

The Thomas Aveling School

Arethusa Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 2UW

Inspection dates 14–15 June 2016

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive headteacher and his senior leadership team are determinedly improving the quality of education. Governors and staff across the school are committed to the school's continued improvement.
- Senior and middle leaders are driving forward initiatives to build on the most effective teaching and learning in the school.
- Pupils enter the school with below-average levels of achievement and by the end of Year 11, pupils' outcomes are above national averages.
- Pupils are making good progress across most subjects, including English and mathematics. In areas where outcomes have not been as strong in the past, such as science, progress is improving because of more effective leadership and teaching.
- Teaching is good and teachers plan interesting and enjoyable lessons. Teachers' secure subject knowledge contributes to high levels of engagement by pupils.
- Pupils enjoy school, have a positive attitude to learning and behave well in classrooms and around the school.
- Strong relationships between staff and pupils help to keep pupils safe, promote personal development and raise their achievement.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a successful feature of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not consistently outstanding across the school. Occasionally, work set by teachers does not take account of pupils' understanding and feedback does not consistently have enough impact on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders do not incisively evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' progress. Improvement plans are not sharp enough.
- Students in the sixth form achieve less well in academic subjects than they do in work-related courses.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership further by:
 - ensuring that leaders robustly and accurately evaluate their work, taking into account the progress of all groups of pupils
 - making stronger links between self-evaluation and improvement planning in order to have greater impact on outcomes for pupils
 - setting out, in action plans, clear targets and descriptions of what will be achieved at key points in the year to enable senior leaders and governors to monitor the impact of actions taken throughout the year. This includes the impact of pupil premium funding on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve pupils' progress from their different starting points by sharpening teachers' use of assessment so that they provide consistently high levels of challenge, support and feedback, appropriate to pupils' needs and abilities.
- Continue to improve sixth-form provision by raising the achievements of students in academic subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive headteacher, senior leaders and governors have driven improvements since the last inspection. Staff morale and relationships within the school are very positive. The staff who completed a survey as part of the inspection overwhelmingly support the school's leaders and feel proud to work at the school. Nine out of ten parents who responded to the online survey Parent View would recommend the school to other parents. The school is regularly oversubscribed for admission into Year 7.
- Changes to the leadership team have strengthened the capacity to secure further improvement. Two deputy headteachers, in post for just over a year, have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are addressing shortcomings in science and the sixth form and have a clear vision for tracking pupils' academic performance and using assessment information to improve pupils' progress further.
- Leadership of the core subjects of English and mathematics is strong. The English subject leader is planning skilfully how to use successful strategies, which led to outstanding outcomes in GCSE English language in 2015, to raise standards in English literature. The mathematics leader has ensured increased challenge for the most able pupils and their achievement is improving in both key stages 3 and 4. Leaders of history and geography have identified the reasons behind some poor performance in 2015 and are tackling these with determination.
- Changes made by leaders have had a positive effect in a short time, but it is too soon to evaluate their full impact. Throughout the school, leaders are working hard to drive improvement. However, their monitoring is not consistently sharp enough to identify the impact of strategies to improve teaching and learning or to indicate whether these are applied consistently to secure rapid improvement in all subjects.
- Additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils is being used to provide a wide range of additional support for their learning and their well-being. By the end of Year 11, the gap in their attainment compared with other pupils nationally has narrowed. However, leaders are not evaluating rigorously the use of pupil premium funding to raise attainment of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups. Similarly, leaders are not clear about the impact of Year 7 catch-up funding to help pupils who join the school below national levels to catch up.
- The curriculum provides broad and balanced opportunities to meet the needs of learners well. A clear and focused programme of independent careers information and guidance supports pupils from Year 8 onwards to make informed decisions about which subjects they study at key stage 4 and beyond. Almost all pupils go on to education, training or employment. An increasing number stay on into the school's sixth form.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including competitions, sporting and cultural activities and clubs which are well attended by pupils. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the enrichment activities available, particularly the sports clubs.
- The school's training programme is well targeted to meet the needs of individual teachers and support staff. Teachers feel well supported by their coaches and appreciate the range of professional development opportunities. Newly qualified teachers are particularly well supported. Middle and senior leaders told inspectors how well prepared they felt for their leadership roles due to previous coaching as part of the school's well-developed succession planning.
- School leaders make very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils show high levels of respect and concern for each other. British values are promoted through assemblies and the school's personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. There is a flourishing school council which helps pupils understand democracy and provides opportunities for them to take on responsibilities. For example, earlier this year, school council members conducted pupil surveys and reported their findings to governors and school leaders. As a result, there are improved systems for reporting instances of bullying and form tutors ensure that effective mentoring between older and younger pupils takes place during form time. Many pupils in the school participate in fundraising activities for charities, and these events are often led by sixth-form students.
- Leaders and governors know their school's strengths and weaknesses, but do not reflect their understanding clearly enough in their self-evaluation documents and improvement plans. Their self-evaluation is overgenerous. Development plans address some appropriate priorities but only list actions and those responsible for reviewing their completion. There is little sense of specific expectations in terms of improvements in outcomes for pupils. In discussion, leaders identify correctly the areas for improvement, but do not focus sharply enough on the impact of actions taken to raise the achievement of

