

Three Rivers Academy

Hersham Road, Hersham, Walton-on-Thames KT12 5PY

Inspection dates

14–15 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Three Rivers Academy has improved significantly over the past three years. Pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors agree that there has been an extremely positive change in the culture and ethos of the school.
- The headteacher has worked tirelessly, supported by committed staff, to transform the school. Consequently, pupils now receive a good level of education.
- Partnership work with The Howard Partnership Trust (THPT) continues to be key to the school's improvement. School staff value and appreciate the collaborative professional training with other trust schools.
- The newly formed local governing board (LGB) is fully committed to the school. Governors are growing in confidence in their role to support and challenge school leaders.
- Teaching is effective in most subjects. Pupils demonstrate eagerness to learn and teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve.
- Pupils' outcomes have improved steadily over time due to continually improving teaching. Pupils currently in the school are making good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils generally behave well in class and around the building. They are proud of their school, look smart and collaborate happily with each other. They appreciate the support they receive from their teachers and the highly effective pastoral staff.
- The curriculum and enrichment activities promote pupils' development well.
- The sixth form is good. Students' outcomes have improved markedly over time and they are well prepared for their next steps.
- Overall attendance is improving and is close to the national average. Leaders are working hard to reduce the level of persistent absence, especially among disadvantaged pupils.
- Middle leaders, some quite new in post, are an increasingly effective group. They are beginning to take responsibility for the development of their team members' teaching skills.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, especially middle-ability pupils, is improving. However, their progress still lags behind that of other pupils.
- There are some instances of less effective teaching, notably in mathematics, where pupils' off-task chatter hinders their progress. Sometimes, teachers do not challenge such behaviour strongly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve pupils' learning and outcomes, especially those of middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils, by:
 - addressing the few remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching
 - checking that all teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently in lessons, especially in mathematics.
- Strengthen leadership and management by empowering middle leaders to build the capacity of their team members to enable pupils to make stronger progress than in the past.
- Continue to improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, ably supported by a strong and committed senior team, has brought a clarity of vision to the school. The school is fully staffed and moved into state-of-the-art premises in February 2018. Since joining THPT, the school has made impressive gains and all stakeholders recognise the transformation that has taken place.
- Leaders have successfully created an ethos of ambition and high expectations. There is a strong sense of community and common purpose among staff and pupils. Leaders at all levels demonstrate an energy, enthusiasm and commitment to fulfilling the school's motto of 'Bringing out the best' in every pupil.
- School development planning and self-evaluation are very effective. School leaders fully understand the school's strengths and areas for development. Actions to improve the school are well thought out, clearly articulated and regularly evaluated.
- Leaders have worked hard to build parents' confidence in the school. Several initiatives to engage parents, especially vulnerable families, have had considerable success. These include coffee mornings for parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and evenings for invited parents of disadvantaged pupils to showcase their children's work. As a result, increasing numbers of parents are choosing the school for their sons and daughters.
- Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, have an overwhelmingly positive view of the school. One parent said:

'The staff all work incredibly hard to provide my daughter with an education that suits her academic ability, while caring for her emotional well-being. She feels safe and valued at this school.'
- Staff are proud to work at the school. They value the opportunities they have to develop their professional practice through working with colleagues across the trust and they have embraced the higher expectations leaders have of them. Consequently, staff are highly motivated and staff turnover is low.
- The school's membership of THPT has been fundamental to the school's improvement. Trust staff support and challenge leaders in equal measure and keep a close eye on the school's performance. Quality assurance systems and procedures are very robust. As a result, staff are clear about what is expected of them and pupils are making good progress over time.
- Leaders keep the school curriculum under constant review. Three years ago, considerable changes were made to allow pupils to experience a wider range of subjects and be ambitious in their choices. Since then, further changes have been made, such as the introduction of two languages at key stage 3 and opportunities for key stage 4 pupils to study separate sciences. As a result, pupils are following courses which suit their needs and encourage them to aim high.
- The provision for the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding lies at the heart of the school's ethos. The taught curriculum provides an array of opportunities for pupils to develop their wider skills and it is supplemented

by a broad range of extra-curricular activities, such as in sport and the arts. Many pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Trips and visits to a variety of locations at home and abroad enhance pupils' understanding of the wider world and prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.

