

Thomas Alleyne's High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124430
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	359669
Inspection dates	17–18 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Ruth Westbrook

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1346
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	336
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Kenny
Headteacher	Suzanne O'Farrell
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2008
School address	Dove Bank Uttoxeter ST14 8DU
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 42 lessons and observed 42 teachers. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and five governors, senior and middle managers and a group of parents and carers. Inspectors spoke to six groups of students including some from the sixth form. They observed the school's work, and looked at improvement plans, key policy documents, assessment information, minutes of the governing body and students' books. In addition, 302 responses to the parents' and carers' questionnaire were received and analysed, together with questionnaire responses from staff and a sample of 409 students from Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effective are plans to raise attainment by increasing the proportion of students gaining a grade A* to C in both English and mathematics?
- How well do teaching and the use of assessment support all students with special educational needs and/or disabilities when in lessons?
- How well are the strategies for raising the achievement of boys working?
- To what extent are the improvements to the quality of the sixth form fully embedded and promoting good progress for students across all courses?

Information about the school

This secondary school is larger than average and also has more sixth form students than is typical. Students join the school at the beginning of Year 9. The school is a specialist school for technology. It was appointed an International Baccalaureate World School in 2007, and has full International School status. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. In 2009 the school received full accreditation as a dyslexia friendly school. Almost all students are from White British families. There are very few students for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. As the only comprehensive school in a large geographical area, it is successful in building a strong community which welcomes and meets the needs of students of all abilities from a wide range of very different backgrounds. Underpinning a strong set of values are outstanding care, guidance and support. Through the house system, students become known as individuals and they have high levels of confidence in the school's ability to advise and support them appropriately. Parents and carers value the system because it enables staff to know students and their families well. As one parent commented, 'It has the sense of a small community in a very large school. They care that your child is happy.' There is very well targeted support for students, including those who are potentially vulnerable. A very strong partnership with parents and carers builds on excellent communication. The school openly consults on changes, most recently on the timings of the school day, and is responsive to the views of parents and carers in implementing these. Students of all ages make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities. Their active participation and responsible action in neighbouring schools, for example, bring much credit to their own school. A large majority of students make a contribution within school as mentors, school council members and through charity fund-raising.

Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses which comes from effective self-evaluation by both middle and senior leaders. Since the last inspection, there has been an emphasis on improvements to the quality of provision in Years 9 to 11. Particular targets for the school have been raising attainment in English and the achievement of boys across all subjects. The impact is evident in English where standards are now above average and in boys' attainment and rates of progress which are steadily rising. More recently, the focus has been to raise achievement in the sixth form. Although not yet evident in published examination results, secure plans are in place to bring this about and the evidence from the inspection indicates that students' achievement is already improving. The track record of improvement demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further.

Teachers plan well and are increasingly making effective use of assessment information to improve the achievement of individual students. In the great majority of lessons, students make at least good progress because the planning ensures that, from the start of the lesson, there is a careful match between activities and the abilities of different students in the group. In the small number of lessons where progress is less rapid, the work is pitched at the middle of the ability range so less able students struggle to complete it and the most able find it too easy. Teachers assess and mark students' work regularly. There is good and outstanding practice which involves students in assessing how well they have done and identifies their next steps. Nevertheless, marking is inconsistent in that some students are not given clear guidance on how to improve and are not encouraged to do

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so. The inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and use of assessment are more marked in the sixth form where a greater proportion of teaching is satisfactory so students only make the progress expected of them. The use of assessment information to identify underachievement in the sixth form is at an early stage of development so intervention is not always as timely as it needs to be.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make good progress by:
 - matching a range of activities to the needs of individual students throughout the course of all lessons
 - making sure that marking and feedback to students consistently engages them in a dialogue which helps them to improve their work.
- Raise the rate of progress across all courses in the sixth form so that it is at least good by:
 - ensuring the consistency of the quality of sixth form teaching
 - using best practice to improve satisfactory teaching to good
 - embedding the systems to track progress so that speedy action is taken when underachievement is identified.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students achieve well and enjoy school. When they join the school at the start of Year 9, attainment is broadly average, but there are marked differences between attainment in English and mathematics with that in mathematics being stronger. By the end of Year 11, attainment is above average representing good progress for all groups of students. Until recently, attainment in English has lagged behind other subjects, largely because of the lower starting point and considerable difficulties in staffing groups appropriately. In 2010, English examination results improved considerably and robust data indicate that students currently in Year 11 are set to attain results which are securely above average. The proportion of students reaching a grade A* to C in both English and mathematics is above average, but the school has correctly identified that some students narrowly miss reaching this standard in both subjects. Current actions to support this group are well established and students say they feel confident from the guidance they are receiving that they will reach the higher grades.