all groups of pupils. As a result, the outcomes for some pupils, particularly the most able, have not risen quickly enough in the past.

■ **The governance of the school**

- Governors fully share the executive headteacher's vision for The Thomas Aveling School and they care deeply about each pupil that belongs to it. They are very proud of the school's achievements.
 - Governors have wide-ranging expertise and participate in training to enhance their skills.
 - Governors know about the school's strengths and weaknesses because of information provided by the executive headteacher. However, they do not always hold senior leaders to account as rigorously as they should. Due to a lack of robust external evaluation, governors have an overgenerous view of the effectiveness of the school. They have not monitored carefully the impact of spending of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.
 - Governors have ensured that pay increases for teachers are only awarded when the staff are effective in their work, including securing good achievement among pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and pupils feel safe in the school. Staff, who know pupils well, are quick to report any concerns they have about children in the school. These concerns are acted on in a timely way and appropriate referrals are made to other agencies. Pupils speak with confidence about the approaches they have learned to keep themselves safe. Virtually all parents who contributed to the online Parent View questionnaire said they feel their children are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching and learning is improving and this has helped to drive up the achievement of current pupils. Clear routines and strong relationships between staff and pupils build high levels of trust. Pupils respect their teachers and each other, and this encourages them to participate confidently in a range of activities that help them learn.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expect pupils to participate fully. Teachers set tasks which are designed to engage pupils. Collaboration is encouraged, and explaining problems to their peers helps pupils improve their own understanding. For example, in a business studies lesson, Year 9 pupils were challenging and supporting each other to determine whether a business had made a profit or loss, using the information provided. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning encourages pupils to deepen their learning. In many lessons, including mathematics and English, pupils are attentive because the work is stimulating, interesting and well structured.
- Where teaching is most effective, it takes close account of pupils' individual and collective starting points, and uses a wide range of strategies to meet their needs. Teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and extend their thinking. This helps to consolidate the learning in the lesson and identify gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed. In geography, Year 10 pupils were fully engaged explaining how collision boundaries create fold mountains because the teacher designed the task to build on their prior learning.
- Occasionally, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not consistently check how well pupils are learning before setting the next task. Sometimes, the most able pupils have to complete work at lower levels before going on to more challenging tasks and so do not make as much progress as they are capable of. At other times, pupils are presented with challenging tasks which they are not yet equipped to tackle, or moved on too quickly, before they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basics.
- There are examples of very effective teacher feedback to pupils in line with the school's expectations. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they have to improve and act upon this feedback. However, there are instances when pupils do not respond or are not clear enough about how well they are doing and how to improve because feedback is not precise enough. A small number of teachers allow poor presentation and errors, including those of spelling, punctuation and grammar, to go uncorrected over time. These inconsistencies exist across and within departments.
- Pupils read fluently and with confidence. Those who need it receive effective additional help. Books showed that pupils are increasingly expected to write at length across the curriculum.
- Teaching assistants, in lessons, make an effective contribution to supporting pupils' progress. Their questioning techniques skilfully support and challenge pupils' thinking and learning and they encourage independence. Many teaching assistants provide additional support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability in small groups outside lessons and the school's performance information shows the achievement of these pupils is rising.

