

# The Thomas Cowley High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	120662
<b>Local Authority</b>	LINCOLNSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	313708
<b>Inspection date</b>	28 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mark Phillips HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	622
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Terry Chapman
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Martyn Taylor
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 March 2005
<b>School address</b>	School Lane Donington Spalding Lincolnshire PE11 4TF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01775 820254
<b>Fax number</b>	01775 821899

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors in one day. HMI evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues in detail; achievement and standards, teaching and learning, students' personal development and well-being, and leadership and management. Evidence was taken from assessment data, school documents, visits to a range of lessons around the school, visits to an assembly and observation of students at break-time, scrutiny of students' work, parental questionnaires, meetings with staff and the chair of governors, and a lunchtime discussion with the school council.

## Description of the school

The Thomas Cowley High is a small secondary modern school. It is a rural school with very few students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language. A proportion of students in the school's locality pass selection tests for grammar schools at age 11 and the abilities of students on entry to Thomas Cowley are below average. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. However, almost all students live in areas of relative social deprivation where fewer than average numbers of adults have experienced higher education. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The largest group has behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and there is also specialist provision for a small number of students with hearing and sight difficulties.

Since September 2006, The Thomas Cowley High School has been a specialist technology college specialising in technology, mathematics and science.

The headteacher is currently on extended sickness-leave; in his absence, the school is being led by one of the deputy headteachers, with support from other members of the senior management team.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Her Majesty's Inspector agrees with the school's overall self-evaluation that The Thomas Cowley High School continues to provide an effective standard of education and care for its students. When they join the school, students' attainment is below average and, in particular, their reading and writing skills are weak. In 2007, the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five or more good GCSE grades remained below the national average but, compared with similar schools nationally, these students made good progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did well. Girls made much better progress than boys in English and mathematics but, conversely, boys made slightly better progress when all subjects are considered. In the first year of specialist school status, the school met almost all of its targets and is now setting increasingly ambitious targets for future achievement.

A significant reason for this progress is the curriculum provision that the school makes in Key Stage 4, complemented by an equally good range of extra-curricular opportunities. The well thought-out set of curriculum options reflects the particular needs, interest and abilities of Thomas Cowley students and responds well to local needs. Courses include applied GCSE courses in art and design, manufacturing, food technology, and resistant materials. There is a vocational performing arts course, as well as more specialised options in drama and music. Students really thrive in, and gain much enjoyment from, these lessons, where they have good opportunities to develop independent learning skills. There is also a good amount of curriculum time for English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Since the last inspection, the school has appointed more experienced specialist teachers in these subjects and provided alternative courses in adult literacy and numeracy. Although the proportion of Year 11 students gaining good GCSE passes in English and mathematics remained below the national average in 2007, the proportion leaving school with good functional, everyday skills in literacy and numeracy was close to the national average. Nevertheless, the school recognises that students' progress in subjects that require advanced reading, writing and arithmetic skills is still not as strong as the progress that they make in the more practical subjects.

Overall, students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory. Discussions with students and visits to lessons undertaken jointly with the deputy headteacher during the inspection revealed that one reason for this is because in these lessons, particularly where students are desk-based, teachers take a more dominant role and students are too passive. Whilst teachers have good subject knowledge and students respect this by behaving compliantly, there are not enough opportunities for students to take the initiative. Despite examples of good practice, two other aspects of teaching are inconsistent across the school. One is the use of homework to reinforce learning from lessons. A number of parents said that they thought more homework should be set; scrutiny of students' homework diaries, together with the school's own analysis, showed that these parents are correct in their concerns. Homework gives further opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills; ensuring that homework is set and completed more regularly in all subjects is an important area for the school's further development.

Similarly, there is inconsistency in teachers' day-to-day marking; alongside some strong practice, there are too many instances when written work is not marked in enough detail.

The school has shown how it can promote students' good progress through a modern, relevant and focussed curriculum. The challenge now is to match this with consistently challenging teaching and, as importantly, independent learning in all lessons.

There is no doubt that young people make good progress in developing their personal skills and well-being during their time at Thomas Cowley; an important reason for this is the good care, guidance and support that the school provides. There are robust systems in place for safeguarding and any incidents of bullying and racism are logged thoroughly and dealt with efficiently. Students say that they feel safe in school and they understand the importance of keeping fit and healthy. They report that teachers and students get on well with each other, and that the house system helps to create a special family atmosphere where every student is well-known and given encouragement.

Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. The percentage of exclusions is below the national average, and decreasing. Attendance, too, is good and reflects students' enjoyment in coming to school. The school has extremely efficient systems in place to monitor any absences, supported by good links with other agencies, including the educational welfare officer. Similarly, a detailed system is used to track students' progress and help academic mentors to guide and motivate them. Students spoke very warmly about the support that these tutors give, and there were particularly positive comments from parents about the help given to students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Links with the local and wider communities are good. A number of parents commented positively on the transition arrangements when students transfer from primary schools. There is a detailed community plan as part of specialist school status and already students have enhanced the life of the local community through a town square sculpture project. International links with schools in Hungary and Sri Lanka enable students to develop their cultural understanding beyond their local environment.

Over the past three years, the school's leadership has focussed successfully on improving the quality of students' education and care. Students are making better progress, attendance rates have increased, and there is less exclusion for poor behaviour. Specialist school status has brought a range of new curriculum opportunities, and the school has worked hard to ensure that staffing better meets the needs of students. The school is inclusive, and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The large majority of parents are supportive of all aspects of the school's work; it is well thought-of in the local community, and is regularly over-subscribed. Whilst the senior team deserves every credit for this and knows most of the school's strengths and weaknesses, the school's self-evaluation is over-generous in a number of key judgements. There are also some immediate challenges that mean that the school's capacity for further improvement is only satisfactory at present. In the headteacher's absence, the deputy headteacher, with good support from his senior colleagues, is ensuring that the school runs smoothly.

However, it is understandable that, in this current situation, his focus is shared between sustaining the everyday management of the school in addition to his main responsibilities for curriculum development and leading teaching. Furthermore, the governing body is currently running a deficit budget, which whilst helping this small secondary school to provide a diverse and interesting curriculum, has also required local authority support. This means that the school has yet to achieve the Financial Management Standard in Schools, and the school's value for money is no better than satisfactory.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Continue to raise standards in English and mathematics to match the standards reached by students in other subjects.
- Ensure that there are opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills in all lessons and subjects, including the regular setting of homework; and ensure that, across the school, students' work is marked regularly with consistent attention to detail.
- Improve the school leadership's monitoring by, and accountability to, the governing body, including in relation to the school budget.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

31 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Thomas Cowley High School, Donington, PE11 4TF

I was very pleased to meet and talk with many of you when I visited your school recently. I am writing now with a summary of my inspection report. Your parents, your teachers, and you yourselves told me that you thought Thomas Cowley is a good place to learn and grow up in, and I agree. The school provides you with a modern curriculum with good opportunities for you to take part in the practical, hands-on lessons that you enjoy so much. Some of you find English and maths more difficult than you do the practical subjects, but again the school is working hard to help you to gain the important skills that are so important to your future prospects. Your teachers have good systems in place to encourage your good attendance and good behaviour. You respond really well by coming to school regularly and by behaving sensibly in and out of lessons, so well done.

The senior team is working hard to keep the school running successfully while Mr Taylor is away. However, to help the school improve even more, Mr Dawson and I have agreed that there are three things to focus on over the coming terms.

- Continue to improve your work and results in English and maths, so that you reach the same high standards in these subjects as you do in, for example, design and technology.
- Make sure that you have more opportunities to work independently without the constant supervision of your teachers. This includes teachers setting you more homework (which means that you will have to do more homework, with the support and encouragement of your parents!)
- Ensure that the governors continue to challenge, support and encourage the senior team, particularly through careful monitoring of the school's budget.

As many of you approach this year's tests and exams, I would like to wish you all the best for your revision and coursework and, indeed, for your future education and employment. Again, my thanks to you and your parents for the part you played in this inspection and for your continued support of The Thomas Cowley High School.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector