



The Thomas Cowley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 120662
 LEA Lincolnshire

Inspection number 274291
 Inspection dates 9-10 March 2005
 Reporting inspector Romy Markham

Inspection deemed to have been carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 according to section 12(3) of the same act.

Type of School	Modern	School address	School Lane
School category	Foundation		Donington
Age range of pupils	11 - 16		Lincs PE11 4TF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01775 820254
Number on roll	577	Fax number	01775 821899
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Sarah Stanyer
Date of previous inspection	27 September 1999	Headteacher	Martyn Taylor

Crown copyright 2005

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of The Thomas Cowley High School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated in the village of Donington and draws its students from Boston, Spalding and outlying villages. The school takes students from the whole ability range, but standards on entry are well below average as the majority of more able students attend grammar schools in the area. It is smaller than most other secondary schools nationally, with 577 students on roll. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances and the proportion eligible for free school meals is average. There are very few students from ethnic minority groups or traveller families. Overall, the proportion of students with special educational needs is average, but an above average proportion have formal statements of special educational need. The school includes a specialist unit for students with sensory impairment.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

The school provides good education. Standards improve from well below average on entry to average in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. Students enjoy being at the school and make good progress in their learning. They have positive attitudes, behave well and feel secure and valued as individuals. Teaching is good overall and staff care well for the safety and welfare of students. Student progress is assessed and guided well. Leadership and management are good. Senior staff have an accurate view of what the school does well and what needs to be improved. The school gives a high priority to ensuring equality of opportunity, especially through good curriculum provision. Parental views of the school are good. The school provides good value for money.

Grade: 2

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection in 1999, but progress has not been steady. There was a dramatic fall in standards in 2002, when GCSE results were half of their previous level. Standards have improved since then and GCSE results are now better than in 1999. Teaching is good overall, as it was during the last inspection, and good attitudes and personal development shown by students have been maintained. Weaknesses in provision for information and communication technology (ICT) have been successfully tackled. Recent improvements have been impressive since the appointment of the new headteacher, particularly in the provision for work-related learning in Years 10 and 11.

Grade: 3

Capacity to improve

The school has good capacity to improve. The new senior management team has a clear focus on improvements and is setting up the development and monitoring strategies to bring these about. Senior staff have an accurate view of the key strengths and weaknesses in the school; they recognise that further development of the self-evaluation process at all levels has the potential to promote further improvements in teaching and learning.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

To improve further the school should:

- Improve strategies to promote the students' literacy skills, so that they have the best possible opportunities to show their knowledge and skills in examinations.
- Ensure that all departments and teams, including governors, use the information from self-evaluation and contribute fully to strategic and departmental development planning.

Achievement and standards

Students enter the school with well below average standards and very weak literacy skills. They make good progress in response to good teaching and their standards are average by the time they leave the school.

Progress is good in Years 7 to 9. In 2004, Year 9 test results were below average when compared with those for all schools but better than those of similar schools. Students maintain this level of progress in their GCSE courses. Results in 2004 matched the national average point score and the proportion of students gaining five or more grades at A*-G was above average. Although the proportion of those gaining five or more higher grades (A*-C) was below national figures, these results were much better than those in similar schools and exceeded the challenging targets set for this group.

Results in English in Year 9 have improved rapidly, overtaking those in mathematics and science in 2004. At GCSE, however, results in English are not as good as those in other subjects. Weak literacy skills are a barrier to students showing their knowledge and skills to best effect in GCSE examinations. Results in practical subjects, for example design and technology, are significantly better than those requiring extensive literacy skills. Students with learning difficulties achieve well and most exceed the targets set for them. A few able students, however, do not do as well as expected, given their results in Year 6. The standards of boys are improving at a faster rate than those of the girls, particularly in GCSE courses. Overall, the school adds better value to students' examination success than all secondary schools nationally.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

