

# Thomas Gainsborough School

Head Lane, Great Cornard, Sudbury, CO10 0JU

**Inspection dates** 16–17 July 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement requires improvement. Since the school's last inspection, the quality of teaching has been too variable to promote consistently good progress.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students' achievement is no better than in the main school.
- Students in the sixth form and more able students in mathematics throughout the school have not made good progress because they have not been sufficiently challenged by the work set for them.
- Teaching requires improvement. Some teachers do not give students enough detailed feedback on how to improve their work. Students are not given enough responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers do not use questions well enough to help students think more deeply about their learning.
- The staff have too few opportunities to help weaker teaching improve by sharing the best practice that already exists in the school.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and the governing body provide strong leadership and demonstrate a clear vision for the school that is supported by all the staff.
- This is a rapidly improving school. Leaders and managers are dealing with weaknesses in teaching effectively. Rates of progress in the vast majority of subjects have improved markedly in the last 18 months.
- In the sixth form, the progress of students is particularly closely monitored. Leaders' actions to improve students' education are now leading to much improved progress this year.
- Students behave well throughout the school. Relationships between staff and students are warm and students feel encouraged by their teachers. Their attitudes to learning are good and they feel safe in the school.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 37 lessons, three of which were seen jointly with senior leaders. They also observed the behaviour of students during social times and when they moved around the school.
- Inspectors examined students' work in books and folders, along with the homework set by teachers.
- Records and logs about students' safety, attendance and behaviour were evaluated.
- Inspectors analysed information and data about the students' past and current performance.
- They considered the school's improvement plans, and records from the monitoring of teaching and governors' meetings.
- Inspectors received the views of students, staff and parents. They considered the 85 parental responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), along with the school's own records of previous consultations with parents.
- Discussions were held with four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, school leaders and other staff, and a representative of the local authority.

## Inspection team

James McAtear, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Angela Skinner

Additional Inspector

Jane Ladner

Additional Inspector

Helen Booth

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Thomas Gainsborough is slightly smaller than the average secondary school. At the time of the inspection the school was in the final stages of planning to extend its age range down to age 11 from September 2013.
- The vast majority of students are White British.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding that in this school applies to students who are cared for by the local authority and for those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported by school action is broadly average. The proportion supported by school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is a little below average.
- The school does not offer students any courses away from the school site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The current headteacher joined the school in January 2012.

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

- Make more teaching consistently good or outstanding through:
  - ensuring that teachers use methods that encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning
  - improving the quality and quantity of written feedback for students, so they are clear about what to do to improve their work
  - ensuring that teachers' questioning is effective in helping students to probe into subjects more deeply
  - enabling staff to share their own best practice to help eliminate any remaining weaknesses in the quality of teaching.
- Improve achievement in mathematics and in the sixth form, by:
  - providing greater challenge for all groups of students, and especially for the most able.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Rates of progress in mathematics did not compare favourably with those seen nationally in 2012, despite some improvement on standards in the previous year. This was because of instability in teaching staff for mathematics and weaknesses in the work set, which has not been demanding enough to get the best out of students. More-able students especially do not reach the levels they are capable of in Year 11 and in the sixth form.
- Achievement in the sixth form has been variable since the previous inspection. Some students were placed on courses that were not best suited to their needs and abilities. Consequently, achievement has not been good.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved this year because leaders and managers have ensured that the match of students to courses is better. High quality advice and guidance has led to improved levels of achievement during 2013. Improved course leadership has led to the proportion of students who stay on to the end of Year 13 rising to levels above those seen nationally.
- This year, progress in mathematics has begun to improve throughout the school because staffing has settled and teaching is better. This has led to a rise in the performance of more-able students, although not at the same accelerated rate as other students.
- In English, 2012 published data show that students' point scores were significantly better than the national average. Rates of progress are good in this subject. The school has been effective in ensuring that the literacy needs of students are met well, and that any who fall behind in English are quickly identified and assisted to get back on track with their learning. This same careful approach is now being seen across the school, so rates of progress are improving in a wider range of subjects. This includes design and technology and physical education, where the progress observed by inspectors was rapid.
- Students read widely and often. Good use is made of the school's access to a well-stocked library, which is a shared facility with the local community. As a result students are articulate and are able to express their views well. Their research skills are well developed, both in the use of information and communication technology and through more traditional methods.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make the same progress as their classmates. It is sometimes more rapid because their needs are identified quickly and they are given good support.
- In both English and mathematics in 2011, students in Year 11 supported by the pupil premium attained around one grade less than their classmates. In 2012 this gap widened to around one and a half grades for both subjects. The school now uses this funding to provide additional tuition for individuals and in small groups. School data show that the gap in mathematics has closed completely this year, and that in English has narrowed.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

