

Thomas Bennett Community College

Ashdown Drive, Tilgate, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 5AD

Inspection dates	30 November-1 December 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Due to a period of significant turbulence, including staff changes, recruitment issues, staff absence and a budget shortfall, leaders have been slower to have an impact on aspects of school improvement.
- Teachers are not consistently using information about pupils' performance to plan pupils' learning. Consequently, not enough tasks challenge pupils to make good progress.
- Aspirations for all young people are not high enough across the school. Teachers' expectations have not been consistently challenging enough for what all pupils can achieve. As a result, too many pupils have underachieved, especially the most able.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders now have an accurate view of the school's performance and are sharply focused on the right areas for further development. Leaders now manage the performance of teachers rigorously. Consequently, teaching is improving.
- The school has started to benefit from the recent leadership and curriculum support given by The Kenmal Academy Trust. This is beginning to improve teachers' skills and leadership at all levels.

- GCSE results have not been high enough over the last three years.
- Not all middle leaders have sufficient impact in driving improvement in outcomes for pupils and in checking the quality of work in their areas.
- Communication with some parents is not successful in promoting what the school is trying to achieve.
- Outcomes for learners in the sixth form are below average and some do not make the progress they should. Retention rates have been below average. Some learners are unclear how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils and learners achieve well in languages at GCSE, and in English literature and sports studies in the sixth form.
- The large majority of pupils are safe in school and understand how to keep themselves safe. Leaders work very well to ensure effective arrangements are in place to safeguard pupils.
- Attendance is rising and far fewer pupils are now regularly absent from school.



Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that governors, leaders and managers at all levels raise expectations of the school community by:
 - promoting a more robust understanding in all adults of what pupils already can do, know and understand to raise their achievement even further
 - challenging pupils to do their best in all aspects of school life
 - making sure that communication with parents is always timely, clear in its intentions and seeks to deal fully with concerns expressed.
- Improve teaching across the whole school, especially in mathematics, so that it consistently enables pupils to make at least good progress from their starting points, by ensuring that:
 - teachers are skilled in using assessment information to plan work to enable all pupils, especially the most able, to improve their overall performance
 - marking and feedback to pupils is consistent with the best practice in the school and in line with the school's agreed policy
 - adults are robust in their use of questioning to probe pupils' knowledge and extend their understanding.
- Improve the sixth form provision and outcomes by:
 - ensuring that the programmes of study in the sixth form are fully based on pupils' prior attainment
 - improving the overall quality of advice and guidance given to pupils so that they can make the right choices for appropriate courses
 - making sure that all learners understand how to keep themselves safe from risk.



Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The period of considerable turbulence in staffing in the school was a major contributor to the below-average progress made by pupils in the last two years. Leaders and governors took very difficult and unpopular, but necessary, decisions about reducing the overall numbers of staff to meet a substantial budget deficit and the levels of payment to cover the private finance initiative for building and maintenance costs.
- Senior leaders and governors now have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are realistic about the challenges they face and have well-considered plans in place to further improve the school, especially for classroom practice. This has not been the case until recently. In mathematics, for example, the lack of suitably qualified and skilled teachers has limited pupils' progress.
- The Kenmal Academy Trust is now providing effective leadership support for the school, working to improve the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders have put in place an appropriate performance management system across the school, and set suitably challenging targets for staff. In addition, leaders are developing individual training plans for staff, describing the next steps they need to take to develop their teaching and outlining the support they will need to do this. However, this has not yet resulted in securely good teaching across all areas of the curriculum.
- Using a variety of information, senior leaders, and a growing number of subject leaders, have a more accurate understanding of pupils' progress. Senior leaders recognise that improvements are not yet as deep rooted as they need to be and that much work is still to be done. The recent appointment of progress leaders to concentrate on improvements in each year group is already beginning raise pupils' expectations of what they can achieve. Information sharing has been simplified, allowing better tracking of disadvantaged pupils through the use of specific curriculum targets.
- Over time, heads of subjects have not ensured that the quality of teaching has been good enough within their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders and representatives from the academy trust are now working with middle leaders to enhance this aspect of their role. Middle leaders are confident that they can become more effective in leading the teaching and learning in their subjects as they are supported well now to improve their impact.
- The overall provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has recently undergone a review so that its impact can be greater. Leaders have put in place rigorous and well-planned monitoring of all provision. However, it is too soon for its impact to be seen. The recently appointed leader to the specialist autistic base has restructured its provision well, engaging more teachers effectively in improving their classroom skills.
- Additional funding, including the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up premium, is used well to improve attendance, to enhance the curriculum and for targeted literacy



