

Inspection of Thomas Mills High School

Saxtead Road, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 9HE

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 January 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel safe at school. They recognise that there have been considerable improvements in the way leaders manage concerns that they raise. They are confident that adults will help them if they are unhappy. Pupils agree that it is okay to be different and that their peers are tolerant and welcoming. They value their lessons where they learn about being healthy, staying safe and accepting differences. Bullying is rare at the school, but some pupils say that there are still a few unkind comments from their peers. This can sometimes continue, even after adults have intervened.

Pupils are very well behaved in lessons and social time. They are respectful to adults and polite to visitors. All pupils know they are expected to do well. Sixth-form students show high levels of resilience in their lessons, and grapple with challenging work very positively.

Pupils really enjoy participating in a wide range of extra-curricular clubs. There are a lot of activities to choose from. Comic book club, film club, music, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and football are just some of the popular options. There is ample time at lunch to attend the activities on offer, so more pupils join in.

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

Leaders have created a curriculum that meets the breadth of the national curriculum. In most subjects, it is well designed to ensure that pupils build their skills and knowledge over time and are well prepared for their next stage of education or training.

In many areas, including in art and modern foreign languages (MFL), teachers know exactly what pupils need to know and be able to do. They use a range of checks, so they understand how well pupils are doing. Many teachers regularly use quizzes in lessons, for example, to reinforce important information. In most areas of the curriculum, leaders ensure that pupils respond to teachers' feedback and that teachers adapt their teaching if pupils are struggling. This helps pupils who fall behind to catch up quickly. Sometimes, pupils do not remember what they have been taught, and leaders do not check well enough that gaps in pupils' understanding are identified and addressed by teachers.

In a few areas, leaders have not planned their key stage 3 curriculum with sufficient ambition. Sometimes, for example, there is an over-reliance on activities linked to GCSE examination style tasks. Where this happens, teachers are not consistent in identifying the small steps of important content pupils need to learn, or in checking that pupils have remembered what they should know, before moving them on to the next stage. Consequently, pupils and teachers are not clear about exactly where and when there are gaps in knowledge, so it is more difficult for pupils to achieve well.

Most teachers have good subject knowledge. They use ambitious vocabulary, and pupils learn to do the same. Teachers are skilled at breaking down tasks and explaining new information clearly. This means pupils, including sixth-form students, are able to access challenging work successfully.

Leaders have accurately identified pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The plans provided to help these pupils are clear and useful. Adults follow the plans carefully and ensure that pupils are supported to achieve well.

Reading is prioritised. All younger pupils read regularly in school through dedicated reading lessons. Extra help is in place for pupils who struggle to read. This helps them to increase their reading fluency and to improve their understanding of the texts they read.

Adults have high expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons, and this means that disruption is rare. Most pupils are keen to work hard and to do well.

Leaders have worked diligently since the last inspection to improve the quality of the personal development curriculum. Specialist teachers now deliver important topics in dedicated lesson time. Assemblies and tutor time sessions reinforce key topics successfully. Pupils learn about important issues such as differences and equality. They display good levels of mutual respect and are tolerant of others. Leaders have ensured that pupils receive appropriate independent careers advice and guidance. As a result, pupils are well prepared for adulthood and their next stage of education or training.

Since the last inspection, governors have worked effectively to increase their skills and knowledge, particularly around safeguarding. They have undertaken relevant training and sought external expertise where appropriate. Consequently, they are effective in holding leaders to account as they continue to improve the provision.

Staff like working at the school and feel well supported by leaders. Parents are equally positive about their children's experiences at school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including governors, have addressed the deficiencies in safeguarding that were identified at the previous inspection. Adults are well trained to identify signs of potential harm in pupils. They are confident to report concerns. Leaders respond appropriately and in a timely manner, liaising with external agencies when needed. Governors are thorough in their safeguarding checks. The important links between safeguarding and behaviour information are being reviewed to ensure that all concerns are picked up quickly.

Pupils learn about potential safeguarding risks and discuss important topics in form time. Pupil voice is used to inform additional teaching if pupils request more information about a particular theme.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a minority of subjects, teachers focus on examination assessment objectives and skills too early. This means that pupils do not learn a broad enough range of subject content in sufficient detail before they complete complex examination style tasks. Consequently, they do not achieve as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the range of subject content is taught and that pupils have grasped the crucial component knowledge that they need to achieve well before moving on to the next stage.
- Teachers do not consistently use assessment as well as they should. As a result, gaps in some pupils' knowledge are not addressed quickly enough, and some activities are not matched well enough to what pupils need to learn. Leaders should ensure that they support teachers to assess well and adapt their teaching accordingly.

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

Unique reference number	136782
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10259745
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	1,092
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	244
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sue Preston
Headteacher	Philip Hurst
Website	www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 September 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school currently uses two registered alternative providers.
- Since the previous inspection, one new deputy headteacher has been appointed externally. One deputy headteacher and one assistant headteacher have been promoted internally.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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(5) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, MFL, design and technology, history and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also visited a range of other lessons and scrutinised the curriculum in religious education.
- The lead inspector met with staff responsible for the administration of the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils. The lead inspector scrutinised the school's safeguarding records and spoke to governors regarding safeguarding.
- Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experience of school, including behaviour and bullying.
- An inspector met with leaders to discuss pupils' personal development and enrichment opportunities as well as behaviour and attendance.
- An inspector met with the leader responsible for the sixth form.
- An inspector met with the school's special educational needs coordinator.
- An inspector spoke to the alternative providers currently used by the school.
- The lead inspector met with governors and scrutinised a range of documents, including improvement plans, safeguarding documentation, minutes of governors' meetings and audits.
- Inspectors reviewed 78 responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils. Inspectors took account of 222 responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors considered 66 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

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