The quality of learning is good and accelerates rapidly when students are actively involved in their learning through practical activities, drama, discussion and group-work. Students are generally motivated and interested learners. They enjoy extremely positive relationships with their teachers and teaching assistants, and these support the good progress that they make. The achievement of boys has improved as a result of the inclusion, wherever possible, of strategies, activities and texts which they find appealing. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress overall. Those with more complex needs and those with statements make consistently good progress and many make outstanding progress. This is because of the thoroughness with which their needs are identified and the good quality of support which they consistently receive in lessons. The progress of those students with less complex special educational

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needs and/or disabilities is good, but there are some inconsistencies in the quality of planning for them in lessons which does not always help them all make as much progress as they might.

Students behave well in lessons and towards each other and show consideration of others around the site. The use of Dove House is helping to reduce the number of exclusions and maintain a low exclusion rate. It is also helping students to manage their own behaviour more successfully. Students report that there are very few occasions of bullying and that they feel safe in school. They are confident that adults in school will help them should they require it. Students have a good understanding of how to use modern technologies and the internet safely. Significant numbers of students take up sport and physical activities after and outside of school. They have a good understanding of the dangers associated with substance abuse. Students have a secure understanding of their next steps in education. Their attendance is above average and they develop well their communication skills and personal skills such as working in teams, cooperating with and supporting others. The development of positive relationships with peers from a wide variety of backgrounds and often mature reflection ensure good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers know their subjects well and use this knowledge to provide a good quality of questioning during lessons, much of which is precise and targeted at particular students. Good use is made of different technologies and resources to enhance the variety of activities in lessons. In the large majority of lessons, teachers plan a range of activities which meet the entire range of abilities within the class. In an art class in Year 11, for example, the excellent planning was based on the teacher's knowledge of the previous progress of students. Clear explanations and varied expectations enabled all students of varying abilities to make outstanding progress with the topic. Occasionally, lesson activities do not take sufficient account of students' previous understanding of the work and are pitched at one level. As a result, the pace of learning slows, especially for the most capable students who require more challenge and for the least able who need more support. Teaching assistants are used well in lessons and make a significant contribution to the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Assessment of students' work is thorough and frequent. Feedback to students generally tells them how well they have done and there is good practice in setting targets for improvement and engaging the students to respond to these. During the inspection, this was seen in art, design and technology and English. On a few occasions, students do not receive enough feedback on what to do next or there is no check on students' responses to feedback.

Students of all abilities have an extensive range of learning opportunities which contribute well to their good achievement on a wide range of courses. The school's specialist status in technology continues to support learning well including boosting boys' achievement across a range of subjects. The good range of courses and enrichment activities within the specialism contribute to improved achievement. Effective techniques which are employed in design and technology are improving boys' literacy skills. The enrichment programmes and extra-curricular opportunities are many and varied and are a strength of the curriculum. Take-up by students is high and their experiences in these activities contribute well to good personal development in all areas.