- Leaders use pupil premium funding imaginatively to support disadvantaged pupils. Examples include targeted literacy support, academic mentoring and enrichment trips. Such activities are helping to raise disadvantaged pupils' aspirations and skills.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding to support the learning and progress of pupils with SEND. Teachers are well supported and guided in providing these pupils with work to meet their needs.
- Leaders can point to considerable successes in their use of Year 7 catch-up funding. Most targeted pupils have caught up with their peers in English and/or mathematics by the end of the academic year.
- While middle leaders are an effective group, some need to take more ownership of the development of their team members' teaching skills, thereby enabling pupils to make stronger progress than in the past.

Governance of the school

- The LGB took over from the trust-appointed interim academy board (IAB) a few months ago. Governors have a wide range of professional skills and know the school well. They have designated roles and responsibilities and are frequent visitors to the school. Supported by a link trustee, a former member of the IAB, they are quickly developing confidence in their new roles.
- Governors undertake continual training provided by the trust and by school staff. They are becoming adept at holding leaders to account by asking questions to support and challenge them.
- Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively. Designated governors scrutinise the school's work on safeguarding and on the spending of the pupil premium funding. They ensure that their findings are reported back to the wider governing board.
- Governors in all the trust's schools have many opportunities to meet and share their experiences and assessments of their schools. Trust personnel oversee the work of the governing body and ensure that they provide an extra layer of scrutiny.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Training for staff, on issues such as radicalisation and extremism, is regularly updated. Increasing numbers of senior staff have undertaken advanced safeguarding training.
- The school's administrative systems and processes for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Record-keeping is generally methodical and thorough. Leaders liaise very effectively with outside agencies to ensure that pupils are given the help they need in a timely

fashion.

- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They say that bullying is minimal and, if it does occur, they have confidence that staff will deal with it. They learn how to keep themselves safe through their 'Aware' lessons and assemblies. For example, Year 8 pupils spoke animatedly about their recent workshop on knife crime.
- Parents who responded to the Ofsted survey agreed that their children feel safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- A relentless focus on the quality of teaching, combined with leaders' success in establishing stability among the staff, has resulted in considerable improvements. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. The school's 'six steps to progress' approach is used consistently across the school. Pupils understand it and respond well to it.
- In most lessons, there are strong relationships and embedded routines, meaning that little learning time is lost. Inspectors saw pupils being challenged to think hard in a variety of subjects, including textiles, dance, history, classics, languages, English and drama. For example, in a Year 7 Spanish lesson, pupils could use complex grammatical structures and a wide variety of vocabulary to describe themselves.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use it effectively to plan lessons to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers expect pupils to work together collaboratively and they clearly enjoy doing so. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, pupils were assessing the quality of an ode their partner had written. They could articulately describe the language features they were looking for.
- In most lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to assess pupils' learning. Some teachers have developed their questioning skills to a more advanced level, challenging pupils to extend their answers and deepen their understanding.
- Pupils' books show that the school's feedback policy is being used consistently. Pupils routinely reflect upon teachers' advice to improve their work and act upon it. They are making good progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding across a variety of subjects.
- Pupils say that homework is set regularly, and they understand the consequences if they fail to meet the deadline for completing it. The school library offers a daily after-school homework club which is always very well attended.
- Leaders recognise that the promotion of literacy skills is important for the community they serve. Teachers use a variety of texts to help pupils extend their vocabulary, and subject-specific terminology is routinely introduced. Increasingly, pupils are expected to write in an extended way across a variety of subjects.
- Although the quality of teaching is improving over time, there are a few instances where teaching is weaker. In some subjects, teachers' skills are not yet sufficiently developed to sustain and engage the learning of particular groups of pupils, such as middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils. This was evident from inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work across a range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Many parents who responded to the questionnaire commented on the unwavering support school staff give to the pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable. One parent said: 'I get great support with one of my sons who has additional needs. Nothing is ever too much. I feel heard and listened to. He, too, feels supported and helped.'
- In the main, pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are eager to do well. They are proud of their school, smart in their uniform and respectful of their impressive school building. They feel listened to and involved in making decisions. For example, they made significant contributions to the construction of the behaviour policy.
- Pupils' personal, social, health and economic education is supported through timetabled 'Aware' lessons, supplemented with assemblies and tutor-time activities. The programme is comprehensive and age-appropriate. For example, during the inspection, which fell during national mental health week, all tutor groups were reflecting on the pressures of body image on young people.
- Pupils feel safe in school and generally show tolerance and understanding of each other's differences. They are encouraged and supported to think about aspects of living in modern Britain, such as the rule of law. They are taught how to protect themselves from risks they may routinely face, such as on the internet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have implemented a clear behaviour policy which, in the main, teachers apply well. Pupils mostly behave well and are courteous and polite to each other and to visitors. Pupils understand the consequences for poor behaviour and incidents are decreasing. The school's focus on restorative strategies is leading to a reducing number of exclusions.
- The school is a calm and orderly place in which pupils can learn. Pupils cope well with the school's 'no bell' strategy and move swiftly to lessons. During breaks and lunchtimes, they take advantage of the excellent facilities the building provides to chat happily, play outside or use the library.
- Major disruption to learning is rare. However, where teachers' expectations are too low and they do not consistently apply the behaviour policy, such as in some mathematics lessons, pupils resort to off-task chatter, which hinders their learning and progress.
- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 have lessons at two alternative providers. Liaison between school staff and one alternative provider to check on pupils' attendance is very regular but is currently less regular in the other one. Leaders have plans in place to address this issue.
- School staff employ a wide variety of strategies to improve pupils' attendance. Many of

these are proving effective, resulting in an improvement in attendance overall, which is broadly in line with the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils' attendance, while improving, lags behind that of other pupils. The rate of persistent absence is also above the national average, although decreasing slowly over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' published examination results have shown an upward trend since joining THPT. In 2018, Year 11 pupils' progress and attainment both showed solid improvement. While attainment remained below the national average, the effect of stronger teaching and higher aspirations was evident. For example, a high proportion of subjects, including English and mathematics, improved their results from the previous year.
- Inspection evidence, supported by the school's own assessment of learning, shows that pupils currently in the school are making stronger progress. While there is still a legacy of weaker teaching which is affecting some pupils in key stage 4, key stage 3 pupils are benefiting from the improved culture and ethos in the school.
- The most able pupils consistently produce high-quality work and show a depth of understanding that is enabling them to make strong progress over time. They respond well to the higher expectations that teachers have of them.
- Disadvantaged pupils are a major focus for school staff. Staff know who they are and work hard to meet their specific needs. A range of interventions are in place to support their learning and progress. Some of these strategies are working well, leading to an improvement across the school in the progress that disadvantaged pupils make. However, they still have some ground to make up to catch up with their peers, particularly middle-attaining pupils.
- Pupils with SEND are making good progress, particularly those in key stage 3. This is because of effective leadership, the targeted support pupils receive and close liaison with primary school partners. Learning support assistants play an important role in helping pupils with SEND make the progress they should.
- Pupils' literacy skills are promoted through the daily 'Drop Everything and Read' programme. Pupils told inspectors that they were reading at home more regularly as a result. School data shows that the number of books pupils are borrowing from the well-stocked library is increasing. Pupils' oracy skills are developing well and inspectors saw many examples of pupils expressing themselves in a very articulate and confident way.
- The careers education and guidance programme begins in Year 7 and is well constructed and age-appropriate. For example, pupils in Year 10 undertake a week's work experience, and Year 11 pupils each have a 'big interview' with a local employer to prepare them for the world of work. A recently appointed careers adviser provides impartial advice. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is a growing area of the school, reflecting its increasing popularity with students. It provides an inclusive and aspirational education. Students attend well and retention rates between Years 12 and 13 are high.
- The leader of the sixth form, while relatively new to post, is experienced in this phase of education. Leadership is further supported by a deputy headteacher. Together, they have high expectations and a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this area. Improvement planning is ambitious and appropriate.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form are of consistently high quality and, therefore, students make good progress across a wide range of subjects. Typically, teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they use to inject high levels of challenge into lessons. They facilitate rich discussions which broaden and deepen students' knowledge, skills and understanding beyond the examination requirements.
- Since joining THPT, results have improved in both academic and vocational subjects. Students make good progress from their starting points. Where there are pockets of underachievement in some subjects, leaders are tackling them.
- The school's own data, supported by inspection evidence, shows that current students are making strong progress. Teachers monitor students' performance closely and have regular meetings about progress and attendance.
- The wide range of level 3 courses on offer meet students' needs well. The introduction of level 2 courses this year has broadened the range. The growing sports academy programmes in football and basketball, which run alongside academic studies, are helping to broaden students' wider skills.
- Students who did not gain a good GCSE pass in English and mathematics in Year 11 receive additional support and teaching to help them to make good progress towards securing a good pass.
- Students are positive about the support they receive from their tutors, all of whom have post-16 experience. Students reported that staff know them well and they value the strong relationships they have with staff. Tutorial activities develop students' understanding of issues they may face, such as mental well-being and driving safely.
- A wide range of enrichment activities are provided, often in response to students' feedback. Year 12 students all have access to work experience placements.
- Students value the support, advice and guidance they receive when applying for university, further training or employment. Increasing numbers are securing apprenticeships or gaining places at high-quality universities.