- Homework is set regularly in line with the school's policy. Pupils reported that they received homework and most parents who responded to the Parent View survey felt their child received appropriate homework for their age.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Teachers and pastoral leaders have created a caring and inclusive environment. They know pupils well, respond in a timely manner to any concerns and maintain contact with parents as much as possible.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They enjoy coming to school and participate well in the extensive range of opportunities to develop socially and personally. A range of adults are always on hand to provide advice and guidance to any pupil, especially those facing particular difficulties.
- Pupils take on responsibilities enthusiastically and enjoy contributing to school life. Members of the school council aim to involve many pupils in their drive to improve the school further.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school and know who to turn to if they have a concern. Staff in the school show a relentless determination to help every pupils overcome difficulties they face. They make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the right emotional and practical guidance and support. The school counsellor fulfils this role well. The school's children's team works very effectively with a wide range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the care and support they require.
- Pupils have been well trained and are very clear about how to avoid danger when using the internet. There are no problems with racism and derogatory language is rarely used. If bullying does occur, it is always dealt with promptly by staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is very good.
- Pupils are polite and respectful to each other, staff and visitors and forge strongly positive relationships with their teachers and each other.
- The behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils are punctual and come to lessons well equipped and ready to learn. The vast majority of pupils are keen and attentive in class and disruption is rare. Occasionally, when teaching is not well matched to their learning needs, some pupils' attention wanes and they lose concentration.
- Attendance at the school is improving and is now in line with national levels. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Typically, pupils start Year 7 with attainment significantly lower than national averages. In the 2015 examinations, the proportion of Year 11 pupils attaining the important standard of five A* to C GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics, was above the national average. This represents strong achievement and is a significant improvement over three years. Standards were particularly high in English, with pupils achieving about half a GCSE grade above the national average.
- In 2015, there was a healthy proportion of good grades in a range of subjects including business studies, English language and information technology. Achievement in geography, history and science was lower. There were fewer A* and A grades achieved because the most able pupils did not make as much progress as they should have in some subjects, including English literature, religious studies, mathematics and physical education. The school is successfully tackling these relative weaknesses.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieved about half a grade behind their classmates in English and mathematics in 2015. Their progress in English was above other pupils nationally. Currently, due to improved teaching, targeted support in lessons and a range of effective interventions, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11, whose starting points from key stage 2 were very low, are on track to sustain good progress in English and make better progress in mathematics, although the attainment gap is predicted to widen. In other year groups, disadvantaged pupils are generally progressing in line with their peers.
- The school's current information shows that most pupils in Years 10 and 11 are on track to meet appropriately challenging targets. In September, the school introduced a new method for assessing

pupils' performance through key stage 3 and in Year 9. However, this process is at an early stage and, although assessment records information about pupils' attainment, it does not yet provide accurate, detailed information about the progress of pupils in years 7 and 9. Work seen during the inspection shows that pupils are making at least expected progress across subjects in these year groups.

- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are supported well and make the same progress as others in the school.
- Pupils' learning in English is a strength in the school. Pupils enjoy engaging activities connected to everyday life and precise feedback from teachers helps the steady development of their skills of expression and communication.
- The progress made in mathematics is improving. The school's information, together with work seen by inspectors in lessons and books, shows the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades is on course to rise this year.
- Learning in science is inconsistent. In Year 11, currently good teaching has helped outcomes catch up for older pupils who were exposed to weak teaching in the past. Some lessons are appropriately demanding and interesting, with a range of activities used to help pupils understand complex ideas. In other lessons, misconceptions are not tackled successfully and there is insufficient challenge for the most able. The subject leader, ably challenged and supported by the deputy headteacher, is tackling weaknesses in teaching, and this is beginning to lead to higher standards in science, especially in key stage 4.
- Pupils' progress in other subjects is at least secure, with particular strengths emerging, or being maintained, for example in business studies. Teachers with strong subject expertise are enthusing pupils and driving improvement.
- The school's work to develop pupils' reading is effective.
- Pupils are well prepared for progression in their next stage of life in work or education. All pupils who left the school in 2015 were enrolled on education or training courses or obtained jobs with training for September 2015. About half stay on in the school's sixth form.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- At the end of 2015, the school met both the academic and vocational minimum standards. Students made very strong progress in vocational subjects. Students studying academic courses made less progress than those studying vocational courses. All students passed all of their courses, both academic and vocational. The school's current performance information indicates that progress in academic subjects is improving.
- The 16 to 19 study programme offers students the opportunity to combine a wide choice of academic and vocational courses. The school is using its links with another school in the trust to collaboratively deliver further academic courses in Spanish and physics from September 2016. Students who have not yet achieved GCSE English and mathematics at grade C or above are supported and follow an effective programme of study to improve their understanding further.
- Leaders have high expectations of the sixth form and recognise the urgent need to improve outcomes in academic subjects. They have analysed why some academic subjects are more successful and are applying this effective practice across the curriculum. The head of the sixth form carefully tracks students' progress and identifies those who are in danger of falling behind. She works with subject teachers and tutors to support individual academic and pastoral needs. This is beginning to help current students to make better progