

Thomas Telford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123627
Local Authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	327950
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	City technology college
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	0–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1197
Sixth form	386
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	13
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Harrison
Headteacher	Kevin Satchwell
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Old Park Telford TF3 4NW
Telephone number	01952 200000
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Age group	0–18
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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 Telford School was formed as a City Technology College in 1991, specialising in mathematics, science and technology. The school attracts students from the neighbouring areas of Telford and Wolverhampton. Most students are from White British backgrounds but the social and ethnic mix broadly reflects the make-up of the local community. The level of disadvantage in the community is average but the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is below average. Virtually no students move to or from other schools. According to Key Stage 2 national test results, attainment on entry to the school is exceptionally high. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is extremely popular and demand for places is very high; for admission purposes, the school uses nationally agreed selection criteria for City Technology Colleges, designed to ensure that the intake reflects the full range of ability according to national norms.

The school also provides a small baby unit and Nursery with places for six babies and 13 two-and-a-half-year-olds.

The school works collaboratively with three Academies for which it is the main sponsor. The objective is to replicate the practices of Thomas Telford School for the benefit of more students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Thomas Telford School continues to strive and achieve excellence in all it does. The determined drive of the headteacher for the best for every student underpins the school's success. All the staff share this vision. In this school, it is 'cool to work'. There is meticulous attention to every detail. As the headteacher explained, 'It is the little things which add up and together become more than the whole.' The school believes every student can achieve highly, consequently every student, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, makes outstanding progress. Standards achieved are the highest in England. Increasingly challenging targets are continually set and met by the school. This ensures that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher infuses all the school does. He knows the school intimately and his presence is felt in all parts of the school. He is a personal tutor, has regular meals with students and his door is always open.

The curriculum is outstanding in its flexibility. It enables subject content to be closely matched to students' interests and prior learning. Topical events are included, such as the election and inauguration of the president of the United States of America. The high quality provision of information and communication technology (ICT) allows students to access curriculum materials at anytime to support their learning. Students' high level of competence in the use of ICT prepares them extremely well for their future economic well-being. Teaching is supported by extensive use of interactive whiteboards in all learning areas. Students' enterprise skills enable them to fundraise very effectively for a huge range of community projects.

Safety is an appropriately high priority. Students feel safe. Personal tutors know their students well and give effective support. Relationships are strong and caring. Students value the mixed ages within each tutor group, enabling older students to support younger ones. Incidents of bullying are rare and swiftly dealt with. Many students travel long distances to the school but the transport is well organised and supervised. This ensures that every student can participate in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities after school. Students appreciate this. They understand about the need for internet safety and older students know about safe driving.

Students know how to stay healthy because of the very strong emphasis on healthy lifestyles and students are encouraged to use the many sporting facilities, including the fitness suite. They choose healthy options at lunchtime and enjoy the award-winning menu provided in the restaurant.

Outstanding care, guidance and support underpin all aspects of school life. Challenging targets are set and effectively monitored for all students. End-of-module feedback, to parents and students every three to four weeks, ensures clarity about what must be done for students to meet their targets. The school effectively shares its methodology with other schools in its locality and nationally.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Open-plan areas in all departments facilitate the sharing of good practice and a community of learners. Detailed feedback following lesson observations also helps teachers to develop their skills. The school uses a wide variety of strategies to communicate effectively with parents, including a parent forum. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One wrote that they 'jumped for joy' when their child got in and are 'still jumping'. A tiny minority of parents feel the school does not sufficiently listen to them or the students. Inspectors were impressed by the endeavours the school makes in encouraging good two-way communication between home and school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Standards are significantly above average. Students make excellent progress because of the first-class teaching and study support that encourages total commitment as well as developing lifelong learning skills. Attendance and retention rates are very high. Students are successful independent learners and take a real pride in their work and achievements. Around 90% of students go on to university while the rest progress to further education and training. Considering the outstanding achievements and well-rounded nature of the students, too few obtain entry to the most prestigious universities.

