

Thomas Bennett Community College

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

Inspection dates

30 April – 1 May 2019

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The Kemnal Academy Trust (TKAT) and local governance board have not ensured that the recommendations from the last inspection to improve the quality of education have been acted upon fully.
- Turbulence caused by restructuring staffing had a destabilising effect on school personnel in the last academic year. This resulted in leaders not focusing sufficiently well on improving the quality of teaching.
- Teaching, learning and assessment remain too variable across the school to ensure consistently good progress for all pupils in all subjects.
- Teachers do not plan precisely enough for the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Most-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently well. Not all most-able pupils make the progress that they are capable of.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunity to practise extended writing across the curriculum.
- Although pupils' attendance is improving, it remains below the national average.
- Leaders are not yet sufficiently adept at planning for improvement. Planning lacks rigour because neither the targets set nor success measures are precise enough. Consequently, leaders do not measure the impact of their work sufficiently well.
- Governors have not had sufficient impact on improving leadership since the last inspection because they have not called leaders fully to account for the results of planned actions.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher has gained the confidence of staff, pupils, parents and carers. The school is now making rapid improvements under new leadership arrangements. Staff are united in working together to improve the school.
- Most pupils and staff say that behaviour has improved greatly this year.
- The sixth form is a good provision. Teaching and outcomes are stronger in the sixth form in comparison with the rest of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - implementing plans which clearly show how leaders at all levels will monitor the success of their actions
 - making certain that leaders take rapid action to improve subjects where progress is currently not strong enough
 - strengthening the effectiveness of governors so that they call leaders precisely to account for the effect of their actions.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan lessons to meet the needs of pupils, particularly by increasing the challenge for the most able and providing the necessary support for pupils with SEND
 - teachers' questions are effective in developing pupils' understanding so that pupils can communicate well, both when they talk and in writing
 - pupils practise their extended writing skills across the curriculum.
- Improve pupils' attendance across the school.
- The school is recommended to undertake an external review of governance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not implemented fully the improvements needed to meet the recommendations from the last full inspection in November 2016 and subsequent monitoring visit. Levels of accountability have not enabled leaders to bring about the necessary changes effectively enough. The academy trust recognises that the school is not yet good enough.
- Progress in the last academic year was hampered further by turbulence caused by a significant staffing restructure, a professional association dispute and changes of headteacher. Staff say that this was a very unsettling period, with many uncertainties. At this time, leaders' priority was focused on securing the financial stability of the school, rather than making the rapid progress needed to improve teaching and learning.
- The recent appointment of a permanent headteacher has improved matters significantly. The recent turbulence has subsided and staff feel valued. This is because there is a clear vision and staff are focused on improving the quality of education provided for pupils. Staffing has been strengthened. The headteacher has improved the school's culture so that is more aspirational for staff and pupils. Staff agree that the current headteacher has transformed the school. As one member of staff said, 'the headteacher is relentlessly positive.'
- Leaders provide helpful feedback to staff on the effectiveness of their work. The headteacher provides clear expectations about how staff should use their time to support pupils' learning. Training opportunities have been improved greatly. In addition, the academy trust provides opportunities for schools in the trust to work effectively together to share good practice. Staff feel that the performance management system is much improved.
- Recently, according to pupils, parents and staff, a new clear policy has led to a transformation of pupils' behaviour around the school. However, despite many other improvements, teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes are still highly inconsistent across the school. Consequently, pupils are not yet receiving good enough teaching in all their subjects to make up for shortcomings in the past.
- The new headteacher is strengthening leadership. The academy trust is providing extra leadership support with the secondment of an additional senior leader. Despite these actions, there are inconsistencies in the quality of leadership at all levels. In general, leaders' planning for improvement is not wholly effective. Consequently, leaders do not monitor the impact of their actions sufficiently well.
- Pupils are provided with a wide curriculum, providing a range of choices at key stage 4. Leaders review the curriculum regularly and adapt it to meet pupils' interests. However, leaders have yet to deepen pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Leaders have developed an effective personal and social education programme. This promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils react positively when discussing sensitive issues of equality and diversity. This was seen in an assembly which promoted deep thought about women in society very effectively.

While pupils are taught about the risks of extremism in British culture, pupils in key stages 3 and 4 have not yet secured a deep enough knowledge of associated issues such as radicalisation.

- Parents agree that the standard of education has improved recently, and many cite their satisfaction with the school. In particular, communication with parents has improved since the last inspection. One parent said, 'The school is trying hard to develop good relationships with parents.' However, some parents shared their frustration about the school's restructuring and its effect on their child's education. There are also a number of remaining concerns, including the quality of special educational needs provision, the quality of teaching and over-reliance on temporary staff.

Governance of the school

- The academy trust's representative holds regular meetings with the headteacher, visits the school to conduct reviews and provides suitable recommendations. Until recently, these recommendations have not had sufficient impact on improving the quality of education at the school. This is partly due to attention being swayed by the problems associated with planning the financial sustainability of the school.
- Local governors understand their statutory responsibilities well in keeping pupils safe. For example, they recently commissioned an external safeguarding audit. However, governors have not ensured that the school's quality of education has improved over time.
- Despite their positive intentions, governors do not have a clear oversight of how leaders plan to improve the school. This is partly due to school action plans not being sufficiently focused on improving teaching. In the past, governors have relied too much on what the headteacher or other leaders have told them. While local governors have received training from the academy trust to help them in their role, it has not been effective enough.
- Consequently, governance arrangements have not resulted in governors holding leaders sufficiently to account for the urgency and effectiveness of their actions to improve the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding policy takes account of the government's current requirements. There are good systems in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- Leaders carry out the checks required to be sure that adults working in the school are suitable to work with children. Staff receive regular and appropriate training, including how to keep pupils safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Parents report that their children are safe and well cared for. Any safeguarding concerns are documented well, and staff liaise effectively with parents and other organisations where necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving but still varies within subjects and across the school. This is partly due to fluctuations in staffing and difficulties with recruitment. In addition, teachers have not received sufficiently effective training in the past in order to hone their skills. Consequently, pupils have received inconsistent teaching over time.
- Teachers' planning is too variable. Successful planning takes into account pupils' starting points and provides activities that are interesting and have the right amount of challenge. However, many pupils experience lessons which are not inspiring enough, being either too easy or too hard.
- Teaching in the mainstream curriculum does not support pupils with SEND well enough. While there are recent improvements, teachers do not receive sufficient guidance about how best to support pupils with additional needs. Consequently, pupils with SEND do not receive sufficient support to help them learn well enough. One pupil, representing the views of others, said, 'We are all expected to work at the same pace, but we need more time and more help.'
- The school has an assessment policy that teachers use with varying success. When this is applied consistently it supports pupils by providing incisive feedback and encouraging them to improve their work. In a number of cases, teachers' feedback is not helpful, or does not develop pupils' understanding in a coherent way.
- Teachers do not consistently plan for the needs of most-able pupils. These pupils are not always provided with challenging enough work.
- Despite being an area to improve in the last full inspection, teachers' questioning still does not consistently develop and check pupils' understanding. Consequently, teachers do not find out exactly what pupils understand in order to adjust their teaching accordingly.
- Teachers pay attention to pupils' accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, pupils do not get sufficient opportunities to write routinely at length about their understanding across the curriculum. Pupils are not yet practising their literacy skills well enough. As one pupil said, 'Some teachers do not know how to help us with our literacy needs.'
- There are pockets of strong teaching in most subjects. Teaching is most consistent in the sixth form and in science, physical education and drama. These teachers have detailed knowledge of pupils and are aware of groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, and meet their learning needs well.
- Parents agree that teaching is inconsistent. While some parents are worried about the quality of teaching their child receives, others are very positive about the standard of teaching.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.

- Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for and receive effective pastoral support. They say that should they have a problem then staff take effective action to resolve it.
- The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about keeping themselves safe. They find out about healthy living and making appropriate lifestyle choices. The food available in the school canteen promotes healthy diet choices.
- Despite the typically strong approach to safeguarding taken by school leaders, pupils do not have a sufficiently secure understanding of the dangers posed by people who have extreme views.
- Students are encouraged to take on leadership roles. For example, student leaders take assemblies and represent the school. Most pupils wear their uniform well and are proud to belong to the school.
- Students speak highly of advice and guidance they receive about choices regarding GCSE courses, career options or next steps.
- There is effective communication and monitoring of the few students attending alternative courses at the local college.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although pupils are polite and courteous most of the time, a small number of pupils report that there are pockets of unsafe behaviour in the school grounds at social times, and that they do not always feel safe. Other pupils did not concur with this view, but during the inspection, evidence of boisterous behaviour was seen in the corridors.
- Pupils' attitudes towards learning are not consistently positive, especially when teaching does not inspire them. Staff have not ensured that pupils across the school take sufficient pride in their work. Graffiti in some books goes unchecked.
- Pupils generally work well together and develop cooperative social interactions. The school is calm and purposeful.
- Leaders have recently overhauled the behaviour policy to positive effect. Most pupils and staff report that behaviour has improved significantly over the last few months. The learning environment has been greatly enhanced by the effective and consistent implementation of behaviour strategies.
- The overall attendance of pupils has been below national averages for a number of years. Very recently, new and well-considered strategies have been put into place to improve pupils' attendance. The early signs are that attendance is improving, but it is too early to judge whether these improvements are sustained.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over recent years, pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of key stage 4 have not been good enough. In 2018, pupils' progress in their GCSE subjects was significantly below average.
- Similarly, pupils' GCSE performance in a number of subjects has also been below average. A notable exception is science, where pupils have achieved around national

averages. Other stronger subjects are modern foreign languages, drama, dance and art.

- Currently, there are signs that pupils' progress across subjects throughout year groups is improving, especially in Year 10. Inspection evidence showed that progress is strongest where the teaching is strongest.
- Leaders have provided Year 11 with extra support in the months leading up to examinations. Inspection evidence shows that Year 11 pupils have made good progress in this academic year. However, there is not sufficient time to make up for weaker progress in the past.
- Leaders have not ensured in the recent past that the most able pupils achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. Observation and scrutiny of work show that the most able pupils are not being challenged consistently well. Consequently, most-able pupils across the school are not making enough progress across a range of subjects and could achieve more.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged are also now making stronger progress, but there is still a lag between their rates of progress and those of other pupils nationally.
- Progress in mathematics is held back due to pupils not getting enough opportunity to apply their knowledge to solve mathematical problems they may encounter.
- Pupils' writing is not developed sufficiently well. Pupils do not routinely explain their understanding in depth. They do not have enough opportunity to write at length across the curriculum. Consequently, key stage 4 pupils preparing for the examinations find difficulty in expressing themselves effectively when tackling longer answers.
- Leaders have implemented successfully a reading programme, scheduled in the library, for Years 7 and 8 pupils. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 catch up their reading skills well. However, the library is an uninspiring place to visit and does not have a wealth of enticing reading material. Leaders are aware of the need to promote reading among all pupils and have plans to enhance the library provision.
- Pupils who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder make good progress, especially in their social and emotional skills. Their needs are met well in the centre.
- A small yet growing proportion of pupils continue their education in the sixth form.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth-form provision has improved since the last inspection. Leaders have developed a small, effective sixth form where students thrive in a close-knit community. Students say, 'It feels like a family.' The head of sixth form knows students extremely well and provides strong and principled leadership.
- A bespoke study programme enables students to take exactly the right courses to cater for their interests and abilities. During the previous academic year, uncertainties about the future of the sixth form affected recruitment into Year 12. Nevertheless, students are provided with the choice of a number of level 3 academic courses and a range of vocational options.

- The football academy makes a significant contribution in supporting the curriculum and recruiting students. Students achieve coaching qualifications and wider leadership skills. For many students, this course enables them to re-engage with learning and helps them to get back on track towards achieving successful outcomes.
- The government's published information about the achievements of the sixth form does not reflect accurately the quality of the sixth-form provision. Current verified information for 2019 shows that the vast majority of students have achieved at least distinction level in their chosen BTEC National Diploma courses. The school's information shows that progress on A-level courses will be around national averages.
- Teaching in the sixth form is stronger than in the rest of the school. Teachers plan precisely, providing clear guidance of the standards required by examination boards. Teaching provides the right combination of challenge, encouragement and support. Students respond very positively and learn well. As a result, students make good progress.
- Students are very positive about the support they receive. They behave very well and are role models to younger pupils. They say that they are safe and that they cover a range of topics in personal and social education that support their understanding of how to keep safe. For example, they recently took an online course about the government's 'Prevent' duty to help them understand the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The head of sixth form goes to great lengths to ensure that all students have a voice, in order to improve provision. Students feel valued.
- Students receive excellent support in planning their next steps. Leaders make sure that they get appropriate information and guidance about possible courses and apprenticeships. In 2018, the vast majority went on to study at higher education and universities, the remaining students finding employment or apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	138620
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10088162

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	981
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	101
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Dick Brown
Headteacher	Stuart Smith
Telephone number	01293 526255
Website	http://thomasbennett-tkat.org.uk/
Email address	admin@thomasbennett-tkat.org
Date of previous inspection	30 November – 1 December 2016

Information about this school

- This is an academy within The Kemnal Academy Trust. The trust delegates some responsibilities to a local governing body.
- The school has a specialised unit for a small number of pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Nearly all these pupils access the mainstream curriculum with support from this unit.
- Around 40% of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium grant.
- Most pupils are White British, although the school has a wide range of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds.

- Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with prior attainment well below the national comparator in reading and mathematics.
- There have been a number of changes in headteacher or executive headteacher since the last inspection.
- The current headteacher was appointed in January 2019. There is not an executive headteacher in the current staffing structure.
- A small number of pupils attend Crawley College or Brinsbury College as alternative learning providers.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector met with the regional director for TKAT and held a further meeting with the chair of the governing body.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and two groups of staff. There were 79 responses from staff to Ofsted’s staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors took account of 164 responses to Ofsted’s online parental questionnaire.
- Teaching and learning was observed across all age groups. Inspectors were accompanied to all lessons by a senior member of staff.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils’ work. Meetings were held with three groups of pupils. Inspectors also looked at work in lessons and talked to pupils around the school.
- Telephone conversations were held with alternative learning providers.
- A number of documents were scrutinised, including improvement plans, safeguarding documents and policies.
- The school’s website was viewed.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Bullen	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Turner	Ofsted Inspector
Victoria Webster	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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