

The Thomas Cowley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120662
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	358812
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Roger Whittaker

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	621
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Terry Chapman
Headteacher	Martyn Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	28 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, observed 28 teachers and held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at monitoring data in relation to students' progress and the quality of teaching, school policies including those regarding safeguarding, the school improvement plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They analysed 67 questionnaires from parents and carers, 101 from students and 45 from staff.

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

- It considered how accurate the school's judgement of good students' learning and progress in present lessons.
- It explored whether there is sufficient evidence to support the school's judgement that this is a good school.
- It looked at evidence to see whether actions to raise standards were having a positive effect.

Information about the school

The Thomas Cowley High is a smaller than average sized secondary school. It became a Specialist Technology College, specialising in technology, mathematics and science, in 2006. Most students are of White British heritage, with only a few from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is slightly below the national average. The school manages specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is a unit to support a few students who are deaf or have sight problems. Eight students are currently supported by the unit, all of whom are in Years 7 and 8.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Thomas Cowley High is a satisfactory school. It has made recent rapid improvements and has some good features. It is well thought of in the local community, and parents and carers speak enthusiastically about how the school cares for their children. One parent said, 'At Thomas Cowley, every child really does matter.'

The headteacher and senior leaders successfully identified the reasons behind a decline in results in 2008 and took effective steps to address them. Significant changes were made to the curriculum and leaders focused on ensuring that students receive greater level of challenge in lessons. While it has taken time for these actions to make a clear impact on standards, some improvement was evident in the 2009 results. Since then, improvements have been rapid so that standards moved closer to the national average in 2010 and for the present Year 11 the gap has almost closed with some students working above the national average. Students' attitudes to learning are good, they are punctual to lessons; attendance is above the national average, they are enthusiastic about their learning and excited about being actively involved in learning activities.

Teaching and learning have improved and are satisfactory, with some good and outstanding lessons. However, in some lessons, students are not engaged fully in learning because they are too passive, with teacher talk dominating much of the time. Teachers have access to improved assessment data but some teachers have not fully embedded the use of this information into their lessons to ensure that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The school has developed the curriculum so that it is now good and increasingly meets the needs of all students. The impact of the enrichment programme has been a significant feature in helping the school to raise standards. The provision of good care, guidance and support is a strength of the school. The different needs of all students are known and strategies put in place to support them. The Year 7 and 8 students who are deaf or have sight loss and who are supported by the unit make satisfactory progress with some recent improvement. The leadership and management of the unit are aware of the need to improve students' basic skills including spoken and sign language levels and have developed more personalised programmes and timetables in order to meet individual needs. This has resulted in students being more able to access the lessons and early signs of improving learning and progress. The headteacher and senior staff are strongly committed to school improvement. They have introduced more rigorous self-evaluation strategies and some middle managers are using these effectively to improve the practice of staff. However, this is not yet consistently the case and leaders' evaluation of teaching, arising from their lesson observations, is sometimes over generous. Nevertheless, the impact of the good curriculum and care, guidance and support, the increase in good and outstanding teaching supported by the students' eagerness to learn, are resulting in rapid improvements in learning and progress. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and remove remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - activities in lessons are interesting and engage students more actively in learning so that they develop independent learning skills
 - teachers understand and use strategies to ensure that all students know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation, especially of teaching and learning, are consistently rigorous by leaders and managers at all levels.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students join the school in Year 7 with standards that are below the national average. At the end of Year 11, they reach standards which are closing the gap between the school's performance and the national average. Over the last three years, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including in English and mathematics has risen from 37% to 51%, significantly below average to slightly below average. At the same time, those achieving five A* to C GCSE grades has improved from 51% to 63%. The school's rigorous tracking data indicates that present Year 11 students are on track to reach standards which are average. Improvements in the curriculum and the good care, guidance and support have helped to ensure that students are now meeting the school's challenging targets. Learning and progress in lessons are satisfactory, at times good and occasionally outstanding. The impact of the specialist status on improving teaching and learning can be seen, for example, in a design and technology lesson, students used excellent communication skills to talk about their planning for different models and how they effectively applied their practical skills. Enthusiastic discussion and assessment led by the students followed. The progress of individual students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is in line with the overall rate of satisfactory progress. The few students of minority ethnic heritage and who speak English as an additional language also make satisfactory progress. The additional support provided in the unit for students who are deaf or have sight problems enables them to make satisfactory progress. This has been supported by the good partnerships with external agencies including the sensory support service and the speech and language therapist.

Students represent their school well. They are welcoming and respectful to visitors and adults who work in the school. This is as a result of the school's effective enrichment programme of which personal, social and health education is a significant part. Students feel and know how to keep safe. They are enthusiastic about their relationships with staff and are quick to point out, as one student said, that 'staff are always about and willing to help should the need arise'. Behaviour is good and students are usually engaged well in learning in lessons where teaching allows them to use independent learning skills. They talk knowledgeably about what it is to have a healthy lifestyle and most can give examples of how they do this. However, there is a need for some of them to take more

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responsibility for adopting a healthy diet. Students are effective members of the school, local and wider community. They willingly take responsibility as prefects, mentors and as members of the school council and enthusiastically work to protect the environment in their local area and to raise money for international charities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching has improved and is satisfactory overall. Recent initiatives to improve it have resulted in some lessons being good and a few outstanding. Exceptional teaching tends to occur where the teacher has good subject knowledge and has thought carefully about the learning of different group of students. This results in plans that provide interesting and innovative activities that support students in achieving to the best of their ability. The school's specialist technology status has been a key factor in helping to raise standards especially in specialist subjects. This was evident, for example, in a design and technology lesson where students designing packages were clear about the criteria for the grades to which they were working. Teaching assistants are generally used well, particularly in lower ability groups and in supporting students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Relationships in lessons are good and students are confident to ask questions and to contribute to discussions when given the opportunity to do so. However, there is still some inconsistency in teaching. In some lessons, teaching is

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relatively unexciting and students are left to simply listen passively to the teacher for too long or are not made aware of how well they are doing and how to improve.

