identify how the learning and progress of individuals can be increased further
  - develop the support and advice offered to mainstream schools on how to maximise the academic progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Pupils' attainment on entry is well below average, with some very occasional exceptions. Understandably, attainment remains low in comparison to age-related expectations, but pupils' progress is outstanding. Almost all parents' and carers' inspection questionnaires show that they are happy with their children's progress and skill development. Several included additional comments such as, 'Our child has progressed significantly', since joining Thomas Wolsey.

The picture of pupils' achievement is complex. Careful analysis of the progress of different groups of pupils, such as boys, girls, those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, those in receipt of free school meals or with additional difficulties such as visual impairment, show that there is no difference in progress between them. However, the academic progress of those who are in dual placements, and therefore not the sole responsibility of Thomas Wolsey, tends to be a little less marked. So saying, the impact of their mainstream placements on their well-being and spiritual, social, cultural and personal development are highly beneficial.

All pupils are very well prepared for the next step in their lives, socially, emotionally and academically. In Years 10 and 11 they gain various awards and qualifications, and experience college 'taster' courses and work experience at a level to suit each individual. Throughout the school, pupils make outstanding progress in developing English and communication skills, including reading and pre-reading skills. The school's specialism in supporting communication through the use of technological aids is outstanding. Where necessary, each pupil is supported to develop means of communication to complement or replace the spoken and/or written word. Such resources include the use of blinking, simple symbols, tablet computers and highly complex eye-gaze technology. The rapid progress made in communication and literacy strongly supports pupils' outstanding personal development.

Pupils' enjoyment of school and determination to learn is clearly evident in all lessons. For example, a small group of pupils with very severe physical disabilities worked exceptionally hard to begin writing a poem using eye-gaze technology. By the end of the session, one pupil had started his poem about 'a rusty red bird' and another about his 'ex-girlfriend'. Observation of pupils and their work in an art lesson in the co-located high school showed outstanding progress towards their challenging, predicted GCSE grades.

## Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is outstanding and underpins pupils' excellent achievement. This finding is confirmed by the inspection questionnaires which show that most pupils and the vast majority of parents and carers are happy with teaching and the way the school meets their child's particular needs. One respondent said, 'Thomas Wolsey goes above and beyond in delivering exceptional teaching.'

There are numerous strengths in teaching. Among these are the professionalism, quality and high expectations of all staff. The support and therapy staff work seamlessly and independently to promote pupils' learning and understanding. Examples of this include supporting communication and pupils' participation in practical activities such as electronic music-making. Teachers plan creatively to make lessons as challenging, interesting and practical as possible. Reading and pre-reading skills are successfully taught from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. For example, in a music/communication lesson, nursery children were taught to recognise the initial sound, first letter and rhythmic pattern of their name. Teaching is strongly underpinned by the outstanding curriculum, which provides relevant, age and ability-appropriate experiences that are tailored by staff to suit individuals' needs. Lesson planning is carefully based upon robust assessment in order to take each pupil forward step-by-step. Lessons meet individuals' needs by taking into consideration their cross-curricular personal learning targets as well as suitable subject-based learning targets.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well promoted by teaching. Pupils are expected to be as independent as possible in their learning, and are given every opportunity to develop their social and communication skills. For example, higher ability pupils in Key Stage 3 were asked to discuss what they would like included in the new school prospectus, and to write three ideas down to present to others. Pupils are often taught in mixed needs groups. On one occasion two boys with very different needs enjoyed a bout of the 'giggles' together which showed the depth of their friendship and mutual understanding.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary. This makes a significant contribution to their learning and to the calm atmosphere. Their attitudes to learning in lessons are excellent. Pupils listen carefully to staff, work well in small groups, and try exceptionally hard in all that they do. All parents and carers who responded to the inspection questions about behaviour agreed that they were happy with it. One respondent said, 'Children always come across as polite, smiling and well-mannered when you walk through the school.' The very large majority of pupils and staff, too, agree. Pupils respond very well to the school's merit system, which includes a weekly raffle ticket award, and are proud of their school. Incidents of misbehaviour are infrequent and are generally related to a few individuals' particularly complex needs. In such circumstances, the school develops effective behaviour management strategies, and/or individual timetables to minimise disruption and to keep them and the other pupils safe.

