

Inspection of Thomas Ashton School

Bennett Street, Hyde, Cheshire SK14 4SS

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils do not receive a meaningful and appropriate education that meets their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Expectations for their achievement are low. Pupils do not learn what they should in many subjects. As a result, they are ill equipped for the next stage in their education.

Pupils arrive at the school with very mixed experiences of education. Overall, they are happy at Thomas Ashton School. They like being in small classes and they enjoy being with their friends. However, pupils' behaviour is not managed well. This means that pupils frequently hear swear words or derogatory language. A significant minority of pupils display aggression at times towards others. The school does not support pupils well enough to develop respectful relationships with their peers and adults.

Pupils have opportunities to work in the local community. For example, they have recently engaged in activities with the residents at the local nursing home. Pupils also hold regular events to support a variety of local and national charities.

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

The school, including governors, has not been able to stem the decline in pupils' education since the previous inspection. Governors do not have the necessary skills or knowledge that they need in order to hold the school to account for pupils' performance. Members of the governing body too readily accept the information that they receive. There are no systems to check on its validity. In addition, subject leadership is underdeveloped. This means that the school's ability to establish and rectify any issues with the design and delivery of the curriculum is weak. A lack of leadership capacity at all levels means that the school is not able to bring about the required improvement without considerable support from external partners.

Pupils, all of whom have SEND, experience a poor quality of education. This is because the curriculum has not been shaped well enough to take account of their needs. The school has not given enough thought to how subjects come together to form a coherent, well-ordered curriculum. The knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which this should be taught have not been identified.

The lack of curriculum guidance makes it difficult for teachers to design learning that helps pupils to extend their knowledge over time. As a result, teachers work in isolation from each other when deciding what pupils should learn. In addition, teachers have not received the support that they need to enhance their own subject knowledge. As a result, pupils often experience a jumbled series of lessons across many subjects. This prevents pupils from building up their knowledge over time.

The absence of curriculum information makes it difficult for teachers to know what they should check when they are assessing pupils' learning. Teachers' use of assessment strategies is underdeveloped and ineffective. Pupils' learning is not

checked well enough to identify whether they have understood what has been taught. Teachers do not spot where knowledge is insecure; nor are they alert to pupils' misconceptions. This leads to wide gaps in pupils' learning. As a result, their understanding of many concepts is fragile. Pupils do not gain a secure foundation on which to build. They are not well equipped for later learning.

The school has not prioritised reading enough. The school environment does not help to foster a love of reading. Some pupils display negative attitudes towards books. Many choose to opt out of reading activities. Pupils do not receive a suitable phonics programme that helps them to become fluent, confident readers. Those pupils in the early stages of reading are not supported well enough. Staff do not have the necessary knowledge to teach phonics effectively. As a result, pupils struggle to read. This hampers their access to other subjects in the curriculum.

Many staff do not have the knowledge or expertise that they need to challenge poor behaviour effectively. Over time, some pupils have recognised that they can avoid learning by not behaving well. A significant majority of pupils are completely reliant on adults to manage their behaviour because they have not developed strategies to support them to manage their own emotions. At times, this leads to considerable disruption because some pupils display behaviours that interrupt their own learning and that of others.

The school has not ensured that pupils attend school often enough. Pupils' absence rates, including for persistent absence, are high. The school has only just raised the importance of attendance with parents and carers and staff. Historically, the school has not paid enough attention to the reasons behind pupils' absence. This has hampered the school from shaping its actions to tackle the underlying causes of non-attendance.

Pupils have the opportunity to take part in activities that take them outside the school building. However, the school has not structured these opportunities well enough so that pupils gain a broad and rich set of experiences to support their personal development. Pupils learn how to keep themselves physically healthy. They have opportunities to take part in sporting activities. Pupils visit different religious settings to put their learning about other faiths into context. Overall, pupils show an understanding of different types of relationships. Even so, the school has not ensured that pupils in the required year groups receive the careers information, advice and guidance that they should. This hinders pupils' ability to make informed decisions about their future.

