

Inspection of The Thomas Adams School

Lowe Hill, Wem, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 5UB

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 September 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	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Mark Cooper. This school is part of the 3–18 Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David O’Toole, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gary Turner.

What is it like to attend this school?

Thomas Adams is a warm, friendly and vibrant school. This is evident in the positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils. The school sets high expectations for what it wants pupils to achieve and works hard to help nurture individual talents and interests.

Many pupils enjoy coming to school and behave well. In lessons, pupils listen attentively to their teachers and engage purposefully in tasks that are set for them. At social times, pupils play together sensibly or chat politely to visitors. Pupils feel safe around school and are confident that teachers will take decisive action to deal with any issues, should they occur. Students who attend the school's sixth form act as positive role models for those in younger years.

Pupils study a wide range of subjects across the curriculum. In many subjects, pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Alongside this, the school offers an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Many pupils participate in sport, music and drama clubs.

Parents and carers are highly positive about the school and the support it provides. As one parent commented in response to Ofsted's survey, 'This is an excellent school that encourages children to learn and be confident.'

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

The curriculum, across all key stages, is suitably broad and ambitious. The school has carefully considered the order of topics and how pupils develop and connect their knowledge and skills over time. In many areas, leaders have also considered what smaller chunks of knowledge are needed to help pupils understand more complex ideas. Together, this all helps pupils to make good progress in their learning.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use this to good effect to teach the curriculum. They present new material well and provide clear instructions to pupils when completing tasks. Teachers generally use assessment effectively to check what pupils know and remember. In stronger subjects, such as design and technology, and art, teachers provide highly effective feedback. This helps pupils to know what they are doing well and where they need to improve. In some areas, teachers' questioning is used effectively to check pupils' understanding. Where this is the case, pupils are confident in what they know and can do. However, on some occasions, teachers do not use questioning consistently well to check pupils' understanding before moving on. This can allow gaps in knowledge or misconceptions to go undetected.

The school provides effective support to pupils who struggle with their reading. Staff accurately identify those on entry to the school who need additional support. Leaders ensure that these pupils are given the right help, including phonics support,

to decode unfamiliar words and/or improve their fluency. Pupils who are part of this programme make strong progress in reading from their starting points.

The school identifies accurately those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Learning plans are reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date and reflect the needs of these pupils. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND study an equally ambitious curriculum and are included in all aspects of school life. Teachers often provide effective support to pupils with SEND to help them with their learning. However, in some instances, teachers do not adapt tasks effectively to take account of pupils with SEND or those who speak English as an additional language. This can slow their learning.

The school provides many opportunities for pupils' broader development. The school's house system forms an integral part of school life, and many pupils are involved in competitions, community activities and charity events. The school has put together a detailed personal, social, health and economic curriculum. This is delivered through 'off timetable days' throughout the school year as well as through form times and assemblies. Pupils learn about key topics such as consent and healthy relationships. They also learn about how to stay safe, including when online and in the local community. However, some pupils told inspectors that the structure of these days does not always help them to remember these key topics long term.

The school has put together an extensive and well-organised careers programme. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about future employment opportunities through talks from various companies. Pupils also learn about their next steps in education with visits and talks from local colleges and apprenticeship providers. Students in the sixth form are supported extremely well. Students regularly hear from guest speakers as well as attending an annual UCAS convention. Students value the support they receive with university applications and how the sixth form prepares them for life beyond school.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school. They work together effectively with parents, trust leaders and those responsible for governance. Leaders recognise the school's many strengths and the areas that require further work. They are aware that sometimes the high expectations they set for all aspects of school life are not consistently delivered in practice.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not systemically check that pupils are secure in their learning before moving on to new content. This can lead to pupils developing misconceptions or gaps in knowledge that are not being picked up and addressed

swiftly. The school should strengthen and share existing good practice so that all teachers check learning effectively.

- On some occasions, teachers do not take account of the needs of all pupils when setting tasks. Where this happens, pupils, including those with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language, struggle to access their learning and complete work to the best of their ability. The school should ensure that teachers successfully adapt tasks, when appropriate, to meet the needs of all pupils.
- In some areas of school life, leaders' high expectations are not fully realised. There are sometimes inconsistencies in what is expected of pupils regarding both their work and behaviour. The school should ensure that all staff understand and implement school policies and actions consistently well so that each pupil can achieve their full potential.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	147508
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10268145
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	1,237
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	173
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gary Turner
Headteacher	Mark Cooper
Website	www.thomasadams.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the 3–18 Education Trust in March 2020.
- The headteacher was appointed in January 2019. Other members of the school leadership team were new in post from September 2021.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- A small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 attend a work experience placement one day a week as part of their curriculum.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the boarding provision.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer, the chair of the trust and the chair of the local governing body. Meetings were also held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, design and technology, and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also looked at other subjects to check how they are planned and taught.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Huw Bishop	Ofsted Inspector
Gail Peyton	Ofsted Inspector
Ellen Walton	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Sims	Ofsted Inspector

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