

Thomas Bennett Community College

Ashdown Drive, Tilgate, Crawley, RH10 5AD

Inspection dates 7–8 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- GCSE results in mathematics and some other subjects declined in 2014. This significantly reduced the proportion of students achieving five good GCSEs, including in English and mathematics.
- AS-level results dropped in 2014.
- The most able students do not achieve as many high grades as they should. Sometimes they are set work that is too easy for them.
- Last year students did not make enough progress, especially in Years 10 and 11, particularly in mathematics.
- Occasionally students' behaviour stops learning because they chat too much and take too long to settle down. Some students do not present their work neatly.
- Teaching lacks consistency, for example in how accurately students' progress and understanding are checked, and how helpfully their work is marked.
- Last year some teachers were over-optimistic in their predictions of GCSE results. As a result, extra support was not always in place where needed.
- Weakness in leadership at all levels during the last four terms contributed to the 2014 decline in examination results.
- The sixth form requires improvement because progress and teaching are too variable between subjects.

The school has the following strengths:

- Students make outstanding progress in English and attain well above average GCSE results. Teaching in English is consistently of a very high standard.
- The A-level pass rate rose in 2014 and a higher percentage of students gained A* to B grades.
- As a result of recently appointed new teachers and middle leaders, teaching has improved in many subjects, for example in humanities.
- Almost all school leavers at the end of Year 11 have their career paths mapped out well.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs and in the autism specialist unit receive extremely effective academic and personal support. Many of these students achieve well.
- The Kemnal Academies Trust, governors and executive and acting headteachers know exactly what needs to be done to raise standards. They have taken rapid and effective action.
- Students feel safe and enjoy school. They mature into thoughtful and considerate young adults. Students describe the 'good vibes' and 'community atmosphere' within the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 40 part-lessons, several of which were jointly observed with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed an assembly and form times.
- Inspectors spoke to students informally and held meetings with groups from several years, including the sixth form.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive and acting headteachers, other members of the senior leadership team and staff with responsibility for subjects and other aspects of the school's work.
- The lead inspector held meetings with chief executive officer for The Kemnal Academies Trust, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors.
- Inspectors discussed their observations with teaching staff and examined a range of documents including the school's improvement plans and data about progress, standards, exclusions, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students' work in lessons and outside of lessons.
- Inspectors took into account 40 parents' and carers' responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire and questionnaires completed by 41 members of staff.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Teresa Gilpin	Additional Inspector
Maureen Hill	Additional Inspector
Keith Homewood	Additional Inspector
David Howley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thomas Bennett Community College converted to become an academy within The Kemnal Academies Trust on 1 September 2012. When its predecessor school, known by the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The school is slightly larger than the average-sized secondary school with a small sixth form.
- About 75% of students are White British, with 10% being of Other White heritage (mainly European). There are small percentages of students who are from several other minority ethnic backgrounds.
- An above average proportion of students speak English as an additional language, of whom few are at an early stage of learning English.
- An above average proportion of students receive support through the pupil premium, which provides additional government funding for specific groups including children who are looked after and students known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has several looked after children.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average. The most common needs relate to students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those with autism.
- The school has a specialist unit for students with autism.
- Well over 40% of students are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in reading or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The school does not use any off-site training.
- In its first year as an academy, the school met the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. It did not meet the floor standard in 2014.
- The previous headteacher took up post in September 2013 at same time as three deputies who were all new to their posts. One was an external appointment and the other two were internal appointments. One of the internal appointments was of a long-standing member of staff, the other had been at the school for two terms. The headteacher left the school two weeks into the present term and the acting headteacher (one of the deputy headteachers) took over two weeks before the inspection. She is supported two to three days a week by an executive headteacher, employed by The Kemnal Academies Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that teachers consistently:
 - prepare activities that are set at the right level and stretch the most able students
 - give students helpful advice about how they can improve their work and time for them to act on the advice given
 - pose questions that make students think and explain their understanding
 - set and maintain high standards for presentation of work and refuse to accept any that is poorly presented
 - ensure students settle quickly to their work and do not chat when they should be working.
- Raise standards and improve progress, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - focusing on getting more higher grades in GCSE and post-16 qualifications
 - checking, by middle and senior leaders, that standards of students' work are accurate and externally validated
 - ensuring staff use information on students' progress to make accurate predictions to plan future learning and to target support as needed
 - reflecting on whether students fully understand work as it is taught and retain and apply this understanding in the long term
 - insisting all teachers follow the behaviour for learning policy in order to eliminate behaviour that can distract others.
- Strengthen leadership and management further by:

