

The Thomas Alleyne School

High Street, Stevenage, SG1 3BE

Inspection dates 9–10 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The academy's leaders are highly effective and are bringing about marked improvements in teaching and in students' progress.
- Students behave well and the academy's work to keep them safe is good.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students are prepared very well for life in modern Britain, for the world of work and for the next stage of their education.
- Teaching is good. Most teachers capture students' enthusiasm and interest with activities that are matched well to their needs.
- The sixth form is good. The academy provides students with a good range of courses that meet their needs well.
- Achievement is good, and is improving quickly, as a result of good teaching and effective leadership.
- The academy offers an excellent range of additional activities and educational visits, including in the arts and sport.
- Standards are rising across the academy and students' progress in English and mathematics matches that found nationally.
- The care and support provided for the most vulnerable students are outstanding. Disadvantaged students frequently make exceptional progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers consistently follow the academy's policy for marking students' work or check to see that students have acted on the advice that they have been given.
- Some teachers do not use questioning effectively to challenge students' thinking and to draw on their knowledge.
- A few students do not present their work as neatly as they should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students during lessons and looked at the quality of work in their books. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with the Executive Principal, the Principal and with other members of the leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Executive Principal, the Principal, senior, subject and other leaders, groups of students, members of the governing body, and with representatives from North Herts College which sponsors the academy.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in the 42 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View and in 32 questionnaires submitted by staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised the academy’s data about students’ attainment and progress as well as data on their behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors also considered documents evaluating the academy’s performance, its plans for improvement, notes about the work of the governing body and policies concerning the safeguarding of students.

Inspection team

Godfrey Bancroft, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Timothy McGuire

Additional Inspector

Brenda Watson

Additional Inspector

Nick Heard

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Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary academy. The Thomas Alleyne School became an academy in September 2013. It is sponsored by North Herts College.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of students who come from minority ethnic groups is just below average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is low.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium (additional government funding to support students who are in the care of the local authority or who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average.
- The academy's sixth form operates in partnership with North Herts College, The Da Vinci Studio School of Science and Engineering and The Da Vinci Studio School of Creative Enterprise. Other than this partnership the academy does not currently provide or receive support from other schools.
- The academy does not make use of any form of alternative off-site provision to support students aged 11-16 at present. Students are supported by North Herts Education Support Centre when required.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' progress and the quality of teaching by making sure all teachers:
 - follow the academy's policy for marking students' work and check that students have acted on the advice that marking gives them
 - use questioning effectively to challenge students' thinking and to extend their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are studying
 - insist that students present their work neatly at all times.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Since the academy opened leaders have done an exceptional job in bringing about improvements to students' achievement and to the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form. They are united in their ambition and drive to sustain these improvements. At the heart of all their work is the commitment to ensuring that every student should want to learn and be able to achieve to the best of their ability. Discrimination of any form is not tolerated. Students have the same opportunities to succeed and feel equally valued. Consequently, they behave well and thrive in the highly positive climate for learning that the academy has fostered.
- Academy leaders, including in the sixth form, have a clear view of what is working well and of the priorities that need to be addressed. Plans for improvement are detailed and precise. They identify clearly how things will be improved and how the impact of improvements on students' progress will be rigorously evaluated.
- The leadership of teaching throughout the academy is outstanding. Academy leaders have improved teachers' effectiveness with great success. They provide teachers with good training opportunities and make regular checks on the quality of teaching. Leaders have challenged weak teaching resolutely and, although this is now almost entirely eradicated, leaders are not complacent; they have made it clear that only good teaching will be accepted. Staff morale is high and teachers are full of praise for the support that they receive and for the opportunities they are given to improve their practice. Senior leaders ensure that only those teachers who are able to demonstrate that they have improved students' progress are rewarded through promotion or increases in salary.
- Staff with responsibility for key subjects, such as English, mathematics and science, undertake their duties well. They play a central role in helping to improve the quality of teaching. They are working effectively to help the small number of teachers who have remaining weaknesses in their practice, for example, those who do not fully apply the academy's marking policy.
- The majority of parents have very positive views of the academy's work and are pleased with the quality of education it provides for their children. The academy also provides parents with some highly effective guidance to help them support their children's learning and progress.
- The curriculum is highly effective in the way it promotes students' personal development. Academy leaders are working exceptionally well to ensure that students' communication, literacy and numeracy skills are reinforced in all subjects. The academy has fully embraced the changes made to the national curriculum. Staff continue to base their assessments of students' progress on National Curriculum levels but the academy is introducing a range of age-related criteria as a basis for its assessments in the future. The academy monitors the attendance, behaviour and progress of sixth form students attending off-site provision carefully to ensure they achieve as well as their peers..
- At the start of each school day students' have thirty minutes of tutorial time. This time is used effectively by the great majority of teachers to, among other things, promote students' personal development, provide them with revision time and enable them to catch up if they fallen behind.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the way in which they are prepared for life in modern Britain, are outstanding. Students are very supportive of local and national charities. There is strong sense of community in which older students happily provide help and support for younger ones. The academy instils a strong sense of value in students and ensures they understand why the notions of tolerance, compassion and justice are such important features of our way of life. Consequently, students are well prepared for life in modern Britain when they leave. The careers advice and guidance that students receive to support them in making decisions about the next stages of education or the world of employment is also highly effective.
- The academy provides an excellent range of additional activities that are enjoyed and appreciated by many students. These include a media and film club, drama presentations, musical events, educational visits and a wide range of sports. The academy's netball and rugby teams have toured France, and the