**The quality of teaching** requires improvement

- Since the time the school was last inspected the quality of teaching has been too variable, including in the sixth form. Planning mostly does not allow students to take enough responsibility for their own learning. This has meant that they are sometimes too passive in lessons to learn well.
- The quality of feedback given to students to let them know how they are doing and how to improve the standard of their work remains inconsistent. In some cases students are given excellent feedback, while in others the guidance they receive is not so useful. It is not specific to the individual, and teachers do not follow it up to make sure students apply the advice they do receive.
- Some teachers use questioning very skilfully to help students think through what they are learning for themselves. In many cases, though, including in the sixth form, questions are not used skilfully enough as they require only short replies and do not challenge students enough. Tasks set are sometimes not demanding enough for students to probe more deeply into the topics they are studying. This is particularly true in mathematics through the school, and in the sixth form in a wider range of subjects.
- The use of adults who support teachers in lessons is effective, both in classroom settings and when individuals receive help on their own or along with a small group of students. This is of particular help to disabled students and those who have special educational needs, especially in improving their reading skills.
- In the past 18 months there has been a fast improving picture because leadership of teaching has improved and this has ensured, for instance, that the pace of teaching is usually brisk. Students enjoy their lessons and are well motivated and sometimes inspired by the wider range of methods teachers use to engage them. This has yet to turn into sustained and consistent improvement in students' achievement because remaining weaknesses have not yet been eliminated, and teachers have too few opportunities to share the excellent practice that is becoming evident in the school.
- The additional group sessions set up by the school build on improved careful monitoring of students' progress, so they are precisely targeted to the students who need them most. Consequently, students are given equal opportunities to learn and there is no discrimination. Teachers are skilled in creating a climate for learning. As a result, performing well, asking questions and seeking help are all seen by students as positive characteristics.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- The overwhelming majority of parents, staff and students who shared their views with inspectors rightly say they feel that behaviour in the school is good.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is good and their attitudes towards learning are positive. They participate willingly in paired and group work and in whole-class discussions. Teachers are treated respectfully and students also show appreciation for the work of other adults who help them across the school.
- Students are clear about the standard of behaviour expected of them, and teachers are consistent in conveying their expectations while maintaining warm relationships with their students. As a result lessons are rarely interrupted and it is uncommon for low-level disruption to affect progress or teaching.

- The atmosphere in the school is calm and orderly. There is a sense of friendliness and students are considerate when they move around the school, showing courtesy and good manners to each other and to visitors. Students take a pride in the school and in their own work.
- Students know about the types of bullying they might meet. They say that it rarely occurs – the school’s behaviour logs confirm this – and express confidence in school staff to address any issues that may arise.
- Parents and students feel the school is a safe place to be. Students understand the dangers they may face, for instance on the internet or from physical dangers like fire, water and electricity.
- There are few fixed-term exclusions. These had been high for some students in the past. Improved management of behaviour has led to the rate in the most recent year falling to below the national average.
- During 2012 attendance was below the national average. Action taken by leaders and managers, including the employment of an attendance officer and improved systems to monitor attendance, has led to rapid improvement and a recent rise to average levels. Students are punctual in arriving at school and in moving between lessons.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The school is led and managed well. The headteacher has made a notable impact on current standards and progress since his appointment in January 2012. Although this had little impact on the results of students who took public examinations very shortly after his arrival, rates of progress have since increased in almost all areas of the school and inadequate teaching has quickly been eliminated.
- The rigour of the school’s work in managing the performance of its teachers has improved. Plans to develop teaching, the curriculum and rates of progress are much more thorough. Although some teaching and aspects of achievement still require improvement, the work of leaders throughout the school to implement these plans is having a sustained positive effect.
- The sixth form is led well. Tracking of students’ progress is particularly strong, and this enables leaders to provide support quickly and ensure the courses chosen meet students’ needs.
- The good range of subjects is carefully designed to meet the needs of students, including those in the sixth form. For example, students are now able to complement their A-level studies with the Extended Project Qualification. This means that they can follow a much more personalised pathway of study that meets their own aspirations and interests. This has led to improved attendance and increased take-up of places in Year 13.
- The school promotes students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students are encouraged to ask questions about the world they live in and they are given opportunities to develop social and cultural awareness, for instance, through drama and music.
- The local authority, especially recently, has provided effective support for this improving school.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors provide good support and challenge. They have a detailed understanding of strengths and weaknesses in students’ levels of achievement, and know what published data

tell them about the school's performance. They have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and are active in ensuring that staff performance is managed rigorously to improve standards. For example, they have a close awareness of the extent to which students' work is marked and support the headteacher in addressing any underperformance found. They support the clear vision of the headteacher to ensure that the best practice in their own school and in other schools is identified and shared, although this has not yet happened enough. They understand how the school spends its pupil premium funding and are aware of its impact. For example, they are aware that the attainment gap between those students receiving this funding and their classmates widened until 2012 and ensured that the spending has made improved impact during 2013.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124797
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	412766

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	893
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	136
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gordon Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Wayne Lloyd
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5–6 October 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01787 375232
<b>Fax number</b>	01787 377386
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@tgschool.net

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