- immediately implementing the external support arranged with The Kemnal Academies Trust
- responding rapidly to the outcomes of the reviews set up to evaluate the governors' work and the future direction of the sixth form
- supporting middle leaders who are relatively new to their responsibilities
- extending the sharing of good teaching practice, especially that seen in the English department.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Combined with some middle leaders failing to steer their departments successfully, the significant changes in senior leadership during the last academic year contributed to the lower GCSE results in 2014. Leadership and management require improvement because it will take time for current senior leaders' expertise to bear fruit, for departments to benefit from external support and for all middle leaders to establish consistently secure progress.
- A number of students were entered for a level of examination which did not match their potential in mathematics and significant coursework issues emerged too late in geography to be put right. Other subjects had not fully adjusted to, or were particularly affected by, the significant changes to examination procedures and courses introduced in 2014.
- When teachers over-predicted GCSE results, particularly in mathematics, students did not always get the extra support they needed quickly. At the same time, misled by the data, senior leaders were not alerted early to underachievement.
- The acting headteacher has restored staff morale successfully in just two weeks, witnessed by comments such as, 'The school's fantastic leadership team is now headed by a supportive and well-respected senior leader.' The expertise and skills of the two deputy headteachers are now contributing to the vigorous push forward the school needs.
- All the 2014 failings related to planning and organisation have been identified. Senior leaders know exactly what has to be done. The Kemnal Academies Trust has taken speedy action to arrange support and check the validity of teachers' checks on students' progress, particularly in mathematics and science.
- The numerous new middle leaders, many appointed in the last four terms, have already revealed they are raising standards. The teaching force has been strengthened in most of the areas where this was most needed.
- The school has the capacity to generate achievement at least as good as that established in its first year as an academy. The 2014 results were a shock but staff have rallied, responded positively to the senior leaders' actions and, with students, created a determination to succeed.
- The curriculum requires improvement because religious education is not taught in Years 10 to 13. In Years 7 to 9 it is taught well through history and geography. Otherwise the flexible curriculum gives students a good choice of academic and non-academic subjects. An increasing number of students are studying French or Spanish at GCSE.
- Personal education is delivered mainly through focus days, rated highly by students. They appreciate specialists delivering topics related to health and relationships for example.
- Year 11 students at risk of exclusion attend a 'Forest School' programme. Here they gain useful qualifications, and confidence to cope with the pressures of school and future life. All of them continue to further education. Leadership of provision for students with special educational needs and in the specialist autism unit is very effective and well organised.
- Staff who completed the questionnaire feel that their training and development are addressed well although some are not keen on the new lecture style of training sessions. Newly qualified teachers are confident they get the support they need.
- Leadership of teaching and learning has changed this term but the school already concentrates on learning and progress before any other elements of lessons are considered. Staff know that their salaries will be affected by the achievement of their students.
- The very few parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire predominantly agreed with the positive statements about the school. The school rightly prides itself on involving parents and carers as much as possible and working with them, particularly those with children with special educational needs.
- One of the recent personal development days known as 'Unique Day' (originally suggested by students) focused on discrimination. The school does much to foster good relationships and equal opportunity.
- The lively and interesting school magazine, produced by students, includes reference to topical issues, as

do the best tutor sessions. A Year 8 assembly developed the theme of Black History month to consider British values, particularly respect for others. The school prepares students well for life in modern Britain.

■ The governance of the school:

- The long-serving Chair of the Governing Body continues to give loyal support to the school. He knows that the governing body, restructured for academy status, has yet to serve the school as well as it wants. A review of its work by the National Association of Governors is already booked.
- Governors realise the need to explore middle leaders' competence as deeply as possible. They fully grasp how far the 2014 GCSE results were below national averages in 2014 and the weaknesses in the quality of teaching which contributed.
- Determined to tackle underperformance in teaching, governors fully support teachers' pay being dependent on what their students achieve. Several staff did not move onto the upper pay spine when they applied last year.
- Governors keep a sharp eye on finances, particularly how additional government funds are allocated, but they have not monitored or evaluated the effectiveness of the different ways it is spent.
- Safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place with regular, detailed staff training.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Across the school students' behaviour is too variable, with some being quick to chat in lessons if teachers do not intervene firmly and quickly. If form time lacks a specific focus, particularly on reading mornings, some students just chat, so the time is not used effectively. When teaching is good, students work enthusiastically and attentively.
- In the specialist autism unit, students learn how to cope with mainstream lessons. Overall their behaviour is similar to that of others. They master social skills and are well prepared to cope with life outside school.
- Some students present untidy work. In subjects such as mathematics and science this can lead to mistakes in calculations.
- Procedures for behaviour management were tightened last year. This led initially to an increase in fixed-term exclusions but a significant reduction has followed, showing it has been effective. Attendance, which is slightly below average, has not changed since the academy opened. The proportion of students who find it difficult to attend school regularly is higher than that seen nationally.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Racist incidents are rare and bullying is taken very seriously by students and staff alike. A student leader group works to combat bullying.
- In discussion with students of all ages, it was clear that the school does not shy away from tackling sensitive topics such as personal lifestyles or extremism. Students discuss the use of the word 'gay' realistically, admitting that it is still heard on occasions. Some students commented on the importance of understanding the potential damage done by inappropriate online activities.
- Student leaders take their responsibilities seriously and contribute much to school life. Some observe teachers in action and give feedback, others help students or energetically organise fund raising events; all contribute to their good social and moral development. Sixth formers volunteer to help in the special educational needs department.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching was inadequate in several subjects last year. Difficulties appointing staff, combined with several teachers having long-term absence for health reasons, added to the problems the school faced.
- Not all teachers assessed students' work accurately last year. Even if they did, in some subjects they overestimated how much progress students would make before they took their examinations, so planning for students' learning needs was unrealistic.
- Other aspects of teaching that require improvement are:
 - imparting knowledge but not checking that students have understood or retained it
 - working towards pass grades rather than challenging students to aim high
 - giving students work that is either too easy or too difficult
 - allowing students to present work untidily
 - marking work irregularly and not providing constructive comments

