

Inspection of Thomas Mills High School

Saxtead Road, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 9HE

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected Thomas Mills High School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged Thomas Mills High School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy. From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened in Thomas Mills High School's effectiveness before and after it converted to academy status.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Thomas Mills High School receive a good quality of education. They show an eagerness to learn. Pupils value the strong teaching they get.

In lessons and around the school, behaviour is calm and purposeful. Most pupils are polite and friendly. Pupils say that bullying does not usually happen, and if it does, staff deal with it well.

Pupils say that leaders could do more to teach them to understand difference. They say that some of their peers do not respect those pupils with different backgrounds or attitudes from themselves.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs and other opportunities to help them develop personally. They receive well-considered guidance about their next steps when leaving school. Almost all pupils go on to positive destinations, with many going to top universities.

While many pupils feel safe at the school, some pupils are uncomfortable about how effectively staff respond to their worries. They say that this prevents them from disclosing their concerns. Pupils say that leaders could provide more helpful ways for them to report these.

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

Leaders' processes for safeguarding are weak. Leaders do not have the information they need in order to know that pupils in the school are safe. Neither senior leaders nor the trustees check thoroughly on the work of the designated safeguarding leads. Some leaders have not had appropriate training. They do not know how and when to record their concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. Too many decisions rely on informal conversations rather than rigorous procedures. This means that leaders are not able to ensure that the safeguarding processes leaders use are effective.

The personal development curriculum does not provide pupils with a secure understanding of respecting others for their differences. While some aspects of personal development are discussed during assemblies, it is not enough to ensure that pupils' attitudes towards others are well developed and embedded in pupils' day-to-day actions. A substantial minority of pupils report that some of their peers do not show respect for those who are different from themselves.

Leaders do not have a clear oversight of how well pupils attend school. Leaders do not know what percentage of pupils have low attendance, or which specific groups of pupils do not come to school regularly. Because of this, leaders are unable to check effectively whether their actions to improve pupils' attendance are working.

Trustees have a range of knowledge and skills to check that the quality of education is effective. However, they do not closely monitor leaders' actions and work to

ensure that pupils are safeguarded. Trustees do not know whether leaders' systems to keep pupils safe are effective. Consequently, trustees are not in a position to hold leaders to account for their actions.

The curriculum is well planned. Subject leaders ensure that pupils build their understanding from what they already know. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They check whether pupils understand what they are learning and address misconceptions. As a result, pupils achieve well across the whole curriculum.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support. Leaders identify the needs of these pupils accurately. Leaders ensure that they put in place effective actions to support pupils' needs. Staff are well trained to help pupils with SEND. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve well and access the same curriculum as their peers. They develop the knowledge they need to be well prepared for their next steps.

Leaders prioritise reading. Staff create a culture in which pupils enjoy reading. Pupils talk positively about what they learn from reading. In addition, the weakest readers get effective support to help them catch up. Consequently, pupils are able to access the full content of the curriculum and develop their reading fluency.

A range of clubs is on offer, and while these were affected by the pandemic, they have restarted and contribute positively towards pupils' personal development.

Students in the sixth form thrive both academically and personally. Students contribute to the wider life of the school. For example, they run the house system, and mentor younger pupils. This helps build their sense of responsibility. Students learn practical skills that will help them later on, such as in personal finance. The well-structured environment in the sixth form helps students to use their independent study times well. As a result, they develop positive attitudes for learning, and subsequently for life.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Safeguarding records are not well maintained. Important safeguarding information is not stored securely. Leaders are not always clear where the records are. This means that leaders do not have to hand the information they need to support vulnerable pupils.

Staff receive training to understand the risks in the local area. Pupils learn how to stay safe online. However, the processes that leaders have put in place for teaching pupils how to stay safe are weak.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' processes for safeguarding are weak. Because of this, leaders are not able to ensure that pupils are safeguarded well. As a matter of urgency, leaders must address these weaknesses and put in place rigorous safeguarding procedures to ensure that they know that pupils, including the most vulnerable, are safeguarded effectively.
- Leaders do not have a clear oversight of the attendance and safeguarding processes in the school. As a result, they do not know enough about the impact of actions they have taken. Leaders should ensure that they have all the information they need and use it purposefully to support them to help improve the systems and processes in place to safeguard pupils effectively.
- Some leaders do not have the knowledge they need to ensure that safeguarding concerns are accurately recorded. This means that leaders cannot be sure that all the concerns are raised that should be. Leaders must ensure that all leaders are trained to understand how and when to record their concerns about pupils' safety and welfare.
- Leaders' curriculum programmes to provide pupils with understanding of difference are not effective enough. Pupils report that some of their peers do not show respect for those who are different from themselves. Leaders should ensure that pupils receive the appropriate knowledge and skills to help them understand all the protected characteristics, so that they are able to apply these in their day-to-day lives.
- Trustees do not carry out sufficient checks on the work of school leaders. Because of this, their oversight of leaders' work on important aspects of the school's work, such as safeguarding, is weak. Trustees must ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to hold leaders to account, and then do so.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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	136782
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10199296
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,143
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	272
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sue Preston
Headteacher	Philip Hurst
Website	www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school became an academy in June 2011.
- Most pupils are from a White British background.
- The school has a lower than average proportion of pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The school uses alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement,

because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other leaders, staff, pupils and trustees.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school improvement plan, school policies, curriculum plans in a range of subjects, and the minutes of trustees' meetings.
- In order to evaluate the quality of education, inspectors did deep dives in mathematics, English, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages and history. In each subject, inspectors carried out meetings with subject leaders, conducted lesson visits, had discussions with staff and pupils, and looked at pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record, considered the school's safeguarding policy, held meetings with the designated safeguarding lead, checked safeguarding records, and spoke to leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed the 135 responses that were submitted by parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 102 free-text responses submitted during the inspection. Inspectors also considered the 71 responses to the staff survey, and the 110 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Katherine Douglas	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Diana Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
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