

Thomas Wolsey School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124907
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328240
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	100
Sixth form	11
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	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Hoggarth
Headteacher	Mrs Nancy McArdle
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Defoe Road Ipswich Suffolk IP1 6SG
Telephone number	01473 467600
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Thomas Wolsey is a community special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 years who have physical and medical needs and learning difficulties. A small but growing number have complex or profound needs, including multi-sensory impairments. About half are wheelchair users and a similar proportion need some alternative way of communicating. Because of their needs and learning difficulties, pupils enter the school with skills and understanding well below those of others of their age. Of the pupils currently on roll, forty one of these are dual placed, being educated for varying parts of the week in their local mainstream schools. The school provides an outreach service both to support these placements and the inclusion of other pupils with physical needs in mainstream schools. This is a growing part of its work. Thirteen children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and eleven in the school's sixth form. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The school has a number of Awards including Investors in People, Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark and Active Mark. In January 2009, the school moved into specially adapted premises within Thurleston High School. Thomas Wolsey is seeking Trust status with this school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Parents and children say this is an 'amazing' school in which pupils achieve 'so much personally and educationally'. They also say the school is so successful because staff are 'so determined and committed.' Inspectors agree that this is an exceptional school in which pupils of all ages, whatever their starting point or needs, achieve outstandingly in all aspects of their development. This is because the teaching and learning in lessons, the quality of care and the learning experiences provided, are of the highest quality. Staff say they are determined 'to unwrap the jewels within each child' and give them the best possible opportunities in later life. This they do very well indeed, within an atmosphere of care and concern and celebration of every tiny step towards learning and independence that pupils make.

The care, support and guidance for pupils is exceptional. The school is tenacious in finding the way to include every pupil in lessons, to 'hear their voice' and to keep them safe. Every child is enabled to express themselves and to be as mobile and independent as possible, through the excellent use of technological aids and team work between therapists, other agencies and the school staff. All this contributes to the outstanding personal development, well-being, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Attendance is good and behaviour excellent. Really strong partnerships with families, agencies, businesses and other schools maximise pupils' learning opportunities and achievements, whether they are learning in the school, on work experience or in local mainstream provision. The excellent outreach service is very highly regarded by schools, who say that because the advice and support provided is so highly relevant and encouraging, 'this makes the placement work.' The school, with its partner schools, is remarkably successful in maintaining an increasing proportion of its pupils, some with highly complex physical and learning needs, within their local communities and schools.

This outstanding provision is in place because of the exceptionally inclusive vision and excellent leadership and management of the headteacher, the senior leadership team and the various middle managers whose roles have all been strengthened through training and support. The move into Thurleston High has rejuvenated this school and excited staff and pupils of both schools. In a short time, because of the commitment of both headteachers, these two schools have become a remarkably harmonious community which celebrates similarities and differences and increasingly shares teaching and learning experiences to the benefit of staff and pupils. Pupils say that being within the high school puts them in the 'real' world and makes them feel included. The oldest say that moving into Thurleston, the responsibilities they have in school and their work experience opportunities, really help them to feel confident about their future.

The school has improved well since the last inspection and provides excellent value for money, using its resources and those available within its community to best effect. The range of awards that pupils can now take has been broadened well for those in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Provision for those with the most complex needs is now excellent and the ways in which the school challenges itself to improve have also increased. It is extending the way it analyses and sets targets, using a commercial scheme which allows it to compare the progress of groups with others externally. At present, measures of progress are largely linked to the personal goals that pupils are to achieve, although the school does also use its own system of assessing small steps to record progress against national criteria.

The governing body fulfils its duties well and now more actively challenges and holds the school to account. Governors are rightly proud of, and excited by, what they are already achieving through their tenacious support for the co-location and the outreach role of the school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form has improved well since the last inspection and is now outstanding. The excellent curriculum offers a range of very well directed, highly relevant activities that are very popular with students and help them to achieve a good range of academic, vocational and personal awards. As a result of this and the excellent teaching and learning, students' achievements and personal development are outstanding. They make exceptional progress in their personal development and in key skills, such as literacy, numeracy, life skills and independence and are justifiably proud of this. Students gain greatly from the daily opportunities for social and academic development with Thurleston students, which enhance the personal development of all involved. For example, students ran a workshop for their mainstream peers on Disability Awareness. Excellent links are in place with the Connexions service, colleges and local businesses providing a very good range of enrichment and ways of preparation for life after school. All this widens students' social horizons and their understanding of their own strengths and needs.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school makes outstanding provision for its youngest children because of the expert teacher knowledge, the calibre of the team work of all staff and the excellent leadership and management. Almost all the children attend their local schools or playgroups as well as Thomas Wolsey and excellent support is provided for these placements through training of staff, technological support and high quality advice. Staff have a very clear focus on helping each child to demonstrate their capability and helping everyone, including families, to understand and provide for the child well. This is reflected in the excellent relationships they develop with families who say their children have made remarkable progress. Children are indeed helped to learn and develop extremely well in all areas of learning and exceptionally well in physical development, communication, early literacy, numeracy, personal, social development and self help skills. The teaching, learning and the range of experiences provided are exceptional, as is the quality of care and support. This is a caring, nurturing environment in which children's safety and well-being are paramount. Detailed, high quality observations and assessment mean that each child's programme is carefully targeted. Not a moment is lost and children's individual personalities and talents are nurtured and shine through.

What the school should do to improve further

- In order to ensure more accurate and challenging target setting, extend the ways that the small steps of progress that pupils and groups make are recorded and evaluated.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils of all ages achieve extremely well in all subjects and in relation to the challenging targets they are set through their individual education plans. Excellent use of technology, including information and communication technology (ICT), supports their achievements in communication, reading, independence and self help, sometimes quite remarkably. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and

post-16, gain a range of both academic and vocational awards highly appropriate for their levels and needs. The school works well with its partnerships to extend these and find the right award for the right pupil. Current work and last year's award results, confirm these achievements to be very good indeed and that individual pupils' particular talents are sought out and provided for. For example, pupils did particularly well in GCSE art and design, science and mathematics, the expressive arts and in Sports Leaders awards. Those with the most complex needs, including those with multi-sensory disability, achieve extremely well from their starting points. They make small but hugely significant gains. This is because the school has focused really well on increasing staff expertise and their understanding of how to meet these pupils' needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils of all ages display great enthusiasm for school, have excellent relationships with each other and their teachers and thoroughly enjoy learning together. Those with more complex communication needs quicken their social development as they become skilled in the use of pictures, symbols, switches and signing to communicate with others. The development of their independence is a significant strength of this school. From an early age, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and show initiative. This helps to raise their confidence and self-esteem. The school council structure enables pupils to contribute and really influence improvements to their learning environment. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through regular physical exercise and benefit from the excellent links the school has with health and educational professional services and sports clubs. They feel secure and well supported in school and confident about taking part in a range of challenging activities in and outside school that further boost their feelings of self-worth and achievement. For example, they take part in the Sports Leaders Award programme. Pupils make good ambassadors for the school in the many joint activities with pupils from other schools and contribute very well to the wider community. They are very well prepared for the world of work, through a good careers education programme and good links with the Connexions service.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Every lesson in this school is carefully planned with each individual's needs and interests in mind. This is all supported by the excellent ways in which staff observe, note and reflect carefully on pupils' learning in lessons and adapt their plans in relation to this. Staff are extremely creative in the resources they bring to lessons and the ways in which they excite pupils' involvement and interest. As a result, even pupils who are tentative learners will 'have a go' at a new experience because they trust their teachers and because of the constant encouragement and feedback they receive. Computers and other aids, such as the use of symbols and signs, support pupils' learning, communication and involvement very well indeed. Special support assistants make a huge contribution to pupils' learning and comfort, as does the joint work with therapists. This all ensures pupils' programmes build extremely well on their prior achievements and allows them the opportunity to try out skills in meaningful ways.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum covers all the elements that it should, is well thought out and highly relevant to the needs of all pupils. It is interpreted in an imaginative way, with a strong emphasis on physical activity, key and life skills, communication and the development of independence. A very strong personal, social, health and citizenship programme permeates the life of the school with enjoyment of learning, confidence building and self-esteem at its heart. Learning is enhanced by an excellent range of visits and visitors to extend pupils' experiences and personal development. These, and excellent partnerships and links, such as those with Ipswich Town Football Club and the local allotments, enrich the curriculum and pupils' understanding of different communities and needs extremely well. The sensory curriculum has been enhanced and developed extremely well with the support of the national charity, SENSE. It promotes learning for all pupils, but particularly those with the most complex needs, very well. The school has outstanding links with many local schools, enabling staff in both settings to share expertise and improve their practice. Those in dual placements receive carefully planned and coordinated experiences and support that enhance their learning.

