

Thamesview School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118879
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313130
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Samantha Morgan-Price HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	836
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Gingell
Headteacher	Rhiannon Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	Thong Lane Gravesend DA12 4LF
Telephone number	01474 566552
Fax number	01474 537405

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a smaller-than-average secondary modern school which has a designated unit for physically disabled students who have a statement of special educational needs. The school is a non-selective school situated in a selective area. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. In 2008, the school was awarded Healthy Schools status. In January 2009, it became a business and enterprise specialist college. The school is currently in the process of relocating to a new building which has been financed by the 'Building Schools for the Future' initiative.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, one that is led by a tireless headteacher and her senior team. In the last two years the achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 has improved substantially. Overall achievement is good. Students enter the school with standards that are well below average and make good progress to achieve average standards at the end of Year 11. Standards reached by students in Year 9 are below the national average. One of the strengths of the school is the way in which students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively supported to achieve as well as their peers. Rigorous monitoring processes are in place which is also enabling students to make good progress because it leads to targeted support. This support has been pivotal in raising the achievement of students especially in Years 10 and 11.

Good personal development enables students to display due regard for others. The behaviour of students is satisfactory, although a small minority of students in lessons and around the school do not behave as well as they should. Students demonstrate a good awareness of how to maintain healthy lifestyles and how to prepare for their future economic well-being. There are effective measures for improving behaviour and the policy of not excluding students but to use inclusion options is highly effective. Students' awareness of other cultures and different faiths within their own and the wider community is not as well developed.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching does not always enable students to do their best in lessons. In the good lessons observed, teachers create an atmosphere where students enjoy learning and as a result they make good progress. In some lessons, teachers do not address the full needs of students and there is insufficient challenge in the tasks they undertake. The proportion of good or outstanding lessons seen around the school is not high enough. In some subjects, teacher feedback from assessment does not provide students with the necessary guidance required to improve their academic performance.

The curriculum is good with a clear strength in the vocational provision for students in Years 10 and 11. The breadth of provision for these students includes a range of vocational options that enable them to select courses that are suited to their needs. Vocational options are being extended to students in lower years and the school has radically changed the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 students to provide them with a cross-curricular 'Enquiry Based Learning' course to address underachievement. This initiative is still in its early stages of development. The school does not currently provide students with a daily act of worship.

Care, guidance and support are good. This is a caring and supportive school. It works very well to support all students, and a particular strength is its success with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective measures to raise students' attendance have enabled the school to move from a very low rate of attendance at the last inspection to one which is at the national average.

Good leadership and management have resulted in students leaving the school with better results. Under the purposeful leadership of the headteacher the school is making effective improvements, enabling students to achieve well. Her vision for improvement has enabled senior leaders to forge excellent partnerships with a range of providers and organisations.

The improvement in attainment in Year 11, clear identification of the key priorities required to improve the school's performance, as well as the tackling of many of the issues identified at the previous inspection, have enabled the school to demonstrate a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it provides increased challenge and is more closely matched to the needs of all students.
- Improve the quality of marking and feedback to enable students to make more rapid progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students start at the school with attainment well below the national average. In the two years prior to the inspection, there has been an upward trend in the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades with a considerable increase on the previous year and exceeding the national average. There was also a marked increase in the corresponding results including English and mathematics. Overall, students made good progress between ages 11 and 16, although boys did not do as well as girls in this respect. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made very good progress over the same period. The variation in performance between subjects in GCSE examinations is wide with some subjects underperforming significantly. Evidence now suggests that in music and design and technology, students are on track to perform better than last year. Current forecasts also indicate that the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades in 2009 is also on track to be at least as good as last year. This is due to the good support mechanisms the school has put in place.

In tests at age 14, there has been a downward trend in the standards that students achieve in all three core subjects. However, the school met or exceeded its targets in English and mathematics for students of this age.

The school has increasingly effective systems in place for setting challenging targets and monitoring the progress of students, both across the school and in the 'learning communities'. The achievement of more able students is being monitored closely.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students feel safe at Thamesview and greatly value the opportunities they have to talk to learning mentors, counsellors and others if they have any concerns. They are aware of the importance of healthy eating. Students participate with enjoyment in physical activities and are very aware of the need for emotional and mental health. Students are keen to explain the range of activities they enjoy and are particularly appreciative of the school's vocational opportunities. Students have a good understanding of how to prepare for their future economic well-being. They develop a good economic understanding, for example, through the support they receive in careers, at the Information Advice and Guidance Centre and work opportunities. Students make a valuable contribution to the school community and feel a strong commitment to the school. They raise funds for charity but would like to do more to directly help members of the local community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall although their awareness of living in a multicultural society is not as well developed. Students' behaviour is satisfactory and they move around school in an orderly way. Attendance is satisfactory and improving.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the good lessons observed, teachers have positive relationships with students and are successful in creating a motivating atmosphere in which learning is enjoyable. They use a variety of teaching styles and well-adapted activities that enable most students in these lessons to make good progress.

In other lessons, there is too little evidence of the provision of a variety of work for students with different needs within the classroom. As a result, in the majority of lessons observed, teaching does not address the full range of needs of learners. In a small minority of classes, students were not always punctual and the poor behaviour of some students disrupts the learning of others.

The rigour of assessment in planning and moving students forward is inconsistent as is marking. Where good examples of marking are seen, students are not only given feedback on the current piece of work, but appropriate comments are also provided to indicate areas for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The breadth of provision, including good vocational and work-related learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11, is a strength of the school and ensures the needs of the majority of students are met. This emphasis on vocational courses also contributes significantly to the personal development and future economic well-being of students.

An innovative curriculum with large amounts of enquiry-based learning was introduced in Key Stage 3 with Years 7 and 8 in September 2008. Students clearly enjoy this way of working. However, progression routes through this course are not well established and are still being planned. The impact on attainment is therefore not yet fully evident.

More able students are well provided for with opportunities to progress at a faster rate. For example, students who are identified as 'jumpers' are able to miss Year 9 and enter Year 10 to begin GCSE courses. A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities are available including sports and creative arts. Increasing priority is being given to the development of literacy and numeracy across the school. Some progress has been made in literacy, although it is too early to judge the overall impact.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care of students is strong, making an effective contribution to students' well-being. The process of target setting and the support to achieve these targets are effective. There is a wide range of strategies for students who are slipping behind and these are well chosen and effective. There are good strategies to improve students' economic well-being, including careers days and close working with the Connexions service. Social development is encouraged well by the school council and the various responsibilities students have. Statutory requirements are met for checking the suitability of staff and for child protection. Health and safety are well promoted and include suitable risk assessments and staff training to support these procedures. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and regularly checked. Students with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities, including students who are physically disabled, are very well supported which contributes effectively to their well-being and encourages their good academic progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Under the strong leadership of the headteacher and her senior leadership team the school has become an effective learning community. Her passion for high-quality learning experiences is infectious and she is transmitting this to the staff. At the core of the school's ethos is the strong focus on the inclusion of all students which the school achieves well, enabling all to feel valued. The restructuring of the school's leadership and management team and the introduction of 'learning communities' has begun and is proving to be effective. It engages exceptionally well with a broad range of local community partners and is mindful of seeking opportunities to increase students' awareness of communities beyond their own. The school's strategy to engage communities of different faiths and ethnicity are underdeveloped. The school evaluates itself well and knows its strengths and weaknesses. Performance is analysed effectively and targets for school improvement are based on a good understanding of needs. As a result, standards and achievement at the end of Year 11 have continued to improve. The creation of a new vocational centre places it at the heart of local and wider learning communities. Senior leaders recognise that more work needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and learning and there are clear actions in place to enable leaders to achieve this. The school's deservedly good reputation has grown and its population has expanded. Governors support the school well, and are committed to continued improvement.

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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
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

27 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Thamesview School, Gravesend, DA12 4LF

On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to thank you for helping us when we came to find out how well you are getting on. We particularly enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to some of you.

We judged that your school is a good school and your headteacher, the senior managers, governors and other staff within the school are working hard to improve the quality of education that you receive.

You achieve well particularly in Years 10 and 11, and the good care, guidance and support that the school provides enable you to develop well. The support for those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly effective. We also judged that the outstanding links the school makes within the community provide you with a good curriculum. The range of vocational courses available to you is a particular strength of the school.

We recognise that there are some things that the school can improve upon to help you achieve better. I have asked leaders and managers in the school to:

- Improve the quality of your lessons by ensuring that teaching more closely matches your learning needs and by increasing the level of challenge provided.
- Improve the quality of marking and feedback that teachers provide to you, so that you are able to understand how to make faster progress in your work.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Samantha Morgan-Price

Her Majesty's Inspector