

Thomas Tallis School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 100190 |
| Local Authority | Greenwich |
| Inspection number | 285739 |
| Inspection dates | 22–23 May 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Ian Hartland HMI |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1639 |
| 6th form | 418 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Ms Margery Nzerem |
| Headteacher | Mr Rob Thomas |
| Date of previous school inspection | 23 September 2002 |
| School address | Kidbrooke Park Road Kidbrooke London SE3 9PX |
| Telephone number | 020 8856 0115 |
| Fax number | 020 8319 4715 |

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|--------------------------|----------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thomas Tallis is an above average size comprehensive school. There are a significant number of students who have English as an additional language. A well above average proportion of students come from minority ethnic groups and are eligible for free school meals. A higher than average proportion of students have statements of special educational need. An above average proportion of students have learning difficulties or disabilities. The school houses two special units, one for students with hearing impairment and another for those with speech and language difficulties. The school also has a learning support unit with specialist staff. It is a specialist Arts College and gained Leading Edge status last year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which displays a number of outstanding features. The school's leaders and all staff ensure that each student is given every opportunity, encouragement and support to do as well as they can. The school is highly inclusive and works with considerable success with its partner agencies in promoting the well being and development of all. The school possess a very strong sense of community. As a result, students enjoy their time at school and make good progress in their learning. They achieve well and attain average standards by the end of Years 11 and 13. The school provides excellent care, guidance and support. The school's ability to break down barriers to learning and to cater for the needs of students with additional learning needs is outstanding. For example, several students with physical impairments, such as those with a hearing impairment, have benefited from higher level courses in the sixth form because of good targeted provision in earlier years. The students' personal development and well-being is good.

The school's specialist status has had a very positive influence and the students are given an exemplary curriculum in the main school but the range of extra activities and opportunities in the sixth form is more limited. Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding teaching. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is however too generous and lacks a sharp enough the focus on student progress. The leadership and management of the school is good. The school knows its strengths and many of the areas in need of development. It has a good capacity to improve. The school does not yet make the best use of data and assessment information to evaluate the progress of different groups of students. The school's measurement of the impact of its policies and actions lack sufficient rigour and precision.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enter the sixth form with levels of attainment that are below average. By the end of their courses standards are broadly in line with national averages. This represents good achievement, as most students make better than expected progress. Teaching is good. The students say they enjoy the sixth form and they cite the support and encouragement offered by most of their teachers as prime reasons. They say that most lessons are challenging and that they are generally well supported and encouraged in their work. Their personal development is good. The students know their target grades and their performance against such targets is monitored. A good range of courses is provided at both intermediate and advanced levels and there is a satisfactory spread of vocational options, although the school acknowledges that this provision might be further improved. Students from local schools are attracted by the quality of the arts and elements of the curriculum provision which has contributed to the increase of students into the sixth form.

There are too few opportunities for the students to exercise responsibility. Students interviewed were critical of the sporting and other recreational opportunities provided. There is no well organised programme for the majority of students, of high quality work placements designed to raise and challenge their aspirations and career intentions. The provision for religious education does not meet statutory requirements. The curriculum offered is only satisfactory overall. The sixth form is well led and managed, but there is no specific programme for monitoring and evaluating teaching in Years 12 and 13.

What the school should do to improve further

- In order to raise standards further, make better use of data to track and evaluate the progress of different groups of students.
- Evaluate more thoroughly the impact of policies and actions.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning by sharpening the focus on students' progress.
- Broaden the range of activities in the sixth form to include sport and work-related experiences and opportunities to exercise responsibility.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, achievement is good as the students make good progress in their learning. The students start in Year 7 with standards that are below average. By the end of Year 9, standards in national tests remain below average but there are consistent signs of improvement with results in recent years coming increasingly closer to the national average. In 2006 an average number of students gained five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The school has achieved particularly good results in English in recent years.

The students make good progress in English in Years 7–9. They make exceptionally good progress in English and mathematics in Years 10 and 11. Students with learning difficulties make particularly good progress in Year 10 and 11. Those who have English as an additional language also make good progress. However, it is not yet a positive picture of good progress across all key stages. The school is aware that overall progress is only satisfactory in Years 7–9 and that it is not yet as good as in Years 10 and 11. Examination results in some of the Arts are outstanding year on year. This is partly due to the school's designation as an Arts College.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are right to see the sense of community in the school as one of its major strengths. Students apply the school rules very well and behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. There is a minority of challenging students but little bullying or racism. When these occur they are dealt with promptly. Students feel safe in the school. Attendance is good because absence is followed up rigorously and because, as indicated in surveys and lesson observations, students enjoy being at school. Students arrive at lessons on time and only a small minority are late coming to school.