Students' personal development and their acquisition of skills for future economic well-being are outstanding. Students' integration as part of the school is successful as they take the lead in organising events, helping in the running of games and other activities. There is no common room and this ensures they are a strong presence and influence for good around the school. Teaching and learning are excellent because of the high expectation and challenge in lessons, matched with close tracking and timely support given to every individual. The leadership and management of the sixth form are highly effective. Close and continuous attention is given to every aspect of a student's life. Individual guidance and support, and very good relations with their teachers, are strengths of the sixth form. The school has strong links with other sixth form providers, universities and industry. The sixth form provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Parents are extremely pleased with the progress and level of care that their children and babies receive in the Nursery and baby unit. They emphasise the family atmosphere; one parent described a 'warm loving environment'. Children's emotional and welfare needs are met extremely sensitively. For example, staff ensured that a very young child new to the baby unit had close personal contact with her key worker at all times and this enabled her to feel confident and to settle well.

Children are happy, make friends, and share especially well. There are frequent opportunities for them to choose what they would like to do. All make at least good progress and some make outstanding progress in their learning. They have a good understanding of number work. Everyday situations are used well to practise their counting. Children take responsibility by serving drinks and healthy foods at snack times. They are very clear about what healthy food is and what food is not healthy.

The setting works very effectively with the parents of children who find learning difficult. This enables these children to make good gains in their learning and personal development. Children are well prepared for their next stage of learning. Primary schools comment on their confidence. Leadership and management have a rigorous approach to ensuring the safety of children. Procedures are robust. Staff have embraced the new requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) enthusiastically. Although the Nursery receives management support on a daily basis, there is not an early years specialist on hand to give the dedicated support that it needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the number of students gaining places at the most prestigious universities by exploring every avenue.

- Strengthen the management of the Nursery by ensuring that a suitably qualified person supports the nursery staff on a day-to-day basis.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Outstanding progress is made at Key Stages 3 and 4 because the range of strategies employed ensure challenging targets are met and students build on success. Students complete Key Stage 3 effectively, with all students achieving much better than the national average in two years. This allows them early entry to GCSE courses. Rigorous analysis of data ensures that the mix of vocational and academic courses taken by every student leads to them all attaining at least ten A* to C GCSE passes. In 2008, 99% of students gained at least ten A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Every student also gained at least a GCSE grade C in ICT. This is much better than the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Attendance overall in 2008 was 98%, which is well above the national average, and testimony to how committed students and parents are to the education offered by the school. Students enjoy coming to school and value all the opportunities they have to develop both academically and as young people. They are proud of their achievements and are excited by others' successes. These are celebrated regularly, by the 'Monday broadcasts' to all students, for example. Students say this encourages them to work hard to gain success themselves. They look to many teachers and high achieving students as role models and are inspired to emulate their success. They value their place at the school highly. Consequently, attitudes to learning are excellent and behaviour is exemplary.

The strong emphasis on the 'thought for the week' enables students to reflect on important issues and supports their spiritual development. They work very well together in lessons and support each other and there is a strong ethos of teamwork.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning are outstanding. Parents endorse this view. The three-hour lessons enable a wide variety of teaching styles, which are well matched to all students' needs, including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This leads to a high level of engagement. Students said they liked longer sessions because they could complete work. Flexibility of teaching allows students to have breaks when they need to. No bells interrupt the purposeful atmosphere. Very good attitudes, relationships and behaviour ensure that there is an excellent culture for learning.

Meticulous planning by individual teachers and teams ensure that teaching responds to individual students' needs on a lesson-by-lesson basis. No group of students fall behind because of this collaborative approach. Effective deployment of teaching assistants ensures all students achieve targets. School staff are paid to teach lessons of absent colleagues. Appropriate specialists teach subjects, and consistency and high standards of teaching ensure students continue to make excellent progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum. The school continually monitors the effectiveness of the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all learners and encourages strong personal development. Carefully planned provision for students to further their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in all aspects of the curriculum.

The school has successfully achieved a balance of academic and vocational pathways for students to ensure success for all. For example, for students who have completed their physical education GCSE early, there is the option of a fitness instructor course in Year 11. Work with local partners is a strong feature and provides enrichment of the vocational curriculum, with, for example, mock interviews, work experience and trips to local businesses. Key partners also provide sponsorship for students going on to higher education. The extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities and high participation rates allow students to develop their personal interests and skills. The programme is responsive to students' suggestions, for example in setting up a girls- only swimming gala.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff are extremely committed to ensuring the very best provision for the pupils. Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet all current requirements. Excellent relations and a strong ethos of support, underpinned by rigorous systems, ensure that students get the very best care, guidance and support for their learning and personal development. Relationships are highly effective and systems for tracking each student's progress are rigorous. Those students who are vulnerable and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. Students who have a history of exclusion from other schools achieve at least five A* to C grades. This is far better than would normally be expected.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Every element of leadership and management is outstanding. The headteacher leads the senior team effectively. Its strength lies in its multi-disciplinary expertise. This securely underpins its clear and detailed understanding of the school. The flatter management structure enables prompt and effective action on day-to-day issues. Each deputy headteacher works alongside a department and teaches 50% of the timetable. Thus, senior managers are able to model good practice and know their area of learning intimately. The weekly senior leadership meeting has as much time allocated to discuss individual students as whole-school issues. Thus, accountability is embedded at all levels. All staff feel valued through systems that guarantee preparation and marking time. They are remunerated for taking extra-curricular sessions. Frequently held team meetings ensure the regular sharing of planning and moderation opportunities. Money is spent where it will have the greatest impact on students' learning. Rigorous interrogation of assessment data informs support activities aligned to school improvement. Income generation leads to funds being reinvested within the school. Students are involved at every opportunity in determining how funds are spent on improving their learning. Governance is outstanding. Governors act as 'critical friends', holding the school to account, and offer a range of business

skills. The latter are used by the school to enhance its business and enterprise culture that has a strong ICT dimension.

Community cohesion is outstanding. This is because the school curriculum has embedded values of reducing intolerance and increasing understanding of other people. Exploring current issues in the news helps students consider difficult moral problems. For instance, a visit by a group of refugees challenged students to reconsider their assumptions. Thus, students develop a high degree of social awareness. The school provides a vast range of opportunities for students to take responsible and supportive roles within the school and the wider community. Students initiate and manage ambitious fund-raising projects, such as supporting building a school in Africa with which the school has strong links. Large numbers of students take the Duke of Edinburgh Award, enabling them not only to develop personally and socially, but also to show initiative in the service of others. In addition, the school has links with a range of schools in the Midlands region that enable the effective sharing of good practice that fosters excellence.

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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?	1	1
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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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**

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Telford School, Telford, TF3 4NW

Thank you for your warm and friendly welcome. We very much enjoyed hearing your views. They greatly helped us in understanding what makes your school so outstanding in every way. You are an important part of what makes your school outstanding because you make a serious commitment to your own learning and to the school.

Your outstanding achievement is because of a wide range of things the school has put in place. The most important is the vision and leadership of your headteacher; he ensures you have high quality care and support from every member of staff in the school. The online curriculum support is excellent and ensures you can access information when it is convenient for you. Teaching is challenging and extra support is provided for all through the mix of subjects, both traditional and vocational. You are involved in an extensive range of school activities, in which nearly everyone participates, and this helps you stay fit and healthy. Your involvement in the wider community, through activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, is impressive.

Your care and consideration for everyone in the school is outstanding. We were very impressed with the range of fund-raising initiatives, such as helping to build the school in Africa. You care about your education and your school, which you have helped develop through your well-thought-out suggestions. The school's excellent leadership ensure the continued high quality of your education.

You are very well equipped for your future life through business and enterprise activities that continue into your sixth form. The sixth form continues the excellent work of Key Stages 3 and 4. We were impressed by the involvement of the sixth form students in the whole of the school. They are excellent role models for you. Considering these outstanding achievements, we would like to see more of you go to the most prestigious universities and we have asked the school to increase numbers by exploring every avenue.

The Nursery and baby unit attached to the school is also outstanding. Consequently, the pre-school children get off to a very good start. To help them do even better, we have asked the school to make sure that an early years specialist supports the Nursery staff on a day-to-day basis.

We wish you continued success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker

Her Majesty's Inspector