

Inspection of The Thomas Cowley High School

School Lane, Donington, Spalding, Lincolnshire PE11 4TF

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 July 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a friendly school where pupils feel safe and have good relationships with staff. They enjoy being part of the school musical and sports day. They read throughout the week. Pupils want to work hard. They want to get a good education.

Pupils are not getting the education they should. Leaders offer them a narrow and unsuitable range of subjects. The school has low expectations of what pupils can achieve. In many lessons, pupils are not challenged. The programme for personal development is not effective. Pupils are not prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not have their needs identified, assessed or met. Leaders and teachers do not give them the support they need to thrive.

Pupils who often miss school do not get the support they need to attend more. Until recently, leaders did not check the well-being and attendance of pupils who are educated at off-site, alternative provisions.

The school is going through a difficult period of change. Throughout this, key leaders and staff have endeavoured to make sure that pupils feel cared for.

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

Trustees and leaders have failed to make sure that pupils get a good deal. Pupils and staff have been let down. Many senior leaders left the school recently. With external support, the remaining school leaders have acted to identify and address the significant weaknesses in the school. They recognise that there is much work to do to bring about the necessary improvements. They are working with staff on plans to improve the school.

The school does not offer an appropriate range of subjects. Pupils do not study computing at any stage. In Years 7 and 8, design and technology is limited to food and nutrition. In Year 11, pupils do not study religious education. Too few pupils study the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate suite of qualifications. For example, many pupils do not study both a language and a humanities subject.

Leaders have not established a culture of high aspirations. They have left subject leaders to work in isolation to set their own curriculum aims. In some subjects, such as languages and art, pupils benefit from a challenging and well-planned curriculum. However, in most subjects, the curriculum is not ambitious. Many teachers have low expectations. Pupils are not challenged. They do not learn as well as they should.

In many subjects, leaders have not identified the important knowledge that they want pupils to learn. They focus on what activities pupils will do and not on what they will learn. Often, teachers do not check pupils' understanding. Pupils develop misconceptions. Teachers do not pick up on pupils' mistakes. Teachers do not use

assessment well. Pupils complete lots of tests but teachers do not use these to inform the next steps for pupils.

The provision for pupils with SEND is poor. Leaders fail to identify and assess these pupils' needs. Leaders do not give teachers the advice that they need to support these pupils in their learning, so that pupils with SEND achieve as well as they should.

Teachers make sure that pupils in key stage 3 read often. Pupils get help to improve their reading. Pupils say that they value the school library.

Pupils are not prepared for life in modern Britain. The careers programme is not effective. The personal development programme does not give pupils the knowledge and understanding they need to flourish in life.

The school is generally calm and orderly. Pupils are friendly and polite. A small minority of pupils do not treat others with respect. There is some vandalism. Some pupils make derogatory comments that upset others. There is some disruption to learning. Teachers do not deal with such disruption consistently.

A high number of pupils are often absent from school. They are missing out on learning. Leaders do not track attendance effectively. They do not give pupils the support they need to improve their attendance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Pupils know that they can turn to adults if they are worried. Staff are vigilant to signs that a pupil may need support. Staff report their concerns promptly. Leaders and staff respond to pupils' needs. Leaders make sure that pupils get the support they need, including from external agencies.

The curriculum does not ensure that pupils learn how to keep themselves and others safe, including when online.

Leaders do not check if pupils who are educated in alternative provisions are attending. Leaders cannot be sure that these pupils are safe and well. This has left these pupils at risk.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not monitor the attendance or well-being of pupils who attend alternative provision. This leaves these pupils at risk. Leaders must ensure that there are in place appropriate checks on the well-being and attendance of pupils who are educated at alternative provisions, so that leaders can respond swiftly to any concerns that they may identify.

- Leaders have not made sure that the curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) is of a high quality. The PSHE and RSE curriculums do not meet pupils' needs. Pupils do not learn about how to keep themselves and others safe. Careers information, advice and guidance are not effective. Pupils are not well-equipped for life. Leaders must ensure that the PSHE and RSE curriculums prepare pupils for their next steps and for life in modern Britain, and that these curriculums meet statutory requirements.
- Leaders do not identify or assess the needs of pupils with SEND. They do not make sure that teachers know what strategies to use in the classroom in order to meet these pupils' needs. As a result, the needs of pupils with SEND are not met. They do not learn as well as they should. Leaders must ensure that the identification and assessment of these pupils' needs are accurate, and that these pupils receive the support they require to help them achieve well and thrive.
- The school has low expectations of what pupils can achieve. The curriculum is not ambitious. Pupils are not challenged. Leaders must make sure that there is an appropriate range of subjects that pupils can study. They must ensure that the curriculum for each subject is ambitious and rigorous.
- In many subjects, leaders have not thought carefully about what they want pupils to know and be able to do. Teachers do not focus on the important knowledge. They do not all check pupils' understanding before moving learning on. Pupils develop misconceptions and gaps in their learning. Leaders must make sure that there is clarification as to the precise knowledge that pupils should acquire across the different subjects and that teachers understand the importance of checking pupils' understanding before introducing new learning.
- Leaders have low expectations of pupils' attendance. They do not use information about attendance to identify patterns in pupil absence. They do not give pupils the support they need to improve their attendance. Leaders must ensure that expectations of pupils' attendance are high and that those who need it receive appropriate challenge and support to attend regularly.
- Having considered the evidence, I strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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	138755
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10241671
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	612
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon Lilley
Headteacher	Christopher Wright
Website	www.thomascowley.lincs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher is a temporary headteacher who took up post in May 2022.
- The school is currently receiving external support from the South Lincolnshire Academies Trust.
- The school uses three registered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive information about the full range of education options available to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons

responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with senior and other leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders from the South Lincolnshire Academies Trust.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with trustees from the Thomas Cowley High School Ltd.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. The lead inspector spoke to representatives from the three alternative provisions.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, languages and science. As part of the deep dives, inspectors visited lessons, spoke with curriculum leaders, reviewed curriculum plans and reviewed pupils' work. They also spoke with pupils and teachers.
- Inspectors visited lessons and form time. They observed pupils at various times of the school day, including at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents and staff through discussions during the inspection and the Ofsted surveys.

Inspection team

Aoife Galletly, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Stevens	Her Majesty's Inspector
Adrian Rollins	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Vasey	Ofsted Inspector

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