Pupils conduct themselves very sensibly around the school, and when moving in and out of areas that are shared with the high school. On social occasions, such as in the dining area, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the high school and Thomas Wolsey pupils. Parents, carers, staff and pupils say that pupils feel safe in school and that there is no bullying. No incidents have been recorded for the last three years. Nevertheless, staff maintain a constant focus on this, for example, heightening pupils' awareness of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying. This is supported very well by suitable policies and procedures, for example on internet safety. Altogether, the school's policies and practices to safeguard pupils' health, safety and well-being are very robust and carefully implemented and monitored.

## **Leadership and management**

Outstanding leadership and management at all levels have helped to maintain and further improve the high quality provision noted in the previous inspection. The outreach service and the communication aids centre both make an outstanding contribution to the achievement and well-being of pupils at Thomas Wolsey and in schools across Suffolk. Schools receiving this support are effusive in their praise and recognition of its positive impact on pupils' achievement and personal development. Thomas Wolsey's vision for its own development, and for the achievement and well-being of all disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, is ambitious. Senior leaders consider that the school's new academy status will help them to extend their vision further, for example to support a wider age range. The school has outstanding capacity for sustained, further improvement.

Thomas Wolsey's outstanding practice ensures that all pupils have equality of opportunity and that none are discriminated against because of their particular circumstances. Rigorous self-evaluation, together with clear, systematic, regularly evaluated procedures, practices and development plans are at the heart of the school's strength. Pupils' performance data is robustly analysed to identify any under-achievement by individuals or groups. This leads to investigations and interventions, such as one-to-one tuition, personalised timetables or changes to the curriculum. Further steps are currently being taken to improve the tracking of small steps of progress. This will help staff to support pupils' achievement even more effectively, particularly for those in dual placements. Staff performance, too, is carefully monitored and supported, for example by induction, professional development, mentoring and coaching. There is now a clear, common understanding of what effective teaching looks like. This has resulted in the eradication of inadequate teaching and the maintenance of high standards throughout staff changes.

Strong, effective governance supports the school's excellence. Converting to academy status necessitated a deeper understanding of the school's work and pupils' outcomes which has enabled greater challenge to be provided. Members' knowledge and understanding are supported by robust working practices, based on very high quality headteacher's reports and regular, well-organised and reported governor visits. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and meet current government requirements.

The high quality curriculum is central to the effectiveness of provision. As one deputy head teacher said, 'If you don't get the curriculum right, nothing will be right.' The curriculum provides a firm basis for activities and teaching that meet the needs and interests of all age and ability groups, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those requiring a sensory approach to learning. The use of community links, partnerships and extra-curricular activities, including many sporting and arts options, for curriculum enrichment and to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding throughout the school.

## 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](http://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.**



27 February 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Thomas Wolsey School, Ipswich, IP1 6SG**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn in lessons. We came to school to see how well you were all doing and how happy you were. We found that Thomas Wolsey is an outstanding school and has a great many strengths. Some of the best aspects are:

- your excellent behaviour, in class, around the school, and in the areas shared with Ormiston Endeavour
- your very positive attitudes to learning and the way you try hard in all that you do
- your excellent academic progress, particularly in English, communication and personal development
- the arrangements made for some of you to attend mainstream school, and the support offered to those schools to help you learn
- the use of so many specialist techniques and aids to help you communicate so successfully
- the outstanding quality of teaching, and the professional way that all staff work together to help you
- the interesting and exciting creative curriculum, including so many extra-curricular activities, arts and sports options
- the outstanding leadership and management of the school, which is helping to improve the school all the time
- the whole staff's commitment to improving the school, and to helping your parents and carers and others in the community.

We have asked the school to use the information it will gain from its new system to track your progress to help you do even better, both in Thomas Wolsey and in your mainstream placements.

You can all help, too, by continuing to behave well and trying hard in all that you do.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth  
Lead inspector

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