School details

Unique reference number	144503
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10088090

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Rebrokered academy
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	917
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate White
Headteacher	Anne-Louise Payne
Telephone number	01932 242 994
Website	www.threeriversacademy.org
Email address	info@threerivers.thpt.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Three Rivers Academy is an average-sized 11 to 18 secondary school. It became part of THPT, a Surrey-based multi-academy trust, in 2016.
- Between 2016 and 2018, an IAB was in place, consisting of three trustees. From September 2018, an LGB gradually replaced the IAB and is now fully operational.
- The five members of THPT have reserved decision rights. They hold the board of trustees to account for meeting the objects of THPT. Trustees are accountable for developing the partnership's strategy and vision and ensuring the high quality of educational provision across all schools. The LGB has some delegated responsibility for the overall strategic direction of the school and oversight of standards.

- The school moved into brand-new purpose-built premises on the site of the predecessor school in February 2018.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is well above the national average.
- Two thirds of pupils are of White British heritage. The remainder are from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Around a third of pupils are disadvantaged and are supported through the pupil premium.
- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 are educated off-site in alternative provision at The Applied Learning Project and Surrey Online School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 53 parts of lessons, most of them jointly with senior leaders. At the time of the inspection, Year 11 and 13 pupils were preparing for examinations, so very few lessons were observed in these year groups. Inspectors also visited form time.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work in books. With school leaders, inspectors also examined a selection of pupils' books in key stages 3 and 4 to get a broader picture of progress over time.
- Inspectors held regular meetings with senior leaders and with a range of staff, including newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school. Inspectors also spoke informally to many staff.
- The lead inspector met with two members of the governing body, the chief executive officer of THPT and another trustee.
- Inspectors took account of the 174 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the written comments submitted by 173 parents. There were 79 responses to the staff questionnaire and 280 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Pupils' views were also gathered through meetings with groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of school information. This included the school's evaluation of its performance, the school's plan for improvement, information about standards and progress, the school's website and logs about behaviour and attendance, as well as a range of policies.

Inspection team

Paula Sargent, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Harry Kutty	Ofsted Inspector
Frederick Valletta	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Swan	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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