Many students take part in the wide range of sports offered and surveys show they have a good understanding of the importance of exercise. School lunches are very healthy and are popular with students. A major strength is the contribution the students make to the school and the wider community. Students lead assemblies and many act as mentors. They are involved in many activities to help the community such as helping in local primary schools. Students make good progress with basic skills and are prepared satisfactorily for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers know their subjects well, plan lessons thoroughly and in the great majority of lessons succeed in creating a positive atmosphere where pupils behave well and are keen to learn. Teachers are well aware of examination requirements and make sure that pupils are well prepared. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well catered for, both in terms of the choice of learning activities and the positive and inclusive atmosphere in lessons. Regular praise and encouragement make a significant contribution to this. However, provision for higher attaining pupils is less consistent, particularly for Years 7–9, where the level of work is not always sufficiently demanding. A small minority of parents also express this view. There are examples of first-rate teaching in the school, for example in English, which is reflected in the outstanding progress made in this subject by the end of Year 11.

Inspectors agree with the school's overall judgement on the quality of teaching. However, on a lesson by lesson basis, the school's evaluation is over-generous because not enough attention is paid to analysing the progress pupils make in acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding. The teaching and learning group has been effective in providing opportunities for the sharing of good practice and stimulating professional discussion in a number of important areas. The school acknowledges that further evaluation of the impact of this work on classroom practice is needed.

The quality of marking is inconsistent. At its best it is exemplary, with regular accurate assessment, linked with praise, merits and very specific targets for improvement. In some subject areas, specific assessed pieces of work also give levels and advice on how to improve. However, much day-to-day marking in exercise books does not live up to this. Marking here is sometimes cursory and there is insufficient response to the pupils' work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school offers an outstanding curriculum that is helping to improve standards. The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers much choice, especially in Years 10 and 11. Choices include vocational options, opportunities to study three separate sciences and a wide range of modern foreign languages. The curriculum is managed very well and its effectiveness is thoroughly monitored and changes made whenever necessary. For example, the Year 7 humanities curriculum has recently been extensively revised so that more emphasis can be placed on developing the students' literacy skills. Higher attaining students are catered for well with early entry in subjects such as mathematics. The needs of lower attaining students and those who might become disaffected are also well met. The school has been highly innovative in developing a range of work-related options along with the opportunity to develop a range of skills via a mini enterprise established on the school site.

Extra-curricular provision is very good, with the students being able to involve themselves in many activities ranging from sports, to hobby clubs and revision sessions. Some shortcomings

have been identified in citizenship, which are being successfully tackled. The school's specialist status has significantly enhanced the curriculum provision. All students in Years 10 and 11 follow an arts based GCSE option and many students have been able to combine work in subjects like mathematics and science with art through special projects. Specialist status has also enabled the school to develop its community work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Strategies for managing those students with behavioural difficulties are extremely effective. There is rigorous and sensitive support for the more vulnerable students, such as those with special educational needs. An example of this is the wide range of support provided for one of the year groups with an above average number of students who have learning difficulties. Students appreciate the careful attention placed on supporting them at key points, such as when they join the school. The school liaises extremely well with outside agencies to ensure that the needs of students are met effectively. There are very strong procedures in place, including risk assessments, to ensure the health and safety of students. A rich range of activities is provided for gifted and talented students but the school is not sufficiently monitoring the impact of this on their progress. The identification of and support for individual students who are underachieving are excellent although the use of data to evaluate the progress of different groups of students is less well developed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Team work among staff at all levels is strong. The headteacher's flair, as expressed in the school's vision statement for 'forging imaginative connections and seeking innovative solutions' are outstanding. The senior leadership team has clearly identified priorities for improvement and are taking appropriate action. However, the criteria for evaluating the impact of these actions are insufficiently precise. The leadership's track record for curriculum innovation and behaviour management is excellent. Monitoring of the work of the faculties has been further strengthened by the introduction of self-reviews. As a result, data analysis has been identified as an area for further training. Although the school is rich in data, the use of this information to monitor the progress of different groups of students is under-developed. Day-to-day, the school runs smoothly and efficiently.

The governing body is very well organised and purposeful in steering school improvement. They have a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

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Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

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|--|-----|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 | 2 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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

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 | 2 | |
| 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 | 1 | |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 | |

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? | 1 | 3 |
| 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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No | |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No | |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Tallis School, London, SE3 9PX

I am writing, following the inspectors' recent visit to your school, to let you know what we think. Thank you for your help in talking to us about the work you do and what you think about the school. We think that yours is a good school which is outstanding in a number of ways.

As a result of the teaching and your hard work, you are increasingly making good progress and achieving higher standards. You do particularly well in English. Most of you make the most of the opportunities the school offers. You behave well in lessons and around the school. We found that relationships between staff and students are good and that the staff guide and support you extremely well, especially those of you who find learning more difficult. You are very well cared for and feel safe at school. Many of your parents are happy with the school and with what it provides.

We think that your headteacher and the senior staff lead the school well and know the ways to make the school even better. We have asked the school to make better checks on your progress, ensure that teaching enables you to make better progress in your learning and to measure more carefully the impact of its various policies and actions. For those of you in the sixth form we have asked the school to provide a wider range of activities including sport and work related experiences and more opportunities for you to exercise positions of responsibility.

With good wishes.

Ian Hartland
Her Majesty's Inspector