



The Thomas Aveling School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118923
LEA Medway
Inspection number 285351
Inspection dates 20 June 2006 to 20 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mike Sutton HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Arethusa Road
School category	Foundation		Rochester
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Kent ME1 2UW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01634 844809
Number on roll	1086	Fax number	01634 818385
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	20 June 2006	Headteacher	Mr Richard Hart

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. During the inspection, several discussions were held with staff, students and governors covering different areas of the school's work. Opportunities were provided for staff and students to talk informally with inspectors. School documentation was evaluated, together with data on the standards achieved at the school. The questionnaires returned by the parents were analysed and comments read. A small number of classrooms were visited.

Description of the school

The school serves a residential area of Rochester. It is a non-selective school with specialist technology college status. It educates students who have either chosen not to go to, or who have not been selected for, grammar schools in the area. There are 1117 students on roll which is slightly above average and with significantly more boys than girls. The school is popular and over-subscribed.

The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is high at 25%. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is lower than seen typically in secondary schools as is the proportion of students who do not speak English as a first language. Whilst the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is around the average, the area the school serves has significant pockets of hardship and many students come from families who have limited experience of higher education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. There is a relentless determination that all the students will have the very best opportunities to succeed in life. Everyone 'goes the extra mile' to ensure that students learn the key skills that they need, study the right courses for them and get the best qualifications they can achieve.

From the headteacher through senior staff, departmental heads to the newest teachers, support staff and those who provide meals and look after the buildings and grounds, the message is the same: it is the students who matter. This can be seen in many ways: staff who give up holidays to run revision classes or summer school; the site manager who provides valuable tasks to boost the confidence of less secure students; departments that are always looking for courses better suited to the students.

The care and guidance provided for the students is exceptional. The pastoral system works extremely well and students know that there is always someone they can talk with at any time if they have a concern or problem. The support and help for youngsters experiencing personal troubles or inner turmoil is outstanding. The 'inclusion zone' is seen by students as a haven where they can calm down and get help and advice, whether they have been asked to go there or decided to go themselves. One student said: 'Without the help I got from the zone, I would be in real trouble by now'. But the school has gone much further, by training a team of students as peer mediators and student mentors. Discussions with students who had experienced difficulties revealed just how important and successful they regard the work of these teams. Because of the measures the school is using, the number of exclusions has fallen sharply, to around the national average.

Academic help and advice is just as good. Students are encouraged to work hard. As one student put it: 'The teachers get it right. They push us, but by just the right amount'. The school has focused strongly on raising the students' aspirations. More and more are looking to further education as a realistic and desirable goal and the numbers in the sixth form are growing steadily. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities make outstanding progress because the team of teachers and assistants who support them is well organised, well led and dedicated to the job.

The range and mix of vocational and academic courses is tailored carefully to each individual. Regular checks on the quality of both the courses and the teaching of them ensure that where adjustments are needed, they are swiftly made.

The end result is a school where students thrive and develop well as people. They make outstanding progress, often from a very weak position when they start Year 7. Standards have risen dramatically during the last five years and at the end of Year 9 and for GCSE, they are in line with the national averages. The teaching of English and in particular of mathematics is of the quality needed to make sure the students are ready for further education or the world of work. The teaching of computer skills – a weakness at the last inspection – is now outstanding, adding strongly to the students' skills base.

This success is the result of sustained and consistent teamwork with a very strong focus on continuous improvement. Subject and faculty leaders have accepted the responsibility for raising performance in their areas and for keeping it under regular review. Under the astute and quietly inspirational leadership of the headteacher, the senior management of the school have maintained a clear view of all that is happening. They regard staff in the same way as their students – people with potential to be developed and allowed to grow. For example, teachers are encouraged to undertake study to gain further qualifications. Staff are promoted ‘when they are ready, not when they are old enough’. Innovation and development are expected and people are allowed to make mistakes in order to learn. Governors too play their part well. The Committee for Student Welfare and the Attendance Panel have played vital roles in helping the school ‘get it right’ for the youngsters.