- ensuring students settle quickly to their work and do not chat when they should be working.
- With many new staff, including middle leaders, teaching is stronger now than last year's results would suggest. Several teachers effectively adapt work, for lower attainers for example, and prepare stimulating materials which grab students' interest and attention.
- Convincing examples of the school's successful focus on literacy were seen during the inspection. For example, Year 9 students said new vocabulary out loud and Year 13 discussed definitions in depth. Since the beginning of this term, design and technology, geography and science teachers have used many mathematical skills such as data interpretation and the use of graphs. They have helped students to draw and interpret them well.
- The outstanding learning in English is underpinned by sharp, well-considered planning, structure and content of lessons. Individual department members have specific responsibilities and research and share related topics as needed. The department has successfully encouraged students to use the library regularly.
- The computer programs used for students with low reading ages and those with English as an additional language are very successful. They contribute particularly well to developing their confidence and ability to keep up in lessons.
- Teachers contribute thoughtfully to students' good, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by generating high expectations for respectful behaviour or by emphasising particular moral or cultural issues in the work being studied.
- Teaching is very effective for students with special educational needs, challenging behaviour and others who are at risk of underachieving. Their emotional literacy and academic levels are measured on entry and their progress is tracked accurately and followed up by flexible and swift adjustments as their needs change.
- Dedicated and experienced teaching assistants receive high-quality training. This is reflected in the skills they employ when working with students in classes in one-to-one and group sessions, and in the specialist autism unit.
- The focus for students attending the specialist unit is on their long-term needs and futures. Some take several years to acquire the confidence and skills they need but they get there in the end. Many achieve well and many go on to further and higher education.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- GCSE achievement declined in the academy's second year, mainly because results in mathematics and a few other subjects fell to below 50% A* to C grades; girls underachieved more than boys. Several students did not attain the right combination of grades and subjects to attain five A* in C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics.
- As a result of weak leadership in some subjects, the well-publicised changes to examination procedures and practice were not anticipated.
- Headline figures do not reveal the full picture of achievement as they do not identify results in different subjects or by different groups of students. GCSE English results were outstanding in 2013 and 2014. All groups of students made rapid progress which was well above that seen nationally. Achievement in BTEC subjects, such as health and social care and physical education, was also good in both 2013 and 2014.
- The school has very high percentages of students with special educational needs (over 50% of Year 11 in 2014) and low attainment. In English and mathematics in 2013, these students made better progress and attained higher GCSE results than similar students nationally. Students supported at school action made better progress than others in the school in mathematics in 2013.
- Ethnic minority students, especially those from Other White backgrounds, attained slightly better than White British students overall in 2013. Boys and girls achieved fairly similar results but boys did much better in 2014, especially in mathematics.
- In 2013, all students, including those eligible for additional government funding and those with special education needs or attending the specialist autism unit, achieved much better grades in English than their peers nationally. However, their progress in mathematics was not as close to national figures, where they attained about half a GCSE grade lower and made less progress than others in the school. In 2014, the gaps widened in mathematics.
- With their achievements reflecting their particular circumstances, the small number of students who are looked after did better in 2014 than in 2013.
- The proportion of the most able students attaining five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, dropped by over five percentage points in 2014. All passed English, four out of five passed

mathematics and about two thirds achieved all three separate sciences. Nevertheless, too few of them attained A* or A grades because their progress was not as fast as it should have been.

- The school's un-validated information shows that progress for students in Years 7 to 9, including the most able, is gathering pace, particularly in mathematics, as well as in other subjects.
- Early entry has had no significant impact on students' English results and is now used less in mathematics, and mainly for the most able students.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- All the sixth formers met during the inspection felt that it was a good experience to study at the school. Most students have moved up from Year 11, valuing the continuity and familiarity. The special educational needs department supports individuals as effectively in the sixth form as in the main school. Students behave well and feel safe.
- A-level results in 2014 were better than those in 2013. Students made at least reasonable progress. Achievement requires improvement, particularly to improve AS results, which fell partly because several students were allowed to follow courses that were not well matched to their abilities. Changes to entry requirements, together with more timely advice about options, are already in place.
- The accuracy of teachers' assessment of standards is variable but improving. The other features that require improvement are the same as in the main school, though the overall quality of learning is slightly better in the sixth form.
- Resit results in mathematics are poor with inadequate teaching for students who did not attain a grade C in Year 11. The class is too large and, for those who struggle, it is unrealistic to rush through the syllabus to enter them in November. Sorting this out and ensuring higher standards in Year 12 are the key reasons why leadership and management require improvement.
- Over 32 subjects and a range of courses are offered. A very effective partnership with Chelsea FC supports the NVQ football course well. A review has been arranged to consider the sixth form's future. With several very small classes, some with just one student for example, the sixth form is expensive to run.
- Careers guidance is good. In 2013, 30 students went to university, 26 gained employment and the rest gained places on apprenticeships.
- Sixth formers are increasingly involved in main school life and some enrichment activities are provided for them by local groups. The range of these is not wide and students have limited personal education sessions.

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

Unique reference number	138620
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	449250

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,123
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reg Bates
Executive Headteacher	Jayne Orviss
Acting Headteacher	Pauline Montalto
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01293 526255
Fax number	01293 527704
Email address	office@thomasbennett-tkat.org

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