

The Thomas Adams School, Wem

Low Hill, Wem, Shrewsbury, SY4 5UB

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the boarding experience		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The acting headteacher, senior team and governing body take a strong lead in driving improvement. Rigorous checks on teaching, with good training and support where it is needed, maintain the quality of classroom practice and improve achievement.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers provide lively and exciting tasks that enable students to build their learning step by step.
- Students' behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. They are polite and welcoming, and keen to talk positively about their school.
- Students' achievement is good. They make good progress to leave with higher standards than they had on entry.
- The range of subjects that students follow is extensive and subjects are well matched to their individual needs.
- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well and are very successful in gaining entry to university, further education or employment.
- Good provision and guidance for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are central to the school's work.
- The overall effectiveness of boarding provision is good. Students receive a consistently good standard of care and make good progress in their social and personal development.
- The school meets all the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Marking does not always tell students what they need to do to improve their work.
- Sometimes the quality of teachers' questioning prevents students from thinking more deeply about the subject or topic being studied.
- The school's recently commissioned fire risk recommendations await implementation within the suggested timescale.
- Not all boarding staff have formal training for administering and dispensing medication.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 51 lessons, including eight shared observations with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed a school assembly, listened to several students read and looked at samples of their recent work.
- Meetings were held with: groups of students; the acting headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team; heads of subject departments; teachers; members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of school documents, including: the school’s self-evaluation; the school development plan; behaviour records; governing body documents and documents relating to the management of teachers’ performance.
- The views of the 132 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 101 questionnaires returned by school staff and two emails received from parents.

Inspection team

Steven Cartlidge, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Cooper	Additional Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector
Kerin Jones	Additional Inspector
Robert Steed	Additional Inspector
Julian Parker	Social Care Inspector
Trevor Hall	Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an above average-sized secondary school. It includes boarding provision for 52 students.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and others, is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school makes use of local businesses as part of its weekly work experience programme for a very small number of Key Stage 4 students.
- Recent tragic circumstances in the mathematics department led to a great deal of staff disruption.
- The acting headteacher, who was the deputy headteacher, has been in post since September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching so that it is good or better in all lessons by ensuring that:
 - the quality of teachers' written comments in students' books matches the highly effective oral feedback provided in lessons, to better assist students to improve their work and parents to support their children's learning
 - staff questioning gives students the opportunity to think more deeply.
- Improve the quality of the boarding experience by:
 - ensuring that all recommendations made by the recently commissioned fire risk assessment are implemented within the suggested timescales
 - increase the number of staff with boarding responsibilities who have formal administration of medication training.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students typically start the school with attainment at or, sometimes, slightly above national averages. They make good progress and their attainment, including that of the most able, means the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics is above average. Year 11 students' GCSE results in 2013 improved on those of the previous year. The school's information, based on accurate internal assessments of how well students are progressing, suggests that students are on track to achieve even better results in 2014.
- The improved standards and rates of progress in Key Stage 4 are also reflected in Key Stage 3, where standards and rates of progress for all groups of pupils are improving rapidly. Stronger performance is shown across the curriculum, including in English, mathematics and science.
- The school has entered students early for GCSE examinations in mathematics in order for them to gain their best possible grade. Early entry is proving helpful and the school is ensuring that students, including the most able in mathematics, have the opportunity to improve even further by offering extra tuition and homework clubs.
- Tragic circumstances in the mathematics department led to a dip in students' progress in 2013. Analysis of recent school data indicates that students are again making good progress.
- Well-established strategies help to accelerate reading skills. Catch-up courses are provided for the weakest readers, establishing a systematic approach and providing effective individual support throughout Key Stage 3. This support means that these students make good progress.
- For the students in Year 7 who are eligible for support through the 'catch-up' premium for those struggling with literacy and numeracy skills on entry, the school has accurate tracking systems which are used to direct specific support. As a result, the school's reliable data show that these students are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The small number of students who study work-related and other subjects off the school site as part of their education are gaining appropriate qualifications and making good progress.
- There is no significant difference between the achievements of students from different ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language.
- Lesson observations show that students are well motivated and keen to achieve well in the large majority of their lessons, resulting in their positive progress. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson students displayed great enthusiasm demonstrating to their classmates their investigative literary skills interpreting aspects of how persuasive writing was used in a podcast. They then became totally engrossed in small groups, where they identified and corrected their own mistakes.
- The school is using its pupil premium funding effectively for extra staffing, one-to-one tuition and funding for additional educational resources for eligible students. In 2013 there was an increase of less than half a GCSE grade between Year 11 students eligible for the pupil premium and others in their year group, partly because of particular unfortunate staffing circumstances in mathematics. The situation has been thoroughly resolved by the senior leadership team and well-directed measures put in place to accelerate current students' progress. Inspectors' careful scrutiny of school data on current Year 11 students' attainment indicates improvement.

