

The Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115207
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326148
Inspection dates	15–16 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	668
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Liam Ward
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Tippet
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2007
School address	Monkwick Avenue Colchester Essex CO2 8NJ
Telephone number	01206 547911
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Thomas Lord Audley School serves both urban and rural areas, some parts of which are socially and economically disadvantaged. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and the number at an early stage of learning the English language or from a minority ethnic background is well below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average as is the percentage eligible for free school meals. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school varies; in some years it is broadly average and, in others, below average.

For the last year, the school has been a member of a federation with Stanway School. The headteacher of Stanway has acted as the executive headteacher of Thomas Lord Audley since January 2007. The school was taken out of special measures and given a notice to improve in September 2007.

The school is part of a Leading Edge Partnership, together with two other schools, and works in collaboration with 14 other schools to provide extended services to children, young people and families in the locality. It provides initial teacher training in partnership with the Colchester Teacher Training Consortium.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Thomas Lord Audley School has improved rapidly since its last inspection. It now provides a satisfactory quality of education and some aspects of its work are good. Consequently, in accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The school's very rapid improvement is attributable to the outstanding leadership of the executive headteacher. In a relatively short time, he has gained the confidence of the pupils and, with the support of the staff and other senior leaders, he has brought about very significant improvement in all aspects of the school's work. Achievement and standards are now satisfactory. This year, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades rose by 16%. These are the best GCSE results in the school's recent history and standards at the end of Year 11 are now much closer to the national average. Nonetheless, attainment at the end of Year 9, which had improved for a number of years, dipped slightly and remains below average. In part, this is because the school focused its efforts heavily on Key Stage 4 but also because it did not always analyse its information on pupils' performance in sufficient depth. As a result, it did not act quickly or effectively enough to stem the underachievement of some pupils. It now has strategies to ensure it does not repeat this in 2009.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory and some aspects, including pupils' enjoyment of their education, their attitudes to learning and their behaviour, are good. Teaching and learning are also satisfactory. Well over half the lessons seen by inspectors were good or outstanding but there are still lessons, particularly for the less able, where the teaching does not provide enough opportunity for pupils to take an active part in learning. In these lessons, pupils make slower progress and sometimes misbehave. Furthermore, the marking of work is inconsistent and does not indicate clearly enough to the pupils what they need to do to improve. In developing its curriculum, the school has rightly concentrated on the core and foundation subjects of the National Curriculum and knows that the range of vocational options is too limited. The quality of the care, guidance and support the school provides and its leadership and management are good. The school environment is calm, orderly and harmonious and, consequently, pupils feel safe and secure there. Leadership and management at all levels are focused on raising standards and are increasingly skilful and successful in doing so. The governing body makes a very effective contribution to the school's work and, together with the school's leadership, provides the school with good capacity to sustain the rapid rate of its improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' attainment and progress in Key Stage 3 by ensuring that all teaching is well matched to pupils' needs and that marking consistently indicates what pupils need to do to improve.
- Analyse the information on pupils' attainment and progress more closely in order to identify the needs of different groups of pupils and to target action to meet these.
- Extend the range of vocational options within the curriculum and, in collaboration with other local providers, ensure that there are clear routes for pupils to continue their vocational studies at the end of Year 11.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Since 2005, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades has almost doubled. In 2008, results improved very significantly and, although still below average, they are now much closer to it than at any time in the school's recent history. The percentage of pupils with five A* - C grades, including English and mathematics, also improved and, as a result, the school now exceeds the national minimum target of 30%. All the pupils achieved at least one GCSE pass grade and the vast majority achieved at least five A-G grades.

To achieve these GCSE results, all pupils made at least satisfactory progress. In English and mathematics, they progressed at a good rate. In particular, this reflects the better teaching, the improved support and guidance offered to pupils and their more positive attitudes to learning.

Despite improving steadily between 2005 and 2007, standards in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 fell slightly in 2008 and remain below average. The school knows what it needs to do to ensure that standards improve next year and evidence from the observation of lessons indicates that pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are now making satisfactory and, in some cases, good progress. In 2008, the school met the challenging targets it set for pupils' attainment in the GCSE examinations but did not meet those for attainment at the end of Year 9.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy school and the good relationships they have with each other and with their teachers. The vast majority behave well around the school and bring positive attitudes to learning to their lessons. The number of exclusions from the school is declining and attendance is improving. Pupils know about healthy lifestyles and participate enthusiastically in physical education lessons and after-school sports clubs. They feel safe in school and have confidence that the staff will tackle any incidents of bullying successfully. Pupils have the chance to take on a range of responsibilities, for example by becoming 'active listeners' in Year 10, and prefects in Year 11. The school council is beginning to be a genuine route for pupils wanting to play an active part in organising and improving the school community. Pupils gain confidence in their relationships with each other from the mixed age tutor groups. Year 11 pupils appreciate their separate tutoring arrangements, and being made to feel mature and adult with their special uniform. This helps to prepare them well for the world beyond their school. Pupils' preparation for their future education, training or employment is satisfactory as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection and the proportion of lessons in which pupils make good progress has increased. The best lessons are characterised by the active engagement of pupils in the learning and by excellent behaviour. In these lessons, teachers use lively resources, including good visual aids, and provide opportunities for pupils to learn in a variety of ways. Pupils respond very well when given the opportunity to work