No institution is perfect and neither is the school. But what matters is that it knows precisely where it could do better and it addresses the problems. Science has received significant attention in recent years. Standards have improved but not as fast as in other subjects and are unlikely to do so until students undertake much more practical work. There have been huge improvements in the way the school gathers and interprets the data about students’ progress but the process could be improved further. The new approach to teaching citizenship, personal and health education is still bedding down and needs regular review. But it is the constant self-questioning and insistence that it can do better still which invoke complete confidence that this school will continue to move forward.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has a good sixth form which offers a broad range of courses. These have the range of levels needed to encourage more students to continue in education and improve their qualifications. In doing so, the school makes an effective contribution to local and national priorities for improving staying-on rates. The school’s partnership with other local schools and colleges is beginning to broaden the range of opportunities for students. There is scope for further expansion of such joint provision and the school has anticipated this well with adjustments to its own timetable. Standards are broadly average, and have risen rapidly over the last three years as a result of better checks by senior staff on students’ progress and the quality of courses. Whilst good overall, there is some variation in the quality of teaching and learning between courses. The school knows that in some courses, the deadlines for completion of coursework need to be more rigorous. Examination pass rates are in line with national averages overall but not enough students pass science at GNVQ intermediate level. A relatively small proportion of students get the highest grades. Given students’ low attainment and the low aspirations of many when they started secondary school, the school’s results overall, represent good achievement. Sixth formers develop good personal skills by playing an active role in the school and wider community. The national award achieved by one student in recognition of her mentoring work in school encapsulates the care for one another being fostered by the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards were in need of improvement at the last inspection. The school has taken up the challenge and standards have risen rapidly. In English, mathematics and science, they are within the average range for schools nationally. Science, however, is hanging on to that level by its finger-tips. Standards in mathematics have risen faster than in other subjects because of the dynamism of the mathematics teaching team. Some students are now entered for GCSE mathematics a year early and with their confidence high.

The progress made by all students is outstanding. Many have caught up from being a year or more behind when they started at the school. There is compelling evidence from test and examination results that the students with special educational needs or who are from unsettled backgrounds make progress which is equally outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students have every opportunity to show responsibility and use their initiative. Prefects, mentors and mediators play important roles in helping the school run harmoniously. As one student commented, 'the staff respect us and we respect them'. There is a clear sense of enjoyment about being at school amongst the students, seen in their levels of attendance, which are better than the national average. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and, for the great majority of students, it is exemplary.

The school is quick to respond to incidents of racism and bullying. The latter was raised as a concern by a small number of parents. Questionnaires completed by students as well as comments made to inspectors show that they do not see this as a problem because the school deals with it effectively.

The wide range of clubs and other activities broadens students' horizons and gives them the knowledge and skills to use in other aspects of their lives. Some are involved as scout leaders, others are strongly committed to sports.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The evidence for the overall good quality of teaching is seen in the outcomes for students. It is outstanding in mathematics where staff enthusiasm is infectious. The support team for children with learning difficulties work extremely well with teachers, helping students make rapid progress. In other subjects, school reviews show teaching to be good. Regular checks by faculty heads and a willingness of staff to help one another ensure that few weaknesses remain undetected. Newly qualified teachers have

their teaching appraised regularly and have good opportunities to watch experience staff at work. As a result, their teaching quickly matches the levels seen throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The students have a wide range of subjects and courses that is well matched to their needs and abilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

This is a key plank of the school's success. By getting this aspect right, the school has raised students' self-esteem and given them the confidence to succeed. The induction scheme for Year 7 pupils starts the process well and the strong year group structure ensures that each student is known as an individual and the needs of all are met as well as possible.

All the required checks to ensure students' welfare and safety are very securely in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The management structure is clear and well suited to the school's needs. Everyone knows their role and for what and to whom they are accountable. Because of this, the school knows itself accurately.

The leadership team encourages staff to innovate and try different approaches and it leads by example, for instance in the drive to develop community links and support for other institutions, and the use of the school as a main element of local teacher training to develop its own new supply of staff and avoid problems of teacher shortages.

The governors give good support. Their committees are effective and they ensure finances are tightly controlled. They have given top priority to the continued raising of standards. The school development plan has the right issues as its focus but could be sharper in the ways in which it measures the success of what it sets out to do.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

My colleague Ian Hodgkinson and I would like to thank you all for the help you gave us during our recent visit to inspect your school. In particular, I would like to pass on our thanks to the four students who showed us round and to the large number of you who met with us at different times.

Yours is an outstanding school which puts it in the top 10% of schools in the country. The reasons for this judgement are many, but principally it is because of the teamwork and dedication amongst the staff. As many of you told us, they give unstintingly of their time to help you achieve your best. The staff care deeply for you and are determined to help you succeed. You have a wide range of courses to choose from and your sixth form is growing in quality as well as size.

As a result, the progress which you make is outstanding and the standards you achieve compare well with many other schools.

You too play your part extremely well. You work hard and respond well to the opportunities for responsibility which you are given. You support and help each other very well through the mediation and mentoring systems. Your confidence is growing and many of you have set your sights high and rightly see further education as the key to success in life.

Under the outstanding leadership of your headteacher and his senior team, everyone seeks to do better all the time. They know that science has improved but needs to improve more. They can show how much behaviour has improved but know that exclusion still has to be used more than they would like. Keep working together with your staff to help improve still further on the successes so far.

If you can find the time in your busy lives to read my full report, please do so. It explains in more detail just why your school is so good and how it can get still better.

Good luck to those who have just taken exams and to all of you, my best wishes for the future. Keep working hard.