

Inspection of Thomas Hall School

Cowley Bridge Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 5AD

Inspection dates: 19 to 20 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Phil Arnold. This school is part of Reach South Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Dean Ashton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Marcus Agius.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff provide a caring and inclusive culture at the school. Pupils who started in Reception and are progressing through the school to Year 11 say they value the sense of community and belonging. Many pupils join the school mid-year. They are well supported when they become pupils of the school. Pupils who have had challenging experiences before coming to the school, feel happy. There are positive relationships between pupils and staff.

However, the attendance of pupils is low. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils do not attend well. A few older pupils do not arrive at their lessons punctually. The school has made new behaviour expectations clear. In most lessons, pupils listen and engage. Pupils are positive about their learning.

Pupils all through the school attend the forest school. They appreciate this time. The school plans a wide range of clubs and visits. For example, trips to the theatre or participating in the Ten Tors challenge. The 'senate' represent pupils in the secondary phase. They meet regularly to represent the views of pupils to the school. They have contributed to the re-naming of the school and the new school uniform. Pupils feel listened to.

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

The school and the trust have ensured there is a broad curriculum running from Reception to Year 11. Many subjects are well planned and sequenced. Some parts of the curriculum have been through recent development. The school is ambitious to raise pupils' outcomes. In early years, there is an ambitious curriculum. The school structures it around topics to enthuse the children, such as dinosaurs. The school plans learning effectively for children to develop their language, numeracy and literacy.

Teachers ensure pupils revisit and recall their learning. Common practices to support pupils to remember more over time are being embedded. Some subjects have strong assessment routines in place. Where these are well implemented, pupils know what they need to do to get better.

The published outcomes for phonics are low. This year, the school has prioritised training to ensure the teaching of reading is robust. It checks this with care. As a result, pupils are more confident in sounding out and blending. Pupils read books matched to the sounds they have learned. The school makes sure there is support for those older pupils who have not secured their knowledge of phonics.

A significant number of pupils have additional needs. Teachers provide structures and models to support these pupils with their learning. However, learning plans do not provide clear targets for pupils. As a result, teachers do not have the information

they need to make adaptations to support pupils effectively. The school is commencing work to ensure that pupils' plans are more robust.

The school has planned a well structured personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils feel confident to discuss and explore challenging topics with maturity. They learn about sex education and relationships in a timely way. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe online. Pupils are proud of 'The Space', an area for pupils to meet and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community. Pupils value the many ways they debate ideas and explore democracy. The school makes sure pupils receive unbiased and broad career advice and guidance. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next steps.

The school has raised the expectations for behaviour. A majority of pupils understand this. They respond well to staff instruction. However, some pupils find it difficult to rise to the school's expectations. In most lessons, pupils follow routines well. For example, in phonics lessons, children behave well. They listen and follow instructions carefully.

The rate of pupils' attendance is low. The school tracks this effectively. It has put in some mechanisms to challenge and improve pupils' attendance. However, these are not sharply focused and so are not having the effect leaders desire.

The trust started to work with the school in earnest this academic year. Trust leaders are now providing strong support for the school. They have raised expectations. As a result, the school has an emerging understanding of what it needs to do next. Prior to this, training had not been in place to develop staff effectively in their roles. Until recently, the school did not have the strategic expertise to evaluate its work well. The school is beginning to make sure it sustains actions for improvement. The school improvement board has clear priorities. Staff find the workload high as the school goes through some accelerated change. Even so, staff feel supported by leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The targets for pupils with SEND are generic. Staff do not know the specific strategies to use for pupils to adapt learning meaningfully. The school must ensure the guidance for pupils with SEND is clearly defined to support their learning.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly, including those pupils with SEND. As a result, they do not progress with their learning. The school must make sure it

evaluates attendance data over time and acts on this to remove barriers to attendance.

- In some subjects, recent changes mean that staff are only just developing their knowledge of the curriculum. The school need to make sure the curriculum is well understood and planned so staff can implement it confidently.
- Professional training for leaders has not been effective in recent years. Consequently, many staff lack confidence in carrying out their roles. The school must ensure that leaders in all roles have the support needed to develop their knowledge and expertise.

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	147650
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10298090
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	456
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Marcus Agius
CEO of trust	Dean Ashton
Headteacher	Phil Arnold
Website	www.thomashallschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined Reach South Academy Trust in June 2023. Prior to that it had been with Avanti Schools Trust since 2020.
- The school is a small all-through school for pupils aged 4 to 16.
- Thomas Hall School has a larger than average proportion of pupils who have SEND.
- The school uses two registered alternative provisions and five unregistered provisions.
- 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 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 the evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, modern foreign languages 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.
- An inspector met with leaders to discuss the provision for pupils with SEND and reviewed documentation.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from the trust, including the CEO of the trust and representatives from the school improvement board.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including school development plans, behaviour records and minutes of governor meetings.
- 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 considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also reviewed letters and communication received during the inspection. Inspectors also viewed the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

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