and numeracy programmes. Although the differences in attainment and progress between disadvantaged and other pupils nationally are now diminishing as a result, they are not closing quickly enough in all subjects, especially in mathematics.

- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. More recently, pathways from Year 7 ensure higher challenge for the most able and appropriate support for lower-ability pupils has been introduced. Increased time has been allocated to English and mathematics, and lower-attaining pupils in key stage 3 receive additional literacy lessons. Widened access to the English Baccalaureate is now in place, as is a better planned alternative curriculum for more vulnerable pupils. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these recent changes.
- Pupils enjoy and take up a range of enrichment activities, including opportunities for them to showcase their talents through sports and drama. This balances the curriculum and supports pupils' personal development. Older learners speak enthusiastically about the Football Academy which provides a full-time course for 16- to 19-year-old learners that incorporates football training with post-16 education.
- A wide range of activities support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils well. These include visits to science and history museums, as well as trips overseas, and various musical and drama events throughout the year. These events, and how leaders and teachers promote participation in them, help pupils to become active and responsible citizens, as do bespoke events such as the Belief Days and Unique Day.
- Senior leaders know that they have to promote better communication with parents to explain the changes being introduced, as results from Parent View show that a quarter of them did not feel well informed. A small number of parents believe that their complaints are not always dealt with well. When checking school procedures, inspectors judged that the school was fully aware of the need to follow up complaints properly. However, virtually all the staff surveyed had a clear understanding of the vision for improvement in the school.
- Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities. Pupils who attend the specialist base for pupils with autism are integrated into mainstream lessons and benefit from the obvious support of their fellow pupils. The previously high level of exclusions from the school has been substantially reduced, attendance has improved and the effective use of restorative practices is ensuring that poor behaviour is now rare. The work by pastoral leaders in the last year has had a good effect, yet more remains to be done to ensure such approaches can be fully successful.

Governance of the school

- In the past, governors did not provide sufficient challenge and were unable to prevent a decline in outcomes. Following a restructuring of governance by the academy trust, they have taken steps to improve their effectiveness.
- With the appointment of the current chair of governors, they have established an honest and open working relationship which is allowing them to challenge more effectively. For example, they are fully aware of the current strengths and weaknesses of the school, knowing that recent work by senior leaders to manage teachers'



performance more rigorously, improve pupils' behaviour and revise the curriculum is beginning to make a positive impact. They recognise that the pace of improvement needs to be even more marked.

Governors have attended a range of training, including safer recruitment, child protection and safeguarding. As a result, they have an appropriate understanding of safeguarding and are fulfilling their responsibilities for ensuring that all pupils are kept safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Senior and other leaders have ensured that safeguarding of pupils is the responsibility of every member of staff. Adults understand their role in keeping pupils safe and know what actions to take if they have a concern. New members of staff told inspectors that their induction to the school had strongly emphasised the need for continuous vigilance. All policies relating to safety are up to date and understood well.
- Safeguarding leaders have worked persistently with parents of vulnerable children and followed up relentlessly where they have made referrals to external agencies to ensure effective resolutions. However not all older learners were clear about how to keep themselves safe from the influences of radicalisation, despite their personal development programmes including guidance on this and other potential dangers to them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement because it has been too variable across the school and has not delivered good enough rates of progress over time.
- Teachers' expectations are inconsistent across the school. There are clear examples of teachers expecting the most of their pupils and setting work that challenges and stretches them effectively, as seen in physical education, some English and some modern foreign languages lessons. However, in some classes, teachers fail to give pupils challenging-enough work that deepens their understanding and knowledge sufficiently. For example, work in mathematics is sometimes too easy and pupils lose interest and motivation. Thus, pupils in these classes, including the most able, disadvantaged pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils, do not make enough progress.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers have positive relationships with their pupils. Teachers set tasks that are appropriate to pupils' levels of ability, considering their prior learning. They ask questions to establish pupils' understanding, and provide support where it is required. In other lessons, questioning is sometimes too superficial and teachers accept answers that do not deepen learning.
- More often now, pupils receive effective feedback about their work. Teachers' comments give pupils very clear advice about the standard they have reached and how to take it to the next level. For example, in science, Year 11 books include a detailed



