Inspection of Thomas Whitehead Church of England Academy

Angels Lane, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5HH

Inspection dates:	17 and 18 June 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Natasha Chiswell. This school is part of the Diocese of St Albans Multi 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 (CEO), Anna Rogers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jenny Jenkins.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school are welcoming, kind and enjoy their learning. Pupils greet you with a smile as you walk through the door, happy to chat about what they are learning.

Pupils are ably supported to progress through their studies. Timely interventions help current pupils fill their gaps in learning. As a result of improvements since the previous inspection, pupils are catching up on the key knowledge needed to reach nationally expected standards by the end of Year 6.

The talents and interests of the children are fostered, both in and outside of the classroom. There are many clubs, competitions and trips, as well as regular visits to perform at local care homes. Community spirit is highly valued. Pupils learn to cooperate and help as a result.

Pupils feel safe. They are well cared for. They behave very well and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Staff know the pupils here and support for the pupils is strong. The schools' Christian values and ethos permeate all parts of school life. Pupils are encouraged to 'let their light shine'.

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

Leaders have shown sustained commitment to raising the quality of education. A significant part of this progress is a well-established curriculum, which has elevated expectations for what pupils should learn throughout their time at school. Its long-term impact on outcomes is yet to be seen, but there are encouraging signs that pupils are benefitting from this. Refinement of the curriculum to further support pupils is now underway. Some subjects do not always outline the key knowledge to be learned and in which order. This sometimes confuses pupils.

The school is emerging from a period of turbulence. Its recent actions to improve the quality of education pupils receive is having a positive impact. Reading is a prominent and well-developed aspect of the curriculum. Leaders have established a clear, systematic approach to phonics teaching, giving pupils a strong foundation in early reading. Pupils read books that are carefully matched to their phonics knowledge, helping to build both confidence and fluency. Pupils are swiftly picked up by the school if they are struggling and access interventions that help them to catch up and keep up.

Efforts to support writing are working well and pupils keenly improve work. Writing is also prioritised across the wider curriculum and pupils have lots of time to perfect their skills. Teachers are aware that their teaching must match pupils' needs and deploy many strategies to support this. Pupils are learning well in many subjects now. However, in a small number of subjects, staff not always accurately monitor pupil progress and achievement as precisely as they could. This means mistakes and misconceptions are not always picked up quickly.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Teachers routinely adapt work and provide support, when needed. The school ensures that pupils' needs are identified early and monitored closely when they begin to find things trickier. Pupils with SEND are set regular targets, which when met give the pupils confidence and a sense of achievement.

The early years curriculum is ambitious and understood by staff. Clear routines are in place to monitor children's progress across all areas of learning. Staff quickly notice when a child is having difficulty accessing their learning. Purposeful and well-designed activities allow children to successfully apply their knowledge. Language and communication are highly valued. Adults model many approaches to speaking, reading and writing. Staff maintain high expectations for all children, ensuring they are supported to thrive.

Pupils have many ways to build and develop their character. Music is central to school life, offering pupils joyful opportunities for self-expression. There are regular performances for pupils to showcase these skills. The school offers a variety of clubs and leadership roles such as 'light leaders'. Pupils take pride in these responsibilities and talk fondly about them.

Pupils are very caring here and poor behaviour is rare. There have been significant improvements in attendance, particularly for pupils who were once persistently absent from school. Pupils want to be in school, and many say they really enjoy their time here.

Leaders at this school have calmly and carefully navigated the journey to secure improvements in the quality of education for its pupils. Decisions have been made with sustainability and stability in mind. The result of this sees many pupils who are secure and confident in their learning. Those responsible for governance have helped the school drive developments and understand the needs of the school. Staff feel valued, supported and very much part of the improvement journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Assessment information is not always used effectively in some subjects to understand pupils' progress. As a result, in some cases, pupil outcomes are not as strong as they should be. Leaders should ensure that all staff are using assessment effectively to identify misconceptions and improve pupil performance.
- In some subjects, the school has not clearly identified the key knowledge that pupils need to learn, and the order in which this is done. Where this is the case, pupils do not

learn important content. The school must ensure that the most important knowledge and skills that pupils must know is clearly identified.

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	143850
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10378560
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jenny Jenkins
CEO of the trust	Anna Rogers
Headteacher	Natasha Chiswell
Website	www.thomaswhiteheadceacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	25 and 26 January 2023

Information about this school

- The school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of St Albans. As a school designated as having a religious character, it was subject to a separate section 48 inspection in November 2024. The next section 48 is due within 5 years of this date.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and a range of other leaders to explore provision across the school, including behaviour, the curriculum, provision for SEND and the early years.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the trust and directors, including the CEO. A meeting was also held with the local governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and music. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning in lessons to understand what it is like to be a pupil in their school. Inspectors also observed the behaviour of pupils across the school site.
- Inspectors gathered the views of pupils and staff through Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys, as well as discussions conducted throughout the inspection.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents through responses to Ofsted Parent View and conversations held during the inspection.

Inspection team

Louise Cooper, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jennifer Brassington	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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