

The Thomas Aveling School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118923
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	326928
Inspection date	26 November 2008
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1102
Sixth form	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Wood
Headteacher	Richard Hart
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2006
School address	Arethusa Road Rochester ME1 2UW
Telephone number	01634 844809
Fax number	01634 818385

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards in the sixth form; care, guidance and support; and the assessment of students' work. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, assessment data, parents' questionnaires, planning documents, observation of lessons, and interviews with staff and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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 this report.

Description of the school

The Thomas Aveling School draws the great majority of its students from the Rochester area. It educates students who have either chosen not to go to, or who have not been selected for, grammar schools in the area. The school has had specialist status for technology since 2001 and training school status since 2005. The school works in partnership with five local schools in the Rochester and Walderslade Consortium and a college of further education to extend the curriculum for sixth form students. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is slightly below average, as is the proportion of students who do not speak English as a first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Thomas Aveling School is a good and very popular school. It has several outstanding features and no major weaknesses. The school is extremely well led and managed and has excellent capacity to improve further. The quality of care, guidance and support for students throughout the school is outstanding. The school is very strongly focused on helping all its students and staff to do their best and is largely successful in achieving this. Students enjoy their education, are friendly and welcoming and highly supportive of their school. The great majority of parents have positive views about the work of the school and feel it is doing a good job.

Students enter the school with below average prior attainment. The proportion of students attaining five or more passes at grades A* to C in GCSE and equivalent examinations by the end of Year 11 is well above the national average but substantially below it when English and mathematics are included. Unconfirmed results for 2008 show that all students achieved at least one pass at grades A* to G at the end of Year 11. This represents very good achievement overall and excellent achievement for many students. There is no evidence of any specific group of students seriously underachieving but some higher attaining students do not always achieve the grades they are capable of. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and students who are in public care make good progress. Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form and achieve well in relation to their attainment when they entered the school.

Students achieve well throughout their time at school because of effective teaching, a curriculum that matches their needs and the excellent support they receive. The lessons observed during the inspection confirmed the school's own view that the majority of teaching is good or better and there is very little unsatisfactory teaching. Lessons are carefully planned, involve a range of interesting activities and engage students' interests. Very effective use is often made of information and communication technology (ICT) to help students learn. Higher attaining students in the 'accelerated learning' group in mathematics are fully challenged and making very good progress. However, this was not the case in some other lessons observed during the inspection where the tasks set did not always stretch students sufficiently. Much work has been done to help teachers improve the quality and use of the assessment of students' work. There is evidence of the impact of this but there are still some inconsistencies in the quality of marking and students are not always clear about the next steps they need to take to make progress.

The excellent quality of care, guidance and support provided for all students is a major strength and a key factor in helping them to remain engaged in education and to gain qualifications. Students spoke very appreciatively about 'the extra mile' that teachers and other staff are prepared to go in order to help them with any difficulties they encounter, both in their personal lives and their academic work. An example of this is the well-attended sessions provided after school, during holidays and on Saturdays to help students improve their coursework and to prepare for examinations. Highly effective use is made of non-teaching staff to provide additional care and support so that students feel there is always someone to turn to. The innovative 'inclusion zone' and work with pupil referral units have helped to improve behaviour and keep exclusions to a minimum. Behaviour observed in lessons and around the school during the inspection was very good. The school takes bullying very seriously and has effective strategies in place for dealing with it, for example through the work of peer mediators and counsellors. Rigorous child protection procedures are in place and incidents of racism are dealt with appropriately on the rare occasions when they are reported. The school works hard to improve

students' attendance, which is now above average. The imaginative 'Z' tutor group for those most at risk of persistent poor attendance is highly effective and its students greatly value the support provided by their tutor. There are excellent systems in place for tracking and monitoring students' progress and rapid interventions are made when there is evidence of any underachievement. Reporting to parents on their children's progress is frequent and well received.

The curriculum is well matched to meet students' needs through a blend of academic and applied courses in the main school and in the sixth form. The introduction of new specialist diplomas is adding further strength to this provision. Improved provision has also been made in citizenship education and in modern foreign languages. Early entry in Year 10 for the highest attaining students in GCSE mathematics has proved to be very successful and there is scope for extending this approach to other subjects. Work with local universities is helping to raise aspirations and encourage students to go on to further and higher education. There is a good take-up of the wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school's specialism is making a significant impact, particularly in mathematics and science where there has been a considerable improvement in GCSE results.

Students' personal development throughout the school is successfully promoted through the curriculum and after-school activities. An improved take-up of healthy eating options and good participation in physical activities held after school indicate that students are adopting healthy lifestyles. The school has received the Healthy Schools award for its work in this area. Students make a very positive contribution to the work of the school and to the wider community. The school council has been effective in helping to bring about improvements, for example in the code of conduct and in the quality of food provided by the school. The views of students are taken seriously and are a valued part of the reviews of the quality of work in subjects. Many sixth form students are involved in supporting younger students in lessons, acting as mentors and helping in local primary schools. All students are involved in charity work. Students feel well prepared for future employment, education and training through a strong programme of careers education and guidance, including work experience. Provision to develop students' enterprise skills has recently been strengthened through the appointment of a teacher to lead this work.

The headteacher and his senior team provide outstanding leadership and management. Their track record of success demonstrates that they are extremely well placed to bring about further improvements. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, set very clear direction and do much to encourage staff to improve their practice and be innovative. They are very well supported by other managers, staff and governors. There are excellent systems in place to check the quality of work in subjects. There is some variation in the effectiveness of subject and course leaders but senior managers are highly effective in intervening and providing support where necessary. Excellent partnerships have been developed with external agencies to support the well-being of students. The school has a very good understanding of its local community and does much to meet its needs, for example through its work with a local primary school, family literacy programmes and courses in mathematics and English. The school makes effective and efficient use of its resources and provides outstanding value for money in terms of what it achieves with its students. The school is making very good progress in reaching or exceeding its targets, including those for its specialism in technology.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

There is an open access policy for post-16 students and a substantial part of the provision is for students who want to improve their GCSE and equivalent qualifications. Students taking these courses make very good progress and achieve well, with substantial numbers going on to take higher level courses. Students taking A-level and equivalent courses make satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the sixth form. They achieve well in terms of their often low starting points when they joined the school. The great majority of students taking A levels successfully complete their courses and attain pass grades, with a substantial proportion going on to higher education. However, too few get the higher grades they are capable of. The school has recognised this and has worked hard to raise achievement, for example through improving attendance and better monitoring of progress. Unconfirmed results for 2008 indicate that this is starting to have an impact. The school's involvement in the sixth form partnership arrangements brings clear benefits as it widens the range of courses available to students. However, relatively few students take courses in the other schools, particularly in the grammar schools. The partnership also benefits staff, for example through the strong collaborative planning to introduce the new diplomas and their involvement in joint staff development activities. The director of the sixth form and her team provide excellent leadership and management. They have done much to raise the aspirations of students to continue to post-16 education and, increasingly, to go on to university.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of higher attaining students in GCSE and equivalent qualifications in the main school and in A-level courses in the sixth form.
- Build on current good practice to ensure that the marking of students' work is of a consistently high quality and that students fully understand what they need to do to improve it.

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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	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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

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	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

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

27 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Thomas Aveling School, Rochester ME1 2UW

Thank you for making us so welcome and for helping us with the recent inspection of your school. I would like to share some of our findings with you. We think that The Thomas Aveling is a good school and that it has several outstanding features. The overwhelming majority of those of you we met and the responses we received from your parents told us that you enjoy school and feel safe and extremely well cared for. We agree with these views. You make good progress and achieve well because teaching is good and you are given excellent support. Your personal development is good. You are given a good choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11 and many of you take advantage of the wide range of after-school activities that are provided for you. You are friendly and welcoming, you attend well and your behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. You show you are able to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. Many of you make an excellent contribution to the life of the school, for example by taking on extra responsibilities and through the work of the student council. You also make a strong contribution to the wider community, for example through your involvement in charity work. Your headteacher and his senior colleagues provide excellent leadership and management and they are very well supported by other staff and governors.

We have suggested the following improvements.

- Some of the marking of your work is not as helpful as it might be and you are not always clear enough about what you need to do to improve. We have asked the school to find ways of making this better.
- Although most of you achieve very well in GCSE examinations, more of you need to get the highest grades and we have asked the school to find ways of helping you to do this.

We feel your school is fully capable of making these and other improvements. I hope you will play your part in this and wish you every success in the future.

David Butler Her Majesty's Inspector