comment from the teacher, in line with school policy, to which pupils have responded well. This has a notable impact on pupils' learning and motivates them to improve their work. However, this is not always the case in other subjects where sometimes pupils' response is limited.

- Where teachers make effective use of assessment information to plan lessons, pupils are well motivated and engaged by more challenging topics that are better suited to their abilities. For example, in a Year 11 drama lesson, pupils could describe in detail what 'immersive theatre' is and then demonstrated some examples which deeply engaged them.
- School leaders are supporting each member of the teaching staff with a plan that helps them develop their practice. Although the full impact of these plans is yet to be seen, leaders are beginning to capitalise on the most confident and positive teaching, where pupils learn well because of well-judged, engaging activities and effective feedback.
- The school's work to promote the development of writing is starting to have an impact in all year groups. A recent school initiative 'Talk for Writing' was seen by inspectors to be engaging many pupils, encouraging them to think more carefully about what vocabulary they were using, as well the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation. This development is carefully monitored, and pupils who need to catch up are given appropriate support.
- Teachers now more frequently collaborate to share and develop their practice, learning from each other. However, there is significant further work to do to ensure that all teaching is as good as the best in the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- All staff, including senior leaders and governors, have a strong commitment to ensuring that pupils' safety and welfare are promoted effectively.
- The curriculum provides pupils with an appropriate range of opportunities to develop their understanding of how to be safe, including being safe online and being safe in their relationships. Due to these opportunities, pupils have a secure understanding of how to be safe. However, a small number of older learners were unsure how they could keep themselves safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- In conversations with inspectors, pupils said that they feel safe at the school. They said that there are people who they can speak to when they have concerns. Pupils said that they are confident that staff would listen to them and would take appropriate action. They also made clear that bullying at the school is rare, yet if it does occur, they can speak to adults who normally take prompt and effective action.
- The large majority of parents who expressed a view through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their child is safe at the school, and that in



most instances teachers deal effectively with any bullying that may occur.

- Equally, pupils are encouraged to show respect and tolerance towards others and were clear that this is a strength of the school. The role of student leader is much prized and those undertaking this role support other pupils, act as mediators between pupils and regularly influence changes in school policies.
- While a comprehensive programme of careers guidance is in place for pupils in Years 9 to 11, it is not always promoting the best choices for pupils moving onto 16 to 19 education, with a few young people choosing pathways that are not the most effective for them. The school is aware of this and has plans to ensure that all are better prepared for their next steps.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In most lessons, pupils behave well when the tasks set motivate them. In the best cases, pupils concentrate very well, with many showing a resilience when they face problems or find work difficult. Where teachers manage their classrooms successfully, pupils show interest in their learning, rising to challenges set. However, this is not yet firmly established across the school, as behaviour deteriorates where teaching fails to engage the pupils. Of the 41 responses on Parent View, just under a third felt that the school did not deal well enough with behaviour.
- A significant reduction in the proportion of pupils who are excluded from the school has been brought about by a positive range of strategies to support those pupils who display challenging behaviours. Ensuring that the code of conduct is firmly applied, in addition to the school working closely with different agencies, has led to this drop. However, the proportion of those who are excluded more than once remains above national averages. The school realises that more needs to be done to decrease this level.
- More recently, growing proportions of pupils are well behaved and conduct themselves sensibly throughout the school day, including at the end of school. More pupils than at the time of the previous inspection now display positive attitudes. In the pupil survey a very large majority agreed that the school encouraged them to treat others equally and with respect. As one pupil remarked: 'We feel we belong here'.
- Usually, pupils treat the building with respect, although pupils do not routinely clear away litter in the canteen at breaktimes. Inspectors noted occasional inappropriate graffiti on displays.
- Attendance is improving now as the robust systems in place to promote pupils' good attendance have had a positive effect with some families that previously did not understand the importance of regular and prompt attendance. However, a group of persistent absentees remains, often among the most vulnerable in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

■ In the last two years, outcomes have been too variable to ensure that pupils make



good progress in all subjects. Pupils' performance information over time shows that in some subjects disadvantaged pupils and others make similar progress, yet in other subjects they do not. However, more recent information from the school shows an upturn in the overall standards is beginning to emerge for pupils currently in the school.

- Pupils enter the school with significantly lower attainment than in other schools nationally: this has been the case for many years. In the last two years, attainment has been below national averages at key stage 4. The GCSE results in 2015 improved from the low base of 2014. The school reached the national floor standards for overall performance, although attainment was significantly low in mathematics. However, in 2016, attainment in English and mathematics dropped from 2015, when results in English had been above national averages. More positively, pupils attained well in modern foreign languages, making good progress from their starting points.
- Achievement in sport and physical education across the school is strong. As part of the school's specialism in sport, it provides good opportunities for those pupils who are especially talented and want to take their skills further.
- In 2015, overall progress in GCSEs was broadly in line with all schools elsewhere. However, pupils' expected progress in mathematics was lower than that of their peers nationally. Disadvantaged pupils and some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally. Unvalidated national figures for 2016 show that progress made by pupils from their starting points was significantly below average in several subjects, particularly for the most able, and the disadvantaged most able overall.
- The school's current performance information for key stages 3 and 4 indicates that increased proportions of pupils are making the progress they should, across a range of subjects. The books that inspectors looked at confirmed this to be the case. Leaders regularly discuss individual pupils and their progress to target intervention as required. This now takes place in current year groups, so that pupils at risk of falling behind in their learning catch up. However, progress in mathematics remains stubbornly below other subjects, as teaching is not yet improving as in other areas.
- Disadvantaged pupils have historically made less progress than other pupils. Leaders' actions to improve teaching and a sharper focus on the use of the pupil premium are beginning to have an impact and differences are diminishing, faster in English than in mathematics, but not rapidly or evenly enough across the curriculum.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers. They have not achieved as well as they should in the past and, although this is being tackled well by the school, it is still too early to see the impact on outcomes.
- The pupils who were heard reading did so with expression and fluency. The most able readers talk knowledgeably about the books they had read and their favourite authors.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

■ Although leaders have high expectations, this is not always evident in classes. There is



inconsistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Retention rates in the past have not been what leaders aspire to. Progress and skill development are also variable, although leaders can evidence an improving picture of learners' progress now.

- The planning and management of individual study programmes is improving. However, these programmes are being limited by poor outcomes at key stage 4 and the lack of high-quality teaching staff at present. The shift towards a more vocation-rich curriculum better meets the needs of the learners. The school knows that raising performance at key stage 4 will be the key to keeping a mixed and varied curriculum for older learners.
- Learners who had not achieved at least grade C at GCSE in either English or mathematics have not always followed appropriate courses, having been placed on academic courses at a higher level than their prior achievement warranted. Leaders are right to conclude that this accounts for lower than average retention rates last year, after being above average in the past. Learners are no longer accepted onto such courses. Group sizes at AS and A level are usually very small, with the majority of classes having fewer than eight learners. This is recognised as not being an effective use of resources.
- While a detailed programme of information, advice and guidance is in place, learners did not feel confident that it met their needs fully. They felt the support has been lacking this year and cite a lack of guidance for university applications as an example. They said this 'stressed them out'.
- Inspectors judge that teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, in line with the school's evaluation. In the best lessons, examples of which are art, theatre studies, history, English and politics, inspirational teaching is underpinned by very high expectations and challenging tasks that make learners think hard. Here, learners challenge each other well and lessons are well paced, promoting good progress. However, this is not yet universal, as these ingredients are missing in other lessons, so learners do not make good enough gains in their knowledge and understanding.
- The leadership of teaching learning and assessment in the 16 to 19 provision has not been sharply focused on developing high-quality classroom practice until recently. More significance had been placed on the tracking of data and suitable interventions. The balance is now being restructured by the head of sixth form to improve classroom practice.
- The Football Academy is a marked strength of the sixth form, attracting learners from other schools. Challenging activities are set to which learners respond well and make good progress.
- Learners develop personal, social and employability skills during their time in the sixth form. However, further work is needed for this to have a better impact on learners' capabilities.
- Generally, learners feel, and are, safe. A small number, however, were not sure how to keep themselves safe from risks of radicalisation, while others recognise threats well. Overall, they adopt healthy lifestyles. They behave well, are good role models to younger pupils in the school and take on some responsibilities to support younger, more vulnerable, pupils.



- In 2015, attainment dropped to be below national averages from 2014. In 2016, overall pass rates of 97% gaining at least grade E were slightly below the national figures. However, the extended project qualification was particularly successful, with all nine learners gaining at least grade D. All learners taking a vocational-based subject passed and more gained distinctions or merits than before. Far too few learners improved their GCSE grades in English and/or mathematics in 2015 and 2016.
- Progress from starting points has been variable in the last two years. Value-added pass rates were below those recorded nationally in both 2015 and 2016. In 2015, learners eligible for free school meals, however, performed slightly better than their peers in both A-level and vocational subjects, and in line with national figures. English literature performance continues to be the strongest as progress is above average. However, in applied information communications technology progress was well below the national average. Now, there is an improving picture for current learners with value added predicted to be in line with national expectations for this year. Leaders know that the recently developed robust and rigorous monitoring will be at the heart of reaching this target.



School details

Unique reference number	138620
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10019911

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy convertor
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,080
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dick Brown
Headteacher	Pauline Montalto
Executive headteacher	Kenny Fitzpatrick
Telephone number	01293 526255
Website	http://thomasbennett-tkat.org.uk
Email address	admin@thomasbennett-tkat.org
Date of previous inspection	7–8 October 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- This is an academy within The Kenmal Academy Trust that is larger than the averagesized secondary school.



- The proportion of girls is slightly below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support from pupil premium funding is above average.
- Most pupils are from white British background or from any other white background.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is slightly above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is high. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan, or a statement of special educational needs, is high. The most common needs relate to pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties and those with speech, language and communication needs.
- The school has a specialist unit for pupils with autism. Nearly all pupils access mainstream lessons across the full curriculum.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The executive headteacher is full time in the school. The Kenmal Academy Trust also provides a range of leadership support for the school.
- A new chair of the governing body has been appointed since the previous inspection.



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 looked at a range of work in pupils' books in many subjects across the school, either in lessons or as a separate activity.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start and end of the school day, breaktimes and lunchtimes. They visited form tutor times in both mornings and afternoons. Inspectors spoke to learners informally and held meetings with groups from several years, including the sixth form.
- Inspectors held meetings with the head of school, executive headteacher, senior leaders from The Kenmal Academy Trust who are supporting the school, other members of the senior leadership team and staff with responsibility for subjects and other aspects of the school's work. The lead inspector also met the chair of governors.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and action plans, the recent review of the use of funding for disadvantaged pupils, information about pupils' attainment and progress, records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, the school's safeguarding and other policies, and monitoring records on checking the quality of teaching and learning.
- Inspectors considered the 54 responses to the pupil online questionnaire.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from the 41 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- The views of staff were gained from the 105 responses to the online staff questionnaire and from discussions with individual teachers.

Inspection team

Hugh Betterton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Harry Ingham	Ofsted Inspector
Anna Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector
Harry Kutty	Ofsted Inspector



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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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