

Thomas Alleyne's High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124430
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314930
Inspection date	11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Frank Knowles

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1363
6th form	331
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Kenny
Headteacher	Suzanne O'Farrell
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Dove Bank Uttoxeter ST14 8DU
Telephone number	01889 561820
Fax number	01889 561850

Age group	13-19
Inspection date	11 June 2008
Inspection number	314930

© Crown copyright 2008

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 Education Act 2005, 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 carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and its capacity to improve. They also investigated the following issues: the progress currently made by students in Years 10 and 11, particularly among boys and in English; how well students engage with their learning, especially in Years 10 and 11; the effectiveness of the school's processes for setting and reviewing students' goals and targets and the quality and effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation processes as they apply to departments and houses. Evidence was gathered from classroom observations of teaching and learning, analysis of school documentation and discussions with senior and middle leaders, other staff, governors, parents and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Thomas Alleyne's High School is a larger than average comprehensive school, with a much larger than average sixth form. Students come from Uttoxeter and a very wide area surrounding the town. Nearly all its students come from White British backgrounds and nearly all are fluent English speakers. Standards when students join the school are average. A high proportion of students from Year 11 stay on into the sixth form, and standards on joining the sixth form are average compared with sixth forms nationally. The school has a below average proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but a higher than average proportion of students with a statement of special educational need. These students have a wide range of learning needs, with a high proportion who are dyslexic.

The school is a specialist school for technology and modern foreign languages, and is the lead school in a Leading Edge partnership that aims to spread best practice among other schools. The school has its own farm and is a registered breeder of Tamworth pigs. It is also an extended school and offers out of school hours counselling and support for social skills, coursework catch-up and individual work. The school has received external validation through the Charter Mark, Investors in People, ArtsMark Silver, Careers Mark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, the Eco Schools and Sustainable Schools Awards, and has full International School status. The headteacher took up her post in November 2007 after a period of acting headship.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thomas Alleyne's High School is a good school. It has some outstanding features which support its continued development very well. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding, mainly because of the excellent ethos in the school and the exceptionally good care, guidance and support they receive. Students reach above average standards at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 and make good progress throughout the school as a result of a good curriculum and the good teaching they receive. The school's leaders bring a strong drive for improvement and make excellent use of the school's self-evaluation processes, which are also outstanding. Parents have an overwhelmingly positive view of the school and the quality of education it provides. One parent reflected this, commenting, 'Good teaching, caring staff and a lovely ethos make Thomas Alleyne's a wonderful school.'

Students show a high level of maturity and full involvement in the life of the school. As well as participating in the many extra-curricular opportunities offered, students regularly take part in surveys about whole-school matters, such as uniform changes, and offer their views when new staff are appointed. As part of the departmental review process, they give their views on the work of departments, including teaching. Students have a high level of participation in sport as part of the school's very effective strategies for helping students to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students now make much healthier choices of food at lunchtime, and the school has recently received a Healthy School award. Students' behaviour in class and around the school is exceptionally good. They show great courtesy to each other and to adults and a concern for the safety and well-being of others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although the school recognises the continuing need to develop students' awareness of the multicultural society they will encounter in education or employment in the future. Students feel very safe in the school, and recall very little bad behaviour or bullying, although some parents are concerned about behaviour. Students always have someone to turn to if they have concerns and are very pleased with the quick and effective response from staff. As a result, students show a high level of enjoyment of school. They contribute very well to links with other schools and the wider community, for example participating in a large community service project involving over 200 students, environmental projects in nature reserves and a group undertaking community gardening. Students are very well prepared for the world of work, and value highly the advice they receive from staff and the Connexions service. Local employers provide strong support. Students' generally high levels of literacy and numeracy skills serve them well for future employment. The school's specialist status in technology and modern foreign languages has been used well to raise standards and support other schools.

This very positive picture comes about through the unusually high level of support that staff give to students. Students are confident that, if they ever need advice about their work or other issues, their teachers and other member of staff will always find the time to talk through their concerns and ensure that additional help is provided where it is needed. Parents, too, recognise the excellent support their children receive at Thomas Alleyne's. One parent summed up the views of many, commenting, 'The staff really do care about the students.' Others noted the school's excellent support for students with learning difficulties, particularly for dyslexia.

The school provides excellent pastoral care and support. It also tracks students' progress exceptionally well, setting challenging individual targets and reinforcing high expectations for all students. Students all know their targets in each subject and most have detailed actions that they are taking to reach them. Students regularly review progress towards these targets

with tutors and teachers. Potential underachievement is identified through the analysis of data and is tackled at an early stage and remedied. The tracking data also have the potential to provide interim summaries by class or year to identify early on any potential underachievement and take any necessary action, but these are not yet in place.

