

# Inspection of Thomas Whitehead CofE Academy

Angels Lane, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5HH

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Inspection dates: 25 and 26 January 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Early years provision

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Inadequate

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils benefit from the new, ambitious curriculum. This is helping them to build an increasingly secure body of knowledge so they learn well over time. The changes made are also improving aspects of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, because many pupils in the school had a weak curriculum experience before the improvements were made, they still have some gaps in what they know in some areas of the curriculum. These are not always picked up and addressed quickly enough.

There are a wide range of opportunities for pupils, which they value and appreciate. Pupils enjoy coming to school and they care for each other. They value the wide range of opportunities that contribute to their time in school. Shared time together in assemblies helps pupils to reflect on key values. It also provides pupil prefects with an opportunity to show leadership skills through taking on a responsible role. Pupils appreciate the improvements made to their lessons, and feel more confident as a result.

Pupils know they are safe in school. They have a clear understanding of the expectations of how they should behave. Pupils trust adults and say they act immediately to sort out any worries, including with bullying if it occurs. Pupils report that behaviour is respectful around school and know that serious incidents are not common.

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

Leaders and staff have worked with continued determination to improve the quality of education. A key feature of the improvement is the revised curriculum now in place. This has raised expectations of what pupils will learn during their time in school. The new curriculum has not been established for enough time to show the difference in pupils' achievement in the longer term. Leaders have not fully checked how effective the curriculum delivery is across all areas of the curriculum. However, there is clear evidence that pupils are knowing and remembering more of what they are learning. This includes pupils with SEND.

Staff across the school work closely with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Together, they identify pupils' specific needs accurately. There is a shared commitment to engage pupils with SEND fully in the curriculum. However, staff do not always have the specialist understanding they need to adapt learning in some areas. This leads to learning activities in some lessons that are not matched closely to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Due to the previously weak curriculum, many pupils have some gaps in what they need to know. In some subjects, teachers make accurate checks to identify and address these. However, there are areas of the curriculum where assessment is not used effectively enough to support pupils at risk of falling behind.

The teaching of reading is now a stronger feature of the curriculum. Leaders have ensured that staff teach phonics in a systematic way. This helps pupils make a secure start to their early reading. Pupils practise reading with books that are accurately aligned to the sounds and words they can read. This builds their confidence and fluency. Throughout the school, there is a shared focus on the use of high-quality books and regular reading practice. This promotes reading for pleasure effectively.

Expectations for good behaviour start in the Nursery. Adults model care and empathy, and pupils across the school follow this example. As a result, classrooms are calm, and help pupils to remain focused on their learning.

Pupils engage with personal, social and health education with maturity. They are reflective about the memorable content they learn and discuss in these lessons. The Christian ethos of the school shines through in the inclusive values that pupils hold. Pupils are proud of their individuality and uniqueness. They say that it is important for everyone to be included, and this is seen in practice. Financial support ensures all pupils can take part in the exciting trips on offer. Pupils also access a range of clubs that run before and after school, such as dodgeball, gymnastics and street dance.

The ambitious curriculum in the early years is well established. There are clear routines in place to check how children are progressing in all areas of learning. Specially crafted learning activities enable children to apply what they know with success. Children with lower starting points with language and communication are well catered for. Adults working with them routinely model effective approaches to speaking, reading and writing. They have high expectations for what children can achieve.

Trustees and the local governing body have established very strong working links to support the leaders to improve the school. This includes robust routines to hold leaders to account for pupils' achievement and for curriculum improvements. These have been key features in securing the critical improvements already made. There is demonstrable capacity for the ongoing developments that are starting to take place.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have continued to maintain a strong safeguarding culture in the school. They ensure all mandatory pre-employment checks are made. Staff have relevant, up-to-date training. This means that they know how to identify, record and share concerns. Leaders respond swiftly and are tenacious in making sure the right support is provided.

Leaders have invested in child and family pastoral support resources to best meet the emerging and ongoing needs of pupils. Pupils learn strategies and knowledge of

how to keep safe. They know it is important to share any worries they have with the trusted adults in school.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Teachers do not make consistently effective use of assessment to check what pupils know before introducing new concepts. This means that pupils are sometimes building new knowledge on weak foundations. Leaders should ensure that teachers routinely identify the gaps in the important knowledge that pupils need for long-term success. Teachers should adapt lessons in response to this, making sure that this knowledge is revisited and secured in pupils' memory over time.
- Staff have gaps in their specialist knowledge of how best to adapt learning for pupils with SEND. This limits the achievement of some pupils with SEND in some areas of the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that staff have expertise in adaptive practice, so that adjustments are made where needed to support all pupils to fully access the ambitious curriculum and achieve well.
- There are gaps in leaders' understanding about how well the new curriculum is improving pupils' learning experiences. Leaders, including subject leaders, need to establish effective routines to monitor the impact of the full curriculum, checking that the intended high expectations for learning are implemented as planned and making a difference. This will ensure that pupils, including the most vulnerable, are best prepared for their next stage of education.

## **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.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	143850
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10259733
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	209
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Jenny Jenkins
<b>Headteacher</b>	Natasha Chiswell
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thomaswhiteheadceacademy.co.uk">www.thomaswhiteheadceacademy.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	12 and 13 July 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- A new substantive headteacher started in September 2022.
- The school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of St Albans. As a school designated as having a religious character, it was subject to a separate section 48 inspection in March 2017 and was judged to be satisfactory. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place within eight years of the previous inspection.
- The school has an on-site Nursery class that is managed by the trust.
- The school does not currently use off-site alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

- This was the third routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the SENCo and a range of other leaders to explore provision across the school, including behaviour, the curriculum, provision for SEND and early years.
- The lead inspector met with three representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair of the trust. A meeting was also held with three members of the local governing body. A separate meeting was held with the chief executive officer of the trust and the director of education.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads, the school's business manager and other staff to discuss safeguarding.
- During the inspection, inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, curriculum plans, school development plans, and safeguarding and behaviour records.
- Inspectors also spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning in lessons to understand what it is like to be a pupil in their school. Inspectors also observed the behaviour of pupils across the school site.
- Inspectors considered the 18 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the nine responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

## Inspection team

Kristian Hewitt, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

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