The arrangements made for transition are exemplary with high levels of interaction with middle schools and prospective parents. As a result, students settle quickly. The quality of information and guidance provided for individual students in respect of choices about future pathways or personal health is outstanding. There is excellent support for students to catch up on their studies should they fall behind in their work. Effective partnerships are established with a number of agencies to extend the breadth of the support and guidance which the school is able to offer. The school works hard with students who are frequently absent to minimise the impact of this on their achievement, and is reducing gradually the number of these students.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Very regular management meetings between senior and middle leaders ensure that communication about the school's direction is clear and consistent. Planning for improvement is good and regularly reviewed through these meetings. There is a systematic approach to monitoring the quality of teaching. Leaders tackle weaker areas of performance robustly, and share outstanding and good practice through a well-constructed training and development programme. Over the last year, the key emphasis of this has shifted appropriately from the main school to the sixth form. The target-setting process for students and review of their progress has been improved substantially since the last inspection. The regular collection of data provides leaders with detailed information about the performance of different groups. Leaders at all levels are using it to identify gaps in performance and put interventions in place to close gaps and ensure equality of opportunity and that any discrimination is tackled. Members of the governing body are fully conversant with the school's work, and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The development of information systems has enabled them to have a clearer view of students' achievements than previously. The 'governor of the month' initiative enables them to gain a deeper understanding of the school's work and informs them well on the views of staff and students. Parents' and carers' views are canvassed regularly. Procedures for safeguarding are good. Recording of information for checks on staff and visitors is carried out meticulously. Procedures for child protection are well established and staff training is comprehensive and up to date enabling staff to identify when students are at risk. There are extensive links with other providers including strong, working relationships with the local pyramid of schools. Work with feeder schools is contributing to improved attainment in English on entry to Year 9. The school has worked closely with other organisations in the town to identify needs for cohesion within the community, and its plan of action is being actively implemented. This includes opportunities for students to link with communities elsewhere in the United Kingdom which are culturally diverse.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average and progress is generally as expected by the end of the course. In 2010, most final year students progressed to university. Students make good use of opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community. Their role as peer counsellors is valued and effective in the lower school. Students feel safe and supported and are developing mature attitudes to their own and others' welfare. They enjoy their time in the sixth form. There are variations in the amount of progress made in different subjects which are attributable to inconsistencies in teaching. In the best practice, teachers use probing questions and assessment, plan imaginative opportunities for active learning and match these to the range of abilities to help students prepare for the wider demands and expectations of independent work beyond school. A broad range of relevant courses is offered which incorporates traditional and vocational A levels and the International Baccalaureate. There is a well developed enrichment programme. Care, guidance and support systems have been enhanced recently. A more rigorous and active system is in place to track students' progress which allows intervention to be employed more rapidly when underachievement is identified. School and sixth form leadership is focused on improving provision so that students' achievement increases. Action plans are being implemented across all departments and the evidence from the inspection indicates that achievement is increasing.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire was higher than usual. A very large majority of parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at Thomas Alleyne. They are particularly positive that the school keeps their children safe, that school is enjoyed and that they are informed well about progress. A number of individual concerns were raised by some parents and carers. These were all shared with the headteacher. A number of concerns centred on students' behaviour. Inspectors followed this up during the inspection, and judged behaviour to be good. Strategies for managing behaviour are clearly communicated to staff, and are appropriately employed in most classrooms. As appropriate to the age of students, staff encourage students to exercise self-discipline and, in the main, students respond well to this encouragement. A number of parents and carers were concerned that their children's education had been affected by lack of continuity in teaching either through staff absence or shared teaching of classes. School leaders are also mindful of this concern. The occurrence of this has lessened this year, but leaders are, wherever possible, seeking to minimise the impact on individual students. The school is seeking to reduce the number of shared classes in next year's timetable.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thomas Alleyne's High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 302 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1346 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	95	31	189	63	12	4	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	100	33	189	63	6	2	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	126	42	159	53	13	4	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	102	34	173	57	23	8	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	84	28	188	62	14	5	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	75	25	167	55	44	15	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	19	170	56	54	18	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	87	29	180	60	20	7	5	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	87	29	185	61	15	5	5	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	59	20	180	60	29	10	9	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	58	19	172	57	27	9	7	2
The school is led and managed effectively	89	29	179	59	10	3	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	120	40	164	54	12	4	3	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



19 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Alleyne's High School, Uttoxeter, ST14 8DU

Thank you for the help you provided when we visited your school recently. We received a warm welcome and your comments and questionnaires were very helpful to us.

The quality of education provided in the school is good. It is satisfactory and improving in the sixth form. Examination results are above average in Year 11 and average in the sixth form. You form very positive relationships with other members of the school community and large numbers of you make an extremely positive contribution to the way that the community runs. You also help in a number of ways within local organisations in Uttoxeter. We agree with you that the staff in school look after you really well, and those of you who need it get plenty of extra help from teachers and other adults. You understand how to lead healthy lives and it was good to see so many involved in the school's sports programme and activities out of school. You told us you feel safe in school. You clearly get on well together and behave appropriately around school and in lessons.

Your teachers spend a great deal of time preparing lessons and resources to make them interesting. We are asking them to look at ways of matching lesson activities to your ability so that some of you get more of a challenge and some a little more support. We are also asking them to make sure that their feedback on your work tells you precisely what you need to work on next to improve. We are asking you to consider their advice and how you can reflect it in your future work. Leaders in your school are working on plans to improve the sixth form so that you make greater progress there. We are asking the school to continue its focus on the sixth form by looking at ways of extending the amount of progress made by sixth form students and ensuring that progress is tracked carefully so that any underachievement is identified quickly.

We hope that you will all play your part in helping the school to improve further by striving to do your very best in your work and help the headteacher and staff put these improvements in place.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Westbrook

Lead inspector

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