

Inspection of Thomas Telford School

Old Park, Telford, Shropshire TF3 4NW

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

This school was last inspected 13 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time. 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 at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at Thomas Telford School. A culture of high expectations permeates every aspect of school life. From Years 7 to 13, pupils rise to the academic challenge and wealth of additional opportunities that staff provide. Leaders work in close partnership with parents and carers to ensure that pupils grow and develop into successful young adults.

Pupils' behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. In lessons, pupils show a hunger and desire to learn. They feed off teachers' enthusiasm and passion for their subject. At lesson change-over and social times, pupils are mature and respectful of others. They carry their red folders to each lesson sensibly and wear their uniform and physical education (PE) kit with pride. Leaders deal with bullying swiftly if it ever occurs.

The curriculum is broad and varied. In many subjects, teachers deepen pupils' knowledge and extend their learning through activities in and outside of the classroom. The sixth-form curriculum is similarly wide-ranging and supplemented with a wealth of other meaningful opportunities.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the support it gives to their children. As one parent commented in response to Ofsted's survey, 'My child is encouraged to follow her dreams and reach her full potential.'

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

Leaders have constructed a highly ambitious curriculum. Careful thought has been given as to how the key stage 3 curriculum successfully prepares pupils for the rigours and demands of key stages 4 and 5. In many subjects, pupils achieve extremely well in both academic and vocational qualifications.

The curriculum is impressively planned and sequenced. Leaders have identified the smaller blocks of knowledge pupils need in order that they can make connections in what they are learning. Leaders have given a high level of thought to organising learning so that pupils build on what they know and revisit key ideas. In science, for example, leaders have constructed the curriculum around 'the big picture', enabling pupils to draw together key knowledge and deepen their understanding of important concepts. There are similar strengths in art. The curriculum builds over five years so that pupils talk confidently and with sophistication about contemporary and historical artists. Across the curriculum, pupils make exceptionally strong progress and produce work of a very high standard.

Teachers use their subject knowledge highly effectively to implement the curriculum. In lessons, strong modelling and clear explanations ensure that pupils understand the tasks they are completing and how these connect to what they already know. Teachers use questioning extremely well to check pupils' understanding and pinpoint

any gaps in their knowledge. Additionally, teachers use a range of different assessment strategies so that pupils know what they do well and how they could improve. As a result, pupils make impressive gains in their knowledge and understanding over time.

Leaders have placed high importance on reading across the school. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have regular visits to the school library, which is well stocked with a range of different texts. Reading interventions are carefully planned and based on accurately identifying those who need additional support. Leaders ensure that weaker readers are part of a phonics catch-up programme to help them improve their reading. Staff also run a highly successful peer reading scheme, where sixth-form students read to younger pupils.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are extremely well supported. Leaders accurately identify pupils' needs and provide clear, precise and effective support. This helps to ensure that pupils with SEND are well integrated into school life and make similar progress to others.

Leaders' work to enhance pupils' personal development is exceptionally strong. Large numbers of pupils take part in 'Session 3' after school in sports, performing arts and academic clubs. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the wealth of different activities they can select from and how they are actively encouraged to pursue their talents and interests. Leaders have carefully considered how pupils learn about relationships and sex education. Pupils learn about topics such as consent, healthy relationships and physical health and mental well-being in an age-appropriate way. In personal tutorials, pupils listen to weekly broadcasts where staff share what is happening across the school, including sporting successes and 'star student' of the week.

The school's careers programme is rich and extensive. Pupils in all year groups have opportunities to engage with the world of work and increase their range and depth of experiences over time. Leaders ensure that pupils are fully aware of the pathways available to them when they leave school, including routes into apprenticeships and further education. Sixth-form students are active role models for younger pupils and play a key role in school life. Students greatly value the support they receive in helping to complete university applications. Many students achieve highly in the sixth form and successfully move on to Russell Group universities.

Governors are highly committed to the school and are rightly proud of its reputation in the local community. They have a strong understanding of the school's many strengths. However, the school's variation from standard practice in the application of attendance codes means that governors do not have a clear oversight of pupils' attendance and behaviour. Therefore, they are hampered in their ability to hold leaders to account for aspects of the school's performance. In addition, the school's behaviour policy does not include all steps that leaders take to help support pupils. Leaders are aware of this and are already starting to make changes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all appropriate safeguarding checks are carried out on staff before they begin work at the school. All staff receive annual and ongoing safeguarding training to ensure that their knowledge of key topics is kept up to date. Staff are aware of the systems to follow should they have a concern about a pupil. Records kept by leaders show that pupils who need help and support get this in a timely way. Leaders are aware that some processes could be further improved to help strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

Pupils learn to keep themselves safe through assemblies, and personal tutor sessions on topics such as grooming and the sharing of inappropriate images.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that staff use attendance codes consistently to record when pupils are sent home due to poor behaviour. This means that governors do not have a clear oversight of pupils' behaviour and attendance. Leaders should ensure that, when pupils are sent home due to poor behaviour, this is recorded in the register in such a way that enables governors to have a better understanding of attendance, especially when pupils are sent home as a disciplinary measure. Leaders should also review their behaviour policy so that it accurately reflects the interventions that are put in place to support pupils with their behaviour.

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	123627
Local authority	Telford & Wrekin
Inspection number	10242477
Type of school	City technology college
School category	Community
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	1567
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	618
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Bowater
Headteacher	Sir Kevin Satchwell
Website	www.ttsonline.net
Date of previous inspection	21 and 22 January 2009

Information about this school

- The school is a city technology college that is funded directly by central government. The school is sponsored by The Mercers' Company and Tarmac Holdings Limited.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first 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 focused on the following subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, PE, and art and design. Inspectors examined leaders' curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about the way these subjects are taught. They also looked at other subjects to check how they are planned and taught.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about pupils' behaviour and attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- Inspectors talked to staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They examined how leaders make employment checks on staff and scrutinised further safeguarding records. They also asked how incidents reported by pupils are recorded and analysed.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors held meetings with governors, assistant executive advisors, the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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