Improvements to the curriculum have had a significant impact on raising standards. The specialist status in technology has improved the provision in the specialist subjects. In Years 7 and 8, the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Actions taken to improve the library stock have led to an increase in borrowing, particularly for boys, and accelerated improvements in reading. Students experiencing difficulties in their learning benefit from additional literacy lessons, which have resulted in improvements in their reading and spelling. Students begin GCSE courses in Year 9. They are able to choose from a wide range of pathways and are confident that the subjects meet their individual needs. There is now a better balance between academic routes and the relevant vocational courses. The personal development programme is very effective in providing students with a good knowledge and understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Students develop a good understanding of the United Kingdom as a multicultural society in citizenship lessons. However, opportunities for first-hand experiences of other cultures are limited. Strong links with the careers advice, together with enterprise days and work experience, help to prepare students for further education or employment.

The school provides well-targeted support for all students, a view that is supported by parents and carers. Good transition arrangements are in place so that students entering the school in Year 7 settle quickly and smoothly. The needs of individual students are known and addressed and, where necessary, supported by good links with a range of outside agencies. The school has rigorous strategies to encourage good attendance, which is now above average. Staff in the unit for students who are deaf or have sight loss know their students well, form excellent relationships with them and are vigilant in ensuring that appropriate equipment and support are available.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The enthusiastic headteacher provides good leadership and is supported well by an effective senior team. They identified that both the quality of teaching and learning and the balance of academic and vocational courses were having a negative effect on students' progress in lessons and restricting them from achieving as well as they could. Together, they addressed the issues and through the support of most staff have improved the curriculum so that it meets the individual needs of students well. Senior leaders have been successful in increasing the number of good lessons so that results have been improving and are now closing the gap between the school and the national average. The

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satisfactory leadership and management of the specialist status have ensured that its impact on raising standards is beginning to be seen across the curriculum. The school improvement plan has correctly identified areas for further development in order to sustain and accelerate the improvement. However, the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is not yet consistent across all leaders and managers. This is especially the case with teaching and learning. Too many lessons are still satisfactory and monitoring is not consistently rigorous in identifying how teaching and learning could be improved.

The school communicates effectively with parents and carers. They are regularly consulted about changes to the school and about their children's progress. The school has made strong links with other schools and colleges to help develop the breadth and balance of the curriculum. The school works effectively with outside agencies to ensure that the needs of all students are met. The school's promotion of equal opportunities is central to its provision and regular monitoring ensures that access to the curriculum and extra-curricular activities is open to all. Improvements have ensured that all students achieve at a similar rate. The school is in the process of developing community cohesion and is planning to review the impact of its provision, which is satisfactory. The governing body enthusiastically supports and encourages the school. However, its members do not rigorously review and challenge the outcomes of the school's actions. They take safeguarding seriously and ensure that statutory requirements are met, although they are aware that there is a need to review the procedures relating to some aspects of the school's risk assessments.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Only a few parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, but those who did were mostly very positive about the education their children receive. They were particularly

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pleased with how the school keeps their children safe and how well it prepares them for the future. A few said that the school does not help them enough to support their children's learning, that the teaching is not always as good as it should be and some were unhappy about the behaviour of a few students. The inspectors found that there has been much improvement in teaching, but that there is still some inconsistency. Inspectors explored the school's strategies for informing parents and carers about how to support their children's learning and found that leaders are aware of the need to look for ways of improving this. The behaviour of most students was found to be good, however, when teaching did not engage students a few tended to move off task.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Thomas Cowley 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 67 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 621 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	40	36	54	3	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	30	45	37	55	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	32	48	32	48	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	32	37	55	7	10	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	34	37	55	4	6	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	25	37	55	11	16	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	21	44	66	8	12	0	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)	12	18	46	69	2	3	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	37	36	54	4	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	39	31	46	7	10	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	27	37	55	6	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	31	46	29	43	5	7	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	46	32	48	4	6	0	0

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.



20 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Thomas Cowley High School, Spalding, PE11 4TF

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school. We were impressed by the way you spoke to us about your school and how you were always willing to help us find our way round the school. Your behaviour was good both in lessons and at breaks and lunchtime. We found that you go to a satisfactory school. It is improving and has some good features.

Your results have improved and you are now closing the gap with the national averages. This is because teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving in all lessons and are good in some lessons.

You make a strong contribution to your progress through attending well, being punctual to lessons and being willing to work enthusiastically when given the opportunity to learn independently.

You understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle.

Staff take good care of you and, consequently, you feel safe. You also adopt safe practices in practical lessons and around the school.

You are enthusiastic about your contributions to life in your school and in the local area.

Your headteacher and senior staff are committed to continuing to improve the school even further so that you all achieve as well as you can.

We have asked the headteacher and other leaders to remove the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. They can do this by making sure that you are actively engaged in interesting activities in lessons and so develop independent learning skills and by ensuring that you know how well you are doing and how to improve your work.

We hope that you continue to enjoy school and to achieve as well as you can by working hard in all lessons.

Yours sincerely

Roger Whittaker

Lead Inspector

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