The school complements its strong focus on individual students' progress by a thorough analysis of assessment and examination results. Senior leaders identify patterns and trends in the results of different groups of students and take action to bring about improvement. For example, a strategic plan to improve boys' achievement, especially in English, has resulted in considerable development work in departments. This has already brought about higher levels of engagement of boys in their learning activities. Early indications from assessments suggest their achievement has improved as well. The rigour of the school's analysis of data means that departments are held accountable for their outcomes. Senior leaders challenge heads of department where there are concerns and support them to bring about improvements where needed. Departmental reviews also start with the analysis of results. These consistently high-quality reviews identify priorities for action that focus on whole-school and department issues. Highly effective peer reviews of departments by other heads of department and heads of house provide very good developmental feedback which is valued by staff, although these do not yet extend to the review of the work of houses. Peer reviews also benefit the reviewer's department, and they provide useful sources of new ideas. All these reviews are reported to the governing body's monitoring committee, where governors ask challenging questions of those presenting their department's report.

A further positive element of self-evaluation is the extensive range of monitoring of teaching and learning that is undertaken by senior and middle leaders. Teachers value the feedback they receive and the subsequent improvement in their practice. The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning, which is good overall. Teachers plan effectively, with well-structured and challenging lessons with clear objectives. The pace of lessons is good and students are generally enthusiastic learners who take part in activities with interest. Teachers make good use of informal assessment in lessons to understand how well students are learning. Some satisfactory teaching does not make enough use of paired and group activities to engage students, and some questioning by teachers does not encourage extended responses that students can use to enhance their learning.

The school's financial management is a strength, with highly efficient use of resources and national recognition as a school providing very good value for money. The school also has an excellent range of partnerships with other organisations that support students' learning. Staff work very well collaboratively, at both whole-school and department or house levels, and this ensures a high degree of consistency of approach. This, along with recent improvements in the achievement of boys and better school planning, mean that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Thomas Alleyne's has a good sixth form that is effective in helping students to attain above average results at AS and A level. Students make good progress during their two years in the sixth form, and this is supported by the school's tracking system, with well-understood targets and regular review of progress with tutors and subject teachers. The retention rate between AS and A2 courses is high, signalling students' high aspirations and enjoyment of Year 12 courses. The school is extending its range of courses, for example to additional BTEC National

diplomas and the International Baccalaureate from September 2008, but students do not have the opportunity for physical education activities as part of the curriculum. Teaching and learning are good, with similar positive features to those found in the main school and similar areas for development. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, although self-evaluation processes are not as sharply focused as in the main school.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. All sixth form students take part in community activities, both within Thomas Alleyne's and in other schools and the community. For example, they mentor younger students and support the school's anti-bullying strategies. They take part in a paired reading scheme, promote modern foreign language learning in first schools and each tutor group organises fund raising events for charity. Two students are members of the governing body's Partnership Committee. The school has seen much success recently with Young Enterprise companies, winning the Staffordshire final and representing the West Midlands in a national event. As in the main school, students' excellent personal development comes about through the dedication of staff in providing support to students where it is needed, for example in constructing personal statements for applications for university places or where students are experiencing personal difficulties. One student reflected the views of many when commenting, 'Teachers are always willing to give up their free time for you – you only have to ask.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers consistently plan activities that actively involve students and use questioning more effectively to gain extended responses and an understanding of what students have learned.
- Bring the quality of self-evaluation in the sixth form up to the high standard found elsewhere in the school.
- Refine the analysis of tracking data to provide class, subject and year averages and use them to guide decisions about interventions and to identify areas of excellence.

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

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	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	1

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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
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	1	
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

12 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Alleyne's High School, Uttoxeter ST14 8DU

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly when we inspected your school. We spoke with many of you in lessons and particularly valued the contribution made by the two groups we worked with. You expressed your views openly and clearly and this helped us a lot in our work.

You will not be surprised to read that we found Thomas Alleyne's to be a good school, with some outstanding features. You all make good progress and achieve above average results overall, and this is largely because teaching and learning are good and because your progress is tracked so well through the traffic light system. The leadership and management of the school are good, too, with a strong focus on improving teaching where it could be better, and making sure you have a good curriculum. School self-evaluation processes are outstanding, and we particularly liked your involvement in these through department surveys.

Your mature approach to your work and to life at the school meant that we found your personal development to be outstanding. We were impressed by the work some of you do in schools and in the community, and your commitment to help others through charity fund raising, for example. Like you, we found that teachers provide you with excellent support whenever you needed it. The care and guidance they provide for you are outstanding.

As in all schools, there are areas to improve, and we have asked the headteacher and staff look at three things:

- Make sure all of your lessons include active learning opportunities and questioning that helps you to respond at length
- Bring the quality of self-evaluation in the sixth form up to the high standard found in other areas of the school
- Make more use of tracking data to identify where things are going really well in the school and where improvements are needed.

We are sure you will continue to support staff in making Thomas Alleyne's an even better school. Thank you again for your contribution to the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Frank Knowles Lead inspector