

Inspection of a good school: The Thomas Alleyne School

High Street, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 3BE

Inspection dates: 15–16 October 2019

Outcome

The Thomas Alleyne School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a popular school with parents, carers and pupils alike. Pupils told us how much they value the support of staff. Most pupils enjoy their lessons. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, feel that the school is doing a good job.

Pupils usually behave well in lessons and around the school. They contribute confidently to discussions and show respect for the opinions of others. While there is a small amount of bullying, pupils are confident that, if they report it, staff will deal with it well.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. They are determined that all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, study the full range of subjects at key stage 3. They believe that all pupils, regardless of their ability, should be able to choose both vocational and academic subjects at GCSE. The number of pupils continuing with English Baccalaureate subjects such as geography, history and Spanish is gradually increasing.

Leaders make sure that there are a wide variety of sporting, social and cultural activities on offer. Pupils and parents appreciate the number of clubs and visits that the school runs throughout the year. Leaders' actions mean that all pupils have the chance to join in with these activities.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Following the previous inspection, the trust did not pay enough attention to maintaining the quality of education recognised at the time. There was a dip in standards but leaders have worked effectively to put this right. The headteacher, who had moved to work with other schools in the trust, returned to his role at Thomas Alleyne. A strengthened team of senior and subject leaders has improved behaviour and raised the quality of teaching. Current leaders, governors and trustees are clear about the strengths of the school and the areas that still need to be improved. Staff morale is high because staff feel valued and trusted by a leadership team that is also mindful of their workload.

Senior leaders and subject leaders have improved planning in all subjects over the past two years. Most teachers know what to teach and in what order so that pupils build the skills and knowledge they need to do well. In science, for example, teachers make sure that key knowledge is revisited often so that pupils develop their understanding and their confidence. In English, teachers give key stage 3 pupils the background knowledge they need to understand books they will study at key stages 4 and 5. In some subjects, there is still work to do to make sure that teachers sequence work in the way that most effectively helps pupils to learn.

Teachers have established effective practices to help pupils remember what they have been taught. Teachers give pupils chances to test their memory and use what they have learned in lessons. This helps pupils to build on what they have learned in the past and results in most pupils improving the quality of their work.

Pupils are usually keen to join in with discussions. However, they do not always use the correct vocabulary to talk about what they have learned. This also affects the quality of what they write. Teachers teach pupils key words in every subject but not always how to use them effectively.

A large majority of pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to their learning. This is because most teachers manage pupils' behaviour in a positive way. A small number of teachers turn a blind eye to pupils who are not on-task. They do not make sure that all pupils complete their work to a good standard. This means that these pupils do not achieve as well as they should and, at times, they distract others.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils to do well. Leaders have rectified the past weaknesses in provision which led to examination outcomes not being strong. The work of current pupils is generally of a high standard because most teachers now have high expectations of pupils.

Although below average, attendance is improving. Leaders' actions, such as a free breakfast club and transport, have led to more pupils attending school more regularly.

Students in the small sixth form have access to an increasing range of A-level subjects at Thomas Alleyne. They can add to these by pursuing technical and vocational qualifications at other local sixth-forms colleges. Students appreciate the support they get because of small group sizes. They say that teachers make the lessons interesting because of their detailed subject knowledge. Leaders ensure that high-quality information and careers advice are available to all pupils and sixth-form students. The school has a strong track record of successfully moving pupils on to further study, employment or training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make the safety and care of pupils a high priority. Staff are well trained and alert to any signs that a pupil may be unsafe or in need of help. Any concerns are carefully followed up and extra support put in place if needed.

Strong links with other local schools, the police and children's services ensure that leaders are well informed about any local safeguarding issues. They make sure that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from any risks.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum has been successfully changed over the past two years so that pupils build the knowledge and skills they need over time. Leaders need to ensure that this new curriculum is delivered with equal rigour across all subjects and that teachers' expectations of what all pupils can achieve are consistently high.
- Some pupils struggle to articulate their learning. There is not enough focus in the new curriculum plans on making sure that pupils develop the vocabulary and skills to communicate their academic knowledge and ideas successfully. Leaders need to ensure that, in all subjects, regular opportunities for this are carefully planned for.
- When teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well, some pupils do not engage with learning as well as they should. Leaders need to make sure that all staff have the skills and confidence to apply the behaviour policy consistently.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 9–10 June 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	140037
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10087433
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	865
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	60
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andrew Simmons
Headteacher	Mark Lewis
Website	www.tas.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	9–10 June 2015

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, The Thomas Alleyne School has increased in size by approximately 200 pupils.
- The school makes use of the Stevenage Education Support Centre’s provision for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator. A meeting was also held with the chair and members of the local governing body and the chair and chief executive of The Hart Schools Trust.
- Inspectors focused on the quality of the curriculum in English, science and modern foreign languages. Discussions were held with the curriculum leader of each subject

and with subject teachers. Inspectors visited lessons in these subject areas, talked to pupils and scrutinised a sample of books.

- Inspectors visited other lessons and walked around the school at different times of the day to check on behaviour and conduct.
- Discussions were held with members of staff about what it is like to work at the school. Different groups of pupils gave their views on what it is like to be a pupil at the school.
- To make sure that safeguarding is effective, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leader, spoke to pupils and teachers and sampled records of actions that leaders take when a pupil needs extra support. Records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults who work at the school were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Lesley Daniel, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Peter Whear

Ofsted Inspector

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