

The Thomas Adams School, Wem

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123589
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	292723
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Philippa Francis HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1324
6th form	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gail Appleton
Headteacher	Neil Hemming
Date of previous school inspection	21 October 2002
School address	Lowe Hill Wem Shrewsbury SY4 5UB
Telephone number	01939 237000
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Age group	11–18
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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 Adams is a large school including a separate sixth form college. It has grown considerably in numbers of students over recent years and is oversubscribed. It holds specialist college status for media arts. The school has boarding provision for 60 students and joint use of a leisure centre in the town. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic groups is much smaller than average, as is the proportion who are eligible for free school meals. A small proportion has special educational needs and very few students speak English as an additional language. The majority of students travel into school each day by bus from across the large rural area served by the school. The school has a partnership arrangement with a secondary school in Kenya.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Thomas Adams is an outstanding school where students thrive and achieve exceptionally well and attain significantly above average standards by the time they are 16. This judgement betters the school's own view of itself as good. The school has a very good reputation both in the local community and across the wider rural area it serves. Boarding provision is good and supports achievement well. Sixth form provision is good and provides excellent care and support for students' personal development. The culture of the school is highly inclusive and it serves the needs of students from Traveller communities especially well. Much of what goes on in the school, both academically and extra to the curriculum, is exciting and innovative and students clearly enjoy their time at the school very much. Managers at all levels show outstanding commitment and enthusiasm and are inspired by the very effective headteacher. His relentless drive to raise achievement is coupled with his high level of attention to every student and every detail of the school's work.

The majority of teaching is consistently good and a minority is outstanding. Assessment supports learning very well and improvements to homework arrangements are proving very effective. In a minority of lessons students rely on their teacher too much and do not develop their independent learning skills sufficiently. The quality of care and support is outstanding and is a key aspect of the exceptional progress students make. Ensuring their well-being is given high priority. Very good mentoring and the impact of a number of well thought out initiatives have been very successful in raising achievement consistently over the last three years, especially and notably of boys. The curriculum matches need exceptionally well and is especially strong in cultural development, its specialist area of media arts, music and extra-curricular activities. Personal development made by students is outstanding.

Governance is outstanding because the board works extremely well both to support the work of the school and as a critical friend. Governors are very skilled and have considerable expertise, which has been used to very good effect. The school is managed extremely well at all levels. Self-evaluation is good but lacks a little sharpness in final analysis, especially of the sixth form. Collaboration with external stakeholders is outstanding and supports much of the school's work well. The school provides very good value for money, has an excellent track record of bringing about improvement and knows itself very well. It has outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Both retention and progression rates in the sixth form are high and recruitment is very good. The sixth form takes in a wide range of students, many of whom come from backgrounds that include little experience of higher education. Students make good progress as shown by their work in lessons and how well they progress in relation to target grades set, based on prior attainment. They develop extremely well personally in both confidence and maturity and are well prepared for their futures. They attain standards in the sixth form that are in line with national averages.

A good range of academic courses is offered with several vocational options and more planned. Teaching and learning are good. Productive use is made of information and communication technology, numeracy and literacy skills to support learning. Excellent care, guidance and support by mentors are coupled with good careers advice and very regular reviews of academic

progress. Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features, such as work done in partnership with others to promote students' well-being. There is clear direction leading to continued improvement in provision, although the evaluation of performance data is not yet fully effective.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of boarding provision is good. At a recent Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the provision was judged to meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS) relating to boarding provision and it exceeded these standards in a number of areas. A small number of recommendations were made for improvement, which the school has already begun to tackle. Communications between the boarding provision and academic tutors have been strengthened and work very well to support achievement. The good quality of boarding provision supports the outstanding personal development of students very effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage and support teachers to share good practice and to further develop their teaching techniques to ensure that many more lessons are of an outstanding quality.
- Improve the analysis of performance data in the sixth form in order to raise standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement in the school is outstanding, with a pattern of strong and consistent improvement over the last three years. Students make outstanding progress throughout the main school from their average starting points. They achieve standards at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 that are significantly better than average. The majority achieve the challenging targets that are set for them. Students who completed Key Stage 4 in 2006 made exceptional progress overall, placing the school in the eighth percentile ranking of all schools. Of this cohort, boys made exceptionally good progress, as did the smaller number of students who have learning difficulties or disabilities. The performance of a small number of lower ability girls was more satisfactory.

The standards reached in external examinations are significantly higher than average in nearly all key measures, especially for girls. Results have improved over the last five years at Key Stage 3 at a faster rate than nationally. Results in science are exceptionally high. The number of students who gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE has improved significantly since 2004. The school recognises that further improvement is needed in results in mathematics and English to match the well above average results in other subjects. Progress in both of these core subjects in the current year is good, as shown by the school's own monitoring records.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students greatly enjoy school and this is reflected in the above average attendance rates. They are proud of their school and are excited by the wide range of opportunities to develop personal skills and feel empowered to use their initiative to influence school policy through the School Council. A large variety of opportunities to develop personal fitness and healthy lifestyles is provided which students participate in very enthusiastically.

Students feel very safe and know there is always someone close at hand to help should a problem arise. Incidents of bullying are minimal and are swiftly dealt with. Older students, especially prefects, take an active role in supporting those new to the school. Students of all ages make an active contribution to the community, raising funds for charity, achieving success in local and national competitions and participating in the many performing arts, media and sporting events involving the local community.