The students enjoy school. They get on well with their teachers, other adults in the school and value the help they receive. As a result, students develop a positive attitude to learning and this contributes strongly to their good achievement. Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is good; students are attentive and work carefully and safely in workshops and laboratories. They value the school's systems of rewards and penalties. The number of exclusions has been high, but students confirm that they consider the sanction to be used appropriately. Nonetheless, the school has this year introduced a scheme of "suspended exclusions" to reduce the amount of schooling lost through the imposition of this sanction. Attendance rates were well below average in 2003-4. New arrangements for monitoring and actively following up absences through attendance panels, coupled with rewards for good attendance, have helped to reduce the absence rate. The current attendance rate is broadly average, although high rates of absence are still more prevalent among older girls.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students respond well to opportunities for their personal development. They develop self-confidence and self esteem and are well prepared for employment, or the next stage of education. Older students, in particular, value the opportunities they have to take on responsibilities within the school. Students feel they are given a genuine voice in decisions about the running of the school. They give good support to the scheme to promote healthier eating and a healthy lifestyle, for example, in suggesting improvements to school meals. Students make a good contribution to the community, particularly in organising charitable events. Students learn increasingly about other cultures and have good opportunities to reflect on the experiences of others.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching is good and enables students to make good progress in their learning and improve their standards in national tests and examinations. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject. They plan lessons well, ensure that objectives are clear to the students and set a good level of challenge. Learning is good; students know what is expected of them and they work with interest and enthusiasm. Occasionally teaching is unimaginative with a more limited range of approaches and this slows the pace of learning.

Assessment procedures are good. The school's system provides students with a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In English, art and physical education there are also good models of peer and self-assessment that give students even greater understanding and control of their learning. The assessment and tracking of progress are outstanding for students with learning difficulties, including those with sensory impairment. The school takes very great care to give these students the best opportunities to achieve. All teachers and teaching assistants are fully involved in this process, along with outside agencies, such as Connexions.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

Provision is broad and balanced and meets National Curriculum requirements. In Years 7 to 9 the school makes good use of setting arrangements so that students work at the appropriate level for them. In Years 10 and 11 a flexible mix of subjects and courses is well matched to the students' interests and aptitudes, including those with learning difficulties and those aiming to go on to higher education. Provision is good for work-related learning but less effective for citizenship. The citizenship course content is good but the school has not planned enough time to properly get to grips with this subject and students' achievements are not assessed. All students follow a programme of personal development, which provides good opportunities for education for safety and health. Students enjoy the good range of extra-curricular activities including sport, music and drama and participation rates are very good.

The school provides good support for students with learning difficulties. Students with visual or hearing impairment are well integrated into lessons, as well as having specialist support. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to develop competencies in literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

Systems for care, guidance and support are good. Learning and support mentors help students well with personal and social problems or those who have difficulty coping with lessons. Students are given individual learning plans, including options involving home tuition, so that even disaffected students are catered for well. Systems for dealing with child protection issues are robust and there are efficient arrangements for dealing with first aid and minor medical problems. Teachers and other staff have an appropriate awareness of health and safety issues.

Comprehensive systems are being introduced to track the progress of students. Records include absence, behavioural problems, or social and child protection issues that may affect learning. All students have challenging individual targets for learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Students from as early as Year 7 have a clear understanding of the National Curriculum levels at which they are working and what they need to do to move on to the next level, although some of these learning targets are more specific than others. Careers advice is adequate. There is a well-planned programme of careers education and students are happy with the advice they are given, but the careers library is not a stimulating resource and is in need of re-organisation and refurbishment.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior team have set a clear direction for improvement. The school correctly gives high priority to equality of opportunity, seen in the mission statement, in the flexible curriculum and in the care shown to students. Parental responses to an inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive and an improvement on a similar survey organised by the school in 2004. There are good quality assurance procedures to track how well students are doing and to monitor and support teaching. Self-evaluation is rigorous and strategic planning is satisfactory but some departments and teams are more effective than others in how they contribute to these procedures. Senior staff, however, make good use of available information, for example in analysing test and examination results.

The governing body is going through a period of change and much is expected of a small hardworking group of experienced members. Governors have ensured that the school meets its legal responsibilities. New members are undergoing induction and training and at the moment the governing body does not yet have the expertise to monitor the work of the school as rigorously as it should.

Financial management is secure and value for money is good. Staffing, accommodation and resources are managed effectively; links with other providers are satisfactory overall and particularly good with the local college of further education.

Grade: 2

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about HMI-led Ofsted inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Dear Students of the Thomas Cowley High School

Thomas Cowley High School, Donington, Lincolnshire

We enjoyed our visit to your school. You made us very welcome when we visited your lessons, watched your assembly and toured the school. It was very interesting to talk with you and your teachers.

What we liked most about your school:

- Everyone gets on very well; you are polite and helpful to each other in lessons and to visitors in the school.
- Your teachers plan interesting things for you to do, particularly in the GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11.
- You work hard and try your best to learn new skills.
- Your headteacher runs the school well. He listens carefully to your ideas about what could be done better.
- Your teachers give very good help to those who find work difficult, or who are feeling unhappy or unwell.

What we would like your school to do now:

- Give you extra help with writing tasks, so that you can do even better in tests and examinations.
- Celebrate what you do well, and plan even more exciting things for the future.

Yours sincerely

The Inspection Team