Year 10 rugby team is currently the holder of the Hertfordshire shield. The recently introduced Duke of Edinburgh Award programme is proving to be very popular among students.

- Leaders make good use of additional resources such the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch up funding. The Year 7 catch up funding is used effectively to overcome shortfalls in students' literacy and numeracy when they join the academy. The academy makes excellent use of the pupil premium funding to help those entitled to it achieve as well as their fellow students and, in some cases, even better.
- The North Herts College is the academy's sponsor. Leaders from the college provide excellent support for the academy and highly effective training opportunities for staff. The college has helped the Principal and Executive Principal to come to an accurate evaluation of the academy's performance. The college also co-ordinates the range of courses provided by the academy, in partnership with the Da Vinci Studio Schools.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors do an excellent job. The support they provide is greatly appreciated by academy leaders. They have a detailed knowledge of all aspects of the academy's work. Governors are very well informed about what is going well, but they also recognise what still needs to be improved. Governors question academy leaders rigorously about anything that they feel is not working as well as it should be.
 - Governors have an excellent knowledge of how well the various groups of students are achieving and know how the academy's performance compares to that of other schools. They check with great care to ensure that additional funding, such as the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch up funding, is helping improve students' progress.
 - Governors are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching. They have a good understanding of the system for rewarding teachers who bring about improvements in students' progress. Governors visit the academy regularly and observe lessons in partnership with academy leaders. These visits always have a specific focus related to aspects of teaching that the academy is trying to improve.
 - Governors are thorough and vigilant in fulfilling their responsibilities to keep students safe. Together with academy leaders, they ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding students are effective and meet requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students conduct around the academy is exemplary and staff manage behaviour well. There are now only isolated instances in lessons when progress is slowed by lack of concentration or when students become distracted and go 'off task'. On occasion, however, students do not take enough care with the presentation of their work.
- School leaders have overseen a significant reduction in the numbers of students excluded for inappropriate behaviour, to the extent that levels are well below those found nationally. If students do misbehave, the academy's highly effective systems for managing behaviour in the 'inclusion provision' ensures their behaviour quickly improves. Students are full of praise for the support that they receive from the inclusion provision.
- Attendance has improved significantly and is now close to the national average. A significant decrease has also been achieved in the previously high level of persistent absenteeism. This has been reduced to a level that is well below that found nationally.
- Students of all ages are eager to take responsibility and to fulfil leadership roles. For example, students are proud to be part of the student parliament and debating society, to lead sports teams and to organise events at the academy. It was the students' idea to introduce a salad bar into the academy's dining area.
- Students are well aware of, and fully share, the academy's core values of working hard and showing respect. Students participated in the holocaust memorial day and have made a commemorative garden in memory of former students who died in the two world wars.
- Students exhibit care and show respect to those who come from other backgrounds and cultures. They

are also very aware and supportive of those who face challenges in their lives or who they know to be less fortunate than themselves. One student commented, 'The great thing about Thomas Alleyne is that we all know each other and get along well together'.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Parents are confident that their children are safe at the academy, and students agree.
- Arrangements to ensure that students are safe are effective and meet current requirements. The academy takes care to check the background of staff when making appointments and to ensure that they are appropriately qualified. Leaders make regular checks to ensure the site is safe and does not present any risk to students. They are equally vigilant when managing offsite activities and educational visits.
- The provision to support the most vulnerable students is outstanding. Students are unequivocal that should they face any personal difficulties, staff will do everything within their power to help them. Students who spoke with inspectors were full of praise for the help that they receive with their academic progress and in overcoming any personal difficulties that they may have. They know what to do to resolve any problems.
- Should difficulties arise, students are confident that staff will act swiftly and effectively to support them and to find an amicable resolution to the issue. The academy is highly effective in its work to ensure that students are fully aware of the potential risks posed by misuse of the internet and social media. Students say that bullying in its various forms is very rare. They are clear about what constitutes bullying