Staff reported that the school supports their well-being and workload. For example, the school has provided staff with regular opportunities to speak to an independent person because they regularly deal with challenging behaviours and complex situations.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school recently introduced new safeguarding arrangements. Staff are now well trained in spotting when pupils may be at risk of harm. Where appropriate, the school works with other agencies to prevent pupils from coming to any potential harm. The school also ensures that pupils learn different ways to keep themselves safe. This includes when they are online.

Staff report their concerns about the pupils in their care quickly. Mostly, the school responds appropriately to such concerns. However, the school's systems for recording concerns do not provide enough assurances to the school or governors that agreed actions have happened. This has the potential for some safeguarding referrals to go unchecked.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school, including governors, has not stemmed the decline in pupils' achievement and behaviour since the previous inspection. Leadership capacity at all levels is weak. As a result, the school does not have the ability to tackle the shortcomings in pupils' education without considerable support. The school must ensure that there is sufficient knowledge and expertise among the workforce to secure much-needed and sustainable improvement.
- Governors do not have the necessary skills and knowledge that they need to hold the school to account for pupils' education and welfare. This contributes to the limited capacity to bring about improvement. Governors must ensure that they build their effectiveness so that they have an accurate oversight of the school's work.
- Subject leadership is underdeveloped. As a result, the school lacks the expertise to design a suitable curriculum and then to check that it is helping pupils to achieve well. This has contributed to the poor quality of education on offer at the school. The school should ensure that subject leadership improves so that there is ownership and oversight of what pupils are taught each day and over time.
- The curriculum lacks cohesion and structure. This leads to teachers working in isolation without an understanding of what pupils should learn and when this will happen. This prevents pupils from building a secure body of knowledge over time. Their achievement is weak as a result. The school must ensure that there is a well-ordered and ambitious curriculum that prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education.
- Assessment strategies are ineffective. This means that teachers are not able to spot when pupils have not understood what has been taught. This leads to wide gaps in pupils' knowledge. Their learning is fragile, so they struggle when faced with new concepts. The school must ensure that staff understand how to use assessment strategies well so that they can identify gaps in learning and take appropriate action to help pupils learn all that they should. Pupils at the early stages of learning to read do not receive a suitable phonics programme that is delivered systematically. Gaps in their reading knowledge do not close. This

means that pupils cannot read fluently, and some pupils develop negative attitudes towards reading. The school must ensure that it implements an appropriate phonics programme that is delivered well so that pupils learn to read with confidence and accuracy.

- Some pupils do not behave well. They show a lack of respect towards their peers and to staff. At times, this results in learning being disrupted or the use of harmful and derogatory name-calling. Staff are not well equipped to deal with such incidents or to help pupils to develop strategies to manage their own emotions. The school must ensure that staff are suitably trained to apply the behaviour policy consistently well so that incidents of unacceptable and harmful behaviour diminish.
- A considerable number of pupils are absent from school. This compounds pupils' weak achievement further. The school should find out the reasons why different groups of pupils choose not to come to school. It should then take suitable action to overcome the barriers to regular attendance so that absence levels decrease swiftly.
- Some pupils do not receive enough information to make informed choices about the next steps in their education, employment or training. This prevents them from setting aspirations for their future. The school should ensure that pupils receive appropriate careers guidance.
- The systems to maintain an oversight of safeguarding incidents lack rigour. This means that the school and governors cannot be fully assured that all the necessary actions to keep pupils safe have happened. The school should ensure that actions to support pupils at risk of harm are recorded with enough clarity to make sure that pupils are safe.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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	106278
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10256229
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Maureen Wallis
Headteacher	Emma Stewart
Website	www.thomasashton.tameside.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- There were no Reception-aged children on roll at the time of the inspection.
- A new headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection. Several staff are new to their leadership roles.
- Some staff have joined the school since the previous inspection. There are a few temporary staff working at the school.
- Leaders make use of one registered alternative provider for a small group of pupils.
- The school does not meet 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 inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was deemed a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked with pupils and staff, and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors listened to a small group of pupils reading aloud.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders to discuss pupils' rates of attendance and pupils' behaviour.
- The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair of governors. He also met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtimes and during their snack time. They scrutinised leaders' records of behaviour.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the school development plan and the school's self-evaluation document.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders 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 spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gary Kelly

Ofsted Inspector

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