Currently, Year 11 pupil premium students' performance is on course to narrowing the attainment gap further by 2014 and students observed during the inspection were seen to be making good progress alongside that of their classmates.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to that of others because staff have identified students' individual learning needs and arranged the right additional help. Teachers and teaching assistants support students, providing challenge and encouragement, and helping them with subject-specific vocabulary.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and results are improving strongly. The attainment of students joining the sixth form is below the national average at the highest GCSE grades because some Year 11 students choose to continue their education elsewhere following the impartial advice they receive on the options available at age 16. Students' good progress means they leave Year 13 with standards that are at least in line with and some above the national average for most subjects. Better use of data assessing students' progress and attainment to set targets and subsequent robust tracking of their performance, including that of the most able and those eligible for the pupil premium funding, are ensuring they are making good progress. The school is also ensuring that students who do not already have a grade C GCSE or above in both English and mathematics are being prepared appropriately to sit these examinations in the summer. Many more students have completed their courses in the past two years than in previous years, and students are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment.

The quality of teaching is good

- The vast majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good or better, and students' good progress and achievement show that good teaching is typical.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Teachers provide a range of tasks that motivate their students and encourage them to want to succeed. Students are also keen to live up to the expectations of the adults around them and this helps them to make good progress. This was particularly noticeable in a mathematics lesson, where students in Year 9 had the opportunity to practise their transformational geometry skills. The students gradually added more and more complex calculations to their mathematical problems and showed a clear understanding of the strategies needed to develop their work to reach the highest level.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work together effectively and the help they give is matched well to the accurate assessment they make of students' learning needs. This ensures that all abilities, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs and the most able, make good progress in all subjects.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers use questioning well to check students' understanding, asking searching questions and encouraging discussion. For example, in a religious education lesson, students in Year 7 worked very well together to develop their understanding of what makes a place 'special'. They clearly enjoyed the task and responded positively to the teacher's probing questioning. Sometimes teachers do not question students' understanding deeply enough and, consequently, students do not have the opportunity to think more deeply about the topic being studied.
- Teachers provide high-quality constructive feedback to students verbally but written feedback, in the form of marking, is more variable. In the best practice, teachers' written comments, which show students what they need to do to improve their work, often contribute to the progress that students make. Students value this kind of feedback, particularly when they are given the

opportunity to reflect and respond to the comments. However, this helpful practice is not yet consistent across the school.

- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers monitor, review and assess students' understanding ensuring that students have grasped key subject ideas that will enable them to achieve good grades. Sixth-form students receive outstanding information, support and guidance on the subjects they study. They take responsibility for monitoring their own progress against personal targets, and they collaborate well in helping each other to achieve.
- Homework is well considered and consolidates and extends learning well. Students complete homework to a good standard and this gives them a strong platform for tackling work in the following lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They settle quickly in lessons and are prepared to cooperate with their teachers when asked to perform any learning activities. For example, in a physical education lesson Year 7 students were able to develop their problem-solving ball skills by working with a few others following exactly the instructions from their teacher.
- Good behaviour was seen by inspectors at break and lunchtimes during the inspection and students were keen to point out that this was typical behaviour. Boarders' behaviour in the boarding accommodation is respectful and of a good standard.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The school has a positive and caring atmosphere. Students say they feel safe in school and their parents agree with that view. Boarders say they feel safe in the boarding accommodation and know they can turn to any member of staff if they have concerns. Students' positive views were reflected in discussions with inspectors.
- Safeguarding arrangements in the boarding accommodation are very effective and keeping students safe is integral to daily practice. Staff appreciate the serious implications of all forms of bullying in the boarding accommodation and its potential harm to students' welfare. Any boarder's concerns are acted upon quickly by 'house parents' and boarders say they feel they are 'a family' who support each other at all times.
- Staff have created a strong anti-bullying culture throughout the school. Students say that there is almost no bullying in the school and that they are very well supported on the rare occasions it occurs. They are well informed about different forms of bullying and other aspects of safety, including internet safety.
- The school works effectively to maintain good behaviour and attendance, including that of those who attend offsite provision, and there are clear procedures in place to monitor and support students who have difficulties in these areas.
- Attendance has improved steadily over the last three years and has always been above national average. Leaders are effectively maintaining this position and are focusing on families who struggle to get their children to school, making clear the effect absence has on their children's progress and attainment.
- Students' work is usually neatly presented, and students take pride in themselves, their school uniform and their school.

- Students conduct themselves well. They are polite and courteous to visitors. They willingly talk to adults and are open about their feelings about the school. The school promotes positive relationships between students, and they get on well together.

The leadership and management are good

- Teachers and governors are ambitious for the school to do well. The acting headteacher provides very determined leadership, promoting a clear focus on continual improvement, and offers teachers and parents a clearly articulated vision for an even better school. Subject leaders, behavioural support leaders and other staff with leadership responsibilities are well supported and lead their areas well.
- The acting headteacher's rigorous analysis of students' progress and her accurate evaluation of the school's work provide all teachers and the governing body with a clear understanding of the school's performance. Her good practice ensures that improvement planning is sharply focused on identified weaknesses seen, for example, in the successful action recently taken to raise attainment in mathematics, adversely affected by a staffing crisis. The school's track record, reflected in students' good achievement and effective teaching, demonstrates capacity for continued improvement.
- The leadership of teaching is good and the school places a high priority on improving teaching through good-quality training. Teachers' performance is checked and information is used from lesson observations and from information about students' progress to set teachers' targets for improvement. There is a clear understanding that decisions about pay increases will be based on the impact of teaching on students' progress.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively and has helped develop the role of the teaching assistants. Students identified as in need of additional help, including those eligible for pupil premium or Year 7 'catch-up' funding and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are well supported. The school's evaluation of its expenditure on the support provided shows that these students are making similarly good progress to that of their classmates.
- School leaders ensure that different groups of pupils have an equal chance to succeed, and they tackle effectively any instances of discrimination.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effectively promoted by a broad range of arts, drama, music, science and sports activities, as well as by visits and visitors.
- The boarding provision is effectively managed as an integral part of the school. Clear lines of accountability are further reinforced by good oversight by the acting headteacher. There is a clear commitment from the school's senior leaders and governing body to enhance the quality of care provided to students through continued improvement and development.
- The range of subjects and topics taught promote a positive attitude to learning among students in all subjects and this leads to them achieving well. The curriculum has been carefully designed around students' interests and learning needs. They receive helpful guidance at all stages to enable them to make informed decisions about their next stage of education or training.
- The leadership team has established rigorous procedures to check on the quality of teaching and provide support for any staff identified as underperforming. As a result, standards in 2014 have

risen, for example, in English literature and geography.

- Arrangements for students following alternative courses offsite enable them to achieve well. Their progress is closely monitored and their safety assured. As a result, almost all students leave school for employment, education or training.
- In the sixth form, a strengthening of leadership and management has benefited students, who have been provided with high-quality and impartial information, advice and guidance prior to starting post-16 courses, about where as well as what to study, and the range of post-16 courses available. Sixth form leavers are given helpful guidance to make informed choices about higher education or training. Consequently, students' have shown improved attainment and progress in most of their post-16 courses, including those in Year 12, who have begun their study programmes.
- The responses to the Parent View survey indicate that parents have very positive views about the school, with the vast majority saying they would recommend the school to another parent.
- The local authority is fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has worked well with senior leaders.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed. It challenges school leaders and holds them to account for students' achievement. It compares the school's performance with that of schools nationally. Governors also strongly support the school and its leaders. They understand the acting headteacher's vision for the school's further improvement and value her leadership until a permanent appointment is made. They have a deep insight into the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning because, for example, they visit the school regularly during the day and talk to both teachers and students about their work. They manage the performance of staff effectively and are rigorous in ensuring that the salary increases are justified by students' good progress and achievement. Governors check carefully on the use of additional funds from the pupil premium in improving the achievement of eligible students. Explanation and action from school leaders and managers are called for when performance does not advance as intended. The governing body oversees the management of finance and resources expertly. Governors rigorously check safeguarding practice and, as a result, safeguarding procedures meet current legal requirements.

Outcomes for boarders	are good
Quality of boarding provision and care	is good
Boarders' safety	is good
Leadership and management of boarding provision	is good

- Boarding staff have high aspirations for the young people. They have provided a good supportive environment that positively enhances their learning and socialisation.
- Boarders live in a friendly cooperative and inclusive community forming strong relationships with peers and staff. They feel safe and happy in their respective boarding houses. Boarders are tolerant of differences and develop a strong sense of their own value and worth.

- Boarders' accommodation is of a good standard, which is subject to on-going improvement through an effective rolling programme of redecoration and refurbishment. Boarders' safety from fire is promoted by the commissioning of independent assessment of risk and the school's prompt response to recommendations. The school, however, needs to ensure recommendations of the most recently commissioned fire assessment risk assessment are implemented within the suggested timescale.
- Robust, comprehensive safeguarding procedures identify any emerging concerns and sensitively respond to individual needs within the school and boarding community. All boarding staff understand their protective responsibilities. Students' well-being would be further enhanced by increasing the number of staff with boarding responsibilities who have formal administration of medication training.
- The leadership and management of boarding are established, knowledgeable and confident ensuring all national minimum standards are met. Boarding forms a well integrated component, enriching the whole school and aspects of the local community. Boarders value the safe, nurturing care they receive.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Boarding/Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	123589
Social care unique reference number	SC020780
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	440345

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1420
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	361
Number of boarders on roll	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Black
Headteacher	Liz Dakin (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2007
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