independently, either by themselves or in groups, and this contributes to their increasingly good progress and improving motivation. Pupils make significantly less progress in those lessons that are overly directed by the teacher. Often, such lessons do not provide enough challenge for pupils to think for themselves and can allow them to go off task and cause disruption. Lower ability groups experience a higher proportion of these kinds of lessons. The school's use and understanding of assessment data is beginning to produce more sophisticated lesson planning, with work increasingly targeted at pupils' different needs and abilities. The marking of students' work, however, is inconsistent. Some departments have a policy that encourages regular and constructive feedback and in these areas, marking is very thorough. Elsewhere marking often lacks detail and fails to indicate clearly to pupils what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides pupils with the opportunities they need to develop their basic skills and the knowledge, skills and understanding of each of the National Curriculum subjects. The school's strategies to improve reading in Years 7 and 8 are boosting literacy skills, and numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are integrated effectively into the curriculum. The recent introduction of a new ICT course in Year 9 is enabling pupils to extend their skills and make an early start to their GCSE studies. In Years 10 and 11, pupils have the choice of a broad range of GCSE courses but, at present, there is not enough vocational provision to meet pupils' needs and interests. In all years, there is a well-structured programme of lessons and activities to promote pupils' personal, social and health education although the school does not assess their attainment in citizenship.

The curriculum ensures that pupils know how to keep themselves safe and how to live a healthy lifestyle. The range of after-school activities and visits is increasing and includes sports, music and drama. The school has acquired government funding for an after-school science and engineering club that is proving very popular with students. All these activities add much interest and enjoyment to pupils' time at school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Vulnerable pupils are monitored very carefully. Their needs are well known, and the school ensures that the work of a range of professionals, such as learning mentors, the school counsellor and school advocate, is co-ordinated to provide effective support. There is also good liaison between the school and outside agencies. Safeguarding procedures are robust and the school ensures pupils' welfare and safety through careful attention to risk assessments and safety on site. Measures to raise the level of attendance are working well and are resulting in steady improvement.

There is an increasingly effective system for tracking the progress of each pupil and this is starting to contribute to improving standards and achievement. Pupils have challenging targets to aim for in all subjects and are well aware of these. Parents and carers are informed regularly about their child's progress. They appreciate the regular reports that use data in an attractive format as this enables them to see their child's progress and potential more clearly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership and staff and pupils share his vision of a continuously improving and increasingly successful school. Senior leaders and managers focus strongly on improving achievement and standards, and they, together with the middle leaders, are held to account when any under-achievement is identified. The school evaluates its work rigorously and this provides it with a detailed and accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses. Priorities for future development focus tightly on what it needs to do to improve and on achieving the increasingly ambitious and challenging targets it sets for pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations. The school has accurately identified improving the quality of teaching and learning as a priority in the drive to raise standards, and there is a robust system in place to monitor lessons and coach teachers in techniques to improve. There is also a comprehensive system for analysing test and exam results. Although this is generally effective, the school is not yet exploiting sufficiently its potential for analysing the progress and needs of different groups of pupils in greater depth.

Middle managers, with responsibilities for subject areas and pastoral care have benefited from good professional training and development and are making an increasingly effective contribution to improving achievement. Governors do a good job in supporting the school, promoting its interests and challenging senior leaders when appropriate. The school is committed to eliminating discrimination and the school community works together harmoniously. There are some good developing projects with the local community, although these are not yet greatly enriching wider school life. The school manages its resources well and gives satisfactory value for money.

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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?	3
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	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Thomas Lord Audley School, Colchester, CO2 8NJ

As you know, we recently visited your school and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. We are very grateful for the help you gave us during our visit and want you to know how much we enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

We were very impressed by all that the school has achieved over the last year. The GCSE results have improved greatly and more of you are achieving your targets. As a result, we think that Thomas Lord Audley now provides a satisfactory quality of education and that some aspects of its work are good. In particular, we think that Mr Tippett is an excellent headteacher, and we know that you, and the parents/carers who wrote to us, do too. He has inspired the staff and is making sure that teaching keeps on improving. Working with the staff, he has also ensured that you know how you are expected to behave and what will happen should you disrupt the learning of others. As we walked around the school and in lessons, we observed good behaviour and positive relationships within the school community. We think the way the school supports, guides and cares for you is also good. This makes you feel safe, secure and happy.

Mr Tippett, the staff and governors want your school to improve even more and we have suggested three ways in which it can do so. First, to help you achieve more, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, we have asked the school to improve some of the teaching and the marking of your work. Secondly, we think the school should look more closely at the information it holds on your performance so that it is quicker at spotting pupils who need extra help. Thirdly, we do not think there are enough vocational courses for older pupils. To provide these, the school will need to work with others in the area to make sure that you can continue your studies at the end of Year 11.

Finally, we would like to congratulate all of you - pupils, parents, governors, staff and the headteacher - for working so well together to improve Thomas Lord Audley. We hope that you will continue your efforts, work hard in lessons and try to gain as much from school life as you can. What you achieve now is vitally important for your future lives. We wish you all the very best with your studies.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour

Her Majesty's Inspector