Close partnerships with a school in Kenya and many other opportunities to study different cultures, including through music, promote excellent cultural development. The school celebrates and values the cultural enrichment offered by students from the Traveller community and enables them to take responsibility within the school. Good spiritual development is supported very effectively by chaplains from several local churches. A strong ethos of mutual respect and care exists which promotes excellent social and moral development. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent and students display a maturity and confidence in their relationships with adults. They develop as rounded individuals able to contribute exceptionally effectively to the community and eventually transfer to working roles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching is good. The majority of teaching is consistently good and, together with the excellent academic monitoring and curriculum, accounts for the outstanding progress made by the students. A small minority of teaching is outstanding and this proportion is growing as teachers increasingly use more variety in their teaching methods and raise the level of challenge, especially for more able students. Good lessons often have outstanding features which include very effective use of information and learning technology, imaginative tasks to motivate and engage students and a challenging pace. The very best lessons also ensure that all students are stretched and completely engrossed in their learning. The school recognises that further development is still needed in developing independent learning skills across the school. In satisfactory lessons there is often too much reliance on the teacher and questions are underused to extend students' knowledge. Assessment strongly supports learning. It is well organised and marking is helpful and encourages improvement. The improvements to the use of homework have made this aspect much more meaningful and very closely linked to improving achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The outstanding curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs and aspirations of students extremely well. In partnership with a local college, recent developments have extended the range of vocational options available with particular relevance for the local economy. Gifted and talented students gain from an expanded programme of additional activities, visits and summer schools.

The school's specialist college status has led to improved choice and opportunities for accreditation at Key Stage 4. Provision for citizenship and personal, social and health education is very good and has had a significant impact on students' attitudes and lifestyles. Students prepare well for the world of work including through well organised work experience and the opportunity to take part in special enterprise days, supported by input from local businesses. A special strength of the curriculum lies in its wide and varied enrichment activities. Students enjoy a comprehensive range of sports activities, performing arts activities, regular musical productions and film making. Students also profit from many visits off the school site, including university briefings, where their perspectives are effectively widened.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support for all students, including those with special educational needs and those in public care, are outstanding. Induction arrangements for new students to the school are very well established through strong links with feeder primary schools. A high level of commitment by staff promotes students' health and safety. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust, with efficient and effective procedures for child protection that are reviewed regularly. The games room offers a safe haven during lunchtimes with activities organised by students. In this safe and supportive environment students achieve challenging targets. A comprehensive mentoring programme ensures students are regularly informed about their progress and performance, including through an inclusive programme about future options and 14 to 19 academic and vocational pathways. Specialist staff work very effectively with outside agencies to support any students who may be at risk. These students are identified early and effective arrangements are put in place to keep them engaged. The school works extremely well with parents and carers to ensure that all students make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are outstanding, and good in the sixth form. The headteacher leads very effectively in a relentless drive to raise achievement. The enthusiasm and commitment of senior and middle managers to strive for improvement is an outstanding feature. The impact of this strong leadership is clearly evident in the improvement over the last three years and especially the latest examination results, which show exceptionally good achievement by

students, particularly boys. Success has been realised through constantly seeking improvements in teaching and the well planned use of highly effective mentoring of individual students. These factors, combined with the strong, caring provision, have enabled students to thrive academically in a safe and secure setting.

The school is self-critical and has in place good procedures for evaluating itself. The monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorously carried out, including through a programme of thorough departmental reviews. Teachers receive very good guidance and support to improve their practice and are beginning to share good practice more effectively. Good, detailed evidence on all aspects of the school is used in self-evaluation. However, the level of analysis of this information is not always sharp enough, especially of performance data relating to progress made and results in the sixth form.

Governance is outstanding and plays a key role in helping the school improve. Governors are very supportive, but they do not avoid asking challenging and pertinent questions when the need arises. They are very well informed and highly effective in monitoring the work of the school. Very good financial expertise and advice have contributed well to the school's present healthy financial position. The school gives outstanding value for money. The staff are highly committed, well qualified and very effectively deployed to maximise achievement. Effective use of resources and additional funding for specialist status has been well used to enhance provision and raise achievement. The strong promotion of equality of opportunity and the inclusive culture are outstanding. Procedures for vetting of staff fully conform to the latest government requirements.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the findings of the inspection team. Firstly, however, I would like to thank you all for the cooperation and courtesy inspectors received during their time at your school. We enjoyed meeting you and found your comments and feedback most helpful.

We judge your school to be outstanding and that you make excellent progress up to the age of 16 and good progress in the sixth form. The results you gain in external tests are above average in the main school and average in the sixth form. Teachers teach well, provide excellent care and support for you and guide you very well through your studies. They are led very successfully by your headteacher and his team of managers. You told us how much you valued the work of your teachers and that you enjoy coming to school. Your attendance is good and nearly all of you work very hard in lessons. We judged your behaviour to be excellent both in lessons and around the school. This is a great tribute to you all and I hope you keep up this very high standard throughout your school days.

There are two areas in which we have asked your school to make improvements. Firstly, we have asked that teachers share the very good ideas they have for making lessons outstanding widely across the school so that more lessons are really first class. Secondly, we have asked the school to analyse the progress made and the results gained by sixth form students even more rigorously so that the areas where improvements can be made are very clearly identified.

You are to be commended for all that you do in the local community through charitable work and other activities. The partnership you have with the Miriu School in Kenya is an excellent example of how you are working hard to gain a wider view of the world. This kind of activity helps tremendously to develop you all personally, socially and culturally, as does your involvement in media arts and music. Well done, and I hope you continue to make sure that these features remain a key part of life in your school.