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teachers plan their teaching carefully to ensure their lessons are interesting and motivate their students. They match tasks well so that they match students' needs and reflect the stages they have reached in their learning. Teachers also cater well for the full range of abilities that make up each class. This includes providing work that is pitched at just the right level to help those who might otherwise struggle to make good progress. They invariably provide work that challenges and extends the most able.
- Teachers teach the basic skills of reading, literacy and numeracy well. Teachers ensure these skills are reinforced across other subjects as appropriate, and not just in English and mathematics lessons. Teachers encourage students to use the correct vocabulary and provide students with regular opportunities to add, subtract, multiply and divide in a wide range of contexts.
- The majority of teachers are good at getting students to think for themselves. However, there are times when teachers do not use questioning sufficiently well to challenge students and extend their thinking or to build on their existing knowledge.
- Teachers assess students' work and progress frequently and accurately. They use the information gained to identify and address any gaps in students' learning. Their response to meeting the needs of any student who falls behind is effective. In this respect, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution by supporting students well, either individually or in small groups.
- Much of the marking of students' work is frequent, helpful and informative. However, a small number of teachers do not adhere fully to the academy's policy for marking work, while others do not always check that students have acted on the advice that their marking provides.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Across the academy, standards are now rising quickly. In 2014, the proportion of students attaining five A*-C GCSE examination passes, including English and mathematics was broadly average, having been significantly lower in previous years. This represented good progress given students below average attainment when they entered the school in Year 7. This pattern of improvement is on course to be

sustained in 2015. Students do particularly well in art and design, design and technology, history and physical education. The academy does not enter students early for GCSE and other examinations.

- Teachers' assessments of students' progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, as well as the work in their books, shows that their progress throughout the academy is good, and that standards are continuing to improve. The proportion of students in each year who are exceeding the levels expected for their age is rising, as is the proportion that are exceeding the expected rate of progress.
- Students' progress in reading, literacy and numeracy is good and underpins the progress that they make in all their other subjects and examinations.
- The most-able students are performing increasingly well and the great majority are achieving their potential in all their subjects. The proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grade passes across all GCSE examinations now matches that found nationally.
- Disabled students and those who have a special educational need benefit from good support and achieve well.
- Students who join Year 7 with attainment that is below that expected for their age are also supported well. Academy staff quickly identify gaps in their learning and take appropriate action to ensure that they are overcome. A similar pattern is evident for those students who come from minority ethnic groups and for the small proportion who do not speak English as their first language.
- The progress of disadvantaged students is good and is improving. In 2014, disadvantaged students were one GCSE grade behind their fellow students and students nationally in both English and mathematics. The academy's assessments for this year and the work in students' books show they are now achieving as well, and in some cases better than, their fellow students in the academy. There are examples in all year groups of disadvantaged students whose attainment is outstripping that of other students.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The academy's partnership with North Herts College and the Da Vinci Studio Schools provides students of all abilities with access to a range of courses that meet their needs well. This partnership results in a high proportion of external applicants joining the sixth form to attend A level courses at Thomas Alleyne.
- Leaders are working effectively to raise standards in A level courses. They make effective use of assessment information to identify any shortfalls in students' progress and to plan the next stages in their learning. Leaders provide very good support for their colleagues, and this has brought about marked improvements in teachers' effectiveness, such that teaching is now consistently good throughout the sixth form.
- Behaviour and safety in the sixth form are good. Students apply themselves well during lessons. They speak highly of the wide range of courses available to them and of the work that teachers do on their behalf. They readily embrace responsibility and are prepared well for life in modern Britain. They have a good insight into their local community and society generally. They are well informed about the work of local and national government organisations.
- Teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. They keep a careful eye on students' progress and are quick to respond to the needs of any who are falling behind or who are struggling with their work. The marking of students' work is helpful, although not all teachers check closely enough to make sure that students have acted on the advice their marking provides. Academy staff keep a watchful eye on the progress of students who are following courses provided by partner institutions.

- Attainment on entry to the sixth form is rising in line with the improvement in the proportion of students who gain five A*-C passes, including English and mathematics in Year 11.
- Achievement is good. Standards in A and AS examination subjects in 2014 were below average. However, as a result of the highly effective measures taken by leaders to improve teaching and to widen the range of courses available to students, attainment is improving. For example, the proportion of students who attained the higher A* and A grades was a little lower than found nationally last year, but is now on track to rise sharply.
- In 2014, students made progress in their A level and AS courses that broadly matched the rate of progress found nationally. This year progress is set to be equally good. Data held by the academy indicates that current students are on track to achieve better results at A and AS level than last year, and to at least maintain their strengths in vocational subjects.
- Retention rates are excellent. All of the students who gained good A level grades in 2014 progressed on to university. Students receive good advice from the academy and its partners to help them make informed decisions about their futures.

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	140037
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	450198

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	651
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Euinton
Executive Principal	Mark Lewis
Principal	Julia Flanagan
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01438 344344
Fax number	01438 344340
Email address	admin@tas.herts.sch.uk

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