There is an excellent new sensory room and hydro pool resource, equipped with the latest technological aids, which stimulate and enhance learning for pupils with complex needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils learn and grow in a safe and hugely supportive environment because they are cared for exceptionally well. Strong partnerships with medical health professionals and other outside agencies ensure that pupils' needs are fully met within the school environment and very well prepared for life beyond it. As a result, all pupils, including those with sensory and complex learning needs achieve excellently in relation to their personal targets. Appropriate arrangements for protecting and safeguarding pupils, including risk assessments, are fully in place and meet government requirements. Pupils are given really good feedback as to how they are doing and what they now need to do to improve. However, although individual education plans include clear, achievable targets, there is some inconsistency in ascribing the timelines for targets to be achieved.

Parents are actively involved as partners in their child's development and very well involved, for example, during annual reviews of statements and at transition reviews. Their views are carefully considered and as a result they feel very well informed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leaders and managers at every level have a very clear view of where the school is going and what now needs to be done to improve further. The school has an ambitious, inclusive vision. Leaders are determined to ensure their pupils achieve well and are as independent as possible and that they both value themselves and are valued. The co-location and move towards Trust status with the High School, and the exceptional local and regional partnerships they have formed, is testament to their determination to achieve this. The school has considerable evidence to back up its judgements about how well it is doing. However, this does not always show to

best effect the excellent progress that pupils make and recognises that it could be analysed and organised in even more effective ways. The school has made a good start on improving this. It is a school which always strives to improve and readily puts new systems, procedures and approaches in place where it evaluates these could have a positive effect. A good example is the targeted work on the multi sensory curriculum with SENSE which has clearly paid off. Managers of the different departments and subjects are highly effective, reviewing carefully their achievements and identifying where they could improve even more. Governance is now good and has some outstanding features, such as the ways in which governors have worked tirelessly towards the co-location and raised money for the playground. The school makes a strong contribution to community cohesion through its own curriculum, its extensive links and its work with the high school. This enables its own pupils and others to celebrate and understand similarities, difference and disability well. This all confirms the leadership and management to be outstanding, including the value for money and the school's capacity to improve even more.

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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	4	4
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	

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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which 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 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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
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**

2 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Wolsey School Ipswich, IP1 6SG

We did so enjoy visiting your school and want to say thank you for the ways in which you welcomed us into your lessons and talked with us.

You told us it is a wonderful school and we agree with you. We think you are very lucky to go to a school like Thomas Wolsey. We think your teachers and support staff work really hard to make lessons interesting and fun and to help you achieve and do all the things you would like to do for yourself. You make excellent progress in all of your work because everyone is so good at working out how best to help you to learn. We like the way in which you can use switches, signs and other aids to help you do this.

You said how much you liked moving to Thurleston High and being part of both schools and again we agree with you that this really has improved the school and the opportunities you have to be part of everything.

We think Mrs McArdle is an excellent headteacher and she has a really good team of teachers and others helping her. She and the governors are working well together to improve things even more.

We have asked them to think about just one thing;

- to improve the ways in which they check on how well everybody in the school is progressing in the different subjects and how they use this information to make the school an even better place to learn.

Once again thank you so much for sharing your lessons with us. We do agree with you that Thomas Wolsey is a really good place to learn in.

With best wishes to you all

Sue Lewis

Lead inspector