

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Robin Elms
Headteacher
Thomas Ashton School
Bennett Street
Hyde
Cheshire
SK14 4SS

Dear Mr Elms

Short inspection of Thomas Ashton School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2017 with Jon Ashley, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the systems to check on what pupils know and can do have been overhauled. Teachers use the information from the new systems to plan work that matches the needs of individual pupils. Consequently, you ensure that gaps in pupils' previous learning are addressed and pupils make good progress from their starting points.

You invest in the well-being and development of staff as well as pupils. Staff experience good professional development. This investment pays dividends. The consistently good teaching across school achieves good outcomes for pupils, academically and behaviourally. Staff have undertaken additional training to help them to support pupils. This has had a particularly positive impact on outcomes for the growing number of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder in school. This additional training includes the training for teaching assistants identified as an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. As a result of the clear processes to check on what pupils know and can do and the good-quality training offered, staff know pupils very well. They offer very good guidance and support for academic needs as well as pastoral and behavioural needs.

You have high aspirations for everyone at Thomas Ashton. You live by your motto 'Because I believe ... I can'. Consequently, there is no ceiling put on pupils' learning

and development. Leaders work tirelessly with staff, pupils and their families to find solutions so that every pupil achieves their best. Leaders make sure that those pupils with the potential to reintegrate into a mainstream school are given every chance of success. You are not complacent and recognise that there is always more to do. You recognise that you could do more to develop pupils' writing in key stage 2 and to develop the curriculum further.

Parents are supportive of the school. They tell us that the school has made a huge difference, not only to the pupils but also to the families. Parents say that you are a constant presence and provide support for the wider family.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Record-keeping is meticulous. Staff are alert to any risks and you follow up any concerns swiftly. You and your leadership team are strong advocates for your pupils. You want the best for every one of them and stick up for what you believe is right. Pupils feel safe and trust adults to help them. Pupils understand the need for clear boundaries and trust adults to put these in place sensitively. Adults ensure that they preserve pupils' self-esteem at all times.

Adults teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. This is particularly important given the vulnerabilities of some of the pupils. The curriculum has been devised to maximise opportunities for pupils to develop life skills in the local community.

Inspection findings

- As a result of good teaching and individual support, pupils make good progress from their different starting points. Leaders deploy other adults well. The additional training that leaders have put in place, so that additional adults can support learning as well as behaviour, is working well. Adults work together seamlessly in lessons to support pupils.
- The progress pupils make in mathematics is particularly strong. Adults use their good subject knowledge to question pupils effectively about their mathematical understanding. Adults use this to deal swiftly with any misconceptions. For example, in a key stage 2 lesson, the teacher used a counting on method to show pupils where they had made a mistake in their subtraction.
- In writing, in most classes, pupils write well in English and in other subjects. Teachers and other adults closely track pupils' progress and use this to good effect when planning writing lessons. The assessment system enables teachers to pinpoint accurately the gaps in pupils' knowledge and address these. However, teachers give pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 insufficient opportunities to write independently or at length. This hampers progress for these pupils in writing.
- Pupils in all key stages make good progress with punctuation and spelling. Pupils in key stage 3 make similarly good progress with grammar and use this to good

effect in their writing across the curriculum. However, the progress made by some pupils in key stage 2 in grammar is slower, and pupils do not use what they have been taught in their own writing.

- Adults instil a love of reading. They take every opportunity to reinforce reading skills. At key stage 1 and key stage 2, adults teach phonics so that pupils who have fallen behind catch up quickly. Pupils use their growing understanding of phonics to help them to work out difficult words when reading. At key stage 3, pupils read for enjoyment and pleasure and enjoy reading different texts. Pupils read together and discuss the text in a sensible and mature way. For example, when discussing why the creature in the book 'Skelling' was hiding in a dangerous place, pupils talked about the reasons and the possible difficulties.
- Leaders manage transition arrangements well and ensure that pupils and parents are prepared for change. Pupils who are starting at Thomas Ashton are given time to adjust to the new arrangements and adults work effectively to understand and support any individual needs. The school successfully supports pupils back into mainstream schools or on to new schools at key stage 4.
- Pupils' overall attendance is improving. The improvements in attendance are because of leaders' efforts to make sure that pupils feel safe and nurtured. Pupils want to come to school. As a result, pupils who have had poor attendance previously make rapid improvements in their attendance at Thomas Ashton. Where pupils do not attend school, leaders make regular checks to ensure that these pupils are safe while alternative solutions are found. The small minority of pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should negatively skews the overall data.
- Pupils at Thomas Ashton exhibit a range of challenging behaviours. Staff manage these behaviours exceptionally well. Staff intervene calmly and quickly. Adults help the pupils to build confidence in their ability to succeed.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. The number of individual pupils with fixed-term exclusions has reduced and the need for the use of positive handling has reduced for the vast majority of pupils. Records show a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour. This is due to the effective strategies of the leadership team.
- Leaders have devised a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils. The curriculum has a blend of academic and essential skills. Pupils work within the national curriculum but adults tailor this to pupils' stages of development and individual needs. English, mathematics, science, physical education, music and personal, social, health and economic education are taught discretely. The rest of the curriculum is organised into half-termly topics.
- Teachers develop work in art particularly well and pupils make good progress. The school holds a gold Artsmark award. The work in art gives pupils a sense of achievement and leaders celebrate this work widely. Adults use this work to develop enterprise work for pupils in key stage 3 and several pupils have sold their work through local exhibitions.
- At key stage 3, the curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education. Teachers weave geography and history into the topic work, enabling a

growing understanding of these areas. Where pupils have an aptitude for a particular subject, for example German, leaders facilitate additional learning in collaboration with a local high school. In key stage 3, pupils work towards accredited qualifications. For example, pupils undertake mini-enterprise projects within the local community. However, teachers give insufficient attention to religious education.

- At key stage 2, teachers plan topic work to meet the needs and the interests of the pupils. Pupils make good progress in art, science and personal, social, health and economic education. However, there are few opportunities to develop geographical or historical knowledge and understanding in key stage 2. Leaders also acknowledge that they could do more in key stage 2 to increase the stamina for writing needed for key stage 3.
- Governors take their roles very seriously and are passionate about the school. Governors have a detailed understanding of Thomas Ashton School. They ensure that they keep up to date with their training and have the necessary skills to support and challenge leaders. Governors make sure that leaders use the pupil premium funding very well to enable disadvantaged pupils to make the same good rates of progress as others.
- Leaders use the sport funding effectively to provide specialist physical education and sports coaching for pupils. This keeps pupils fit and active as well as developing basic skills, including teamwork.
- Governors ensure that leaders use the additional funding received for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities very well to deliver individualised support for pupils. This contributes to the good progress pupils make, both academically and behaviourally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- Pupils' writing at key stage 2 is developed further by:
 - giving pupils opportunities to write independently in key stages 1 and 2
 - building stamina for writing for older pupils in key stage 2 to write at length in preparation for key stage 3.
- The curriculum is developed further in history, geography and religious education to ensure that this is taught in sufficient depth.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, inspectors met with you, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with representatives from the local authority. Inspectors visited classes with school leaders to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. Inspectors met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with four parents on the playground before school. Inspectors considered responses to the school's own parent questionnaires and to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors observed pupils on the playground and in the dining hall. Inspectors conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record-keeping. We talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. Inspectors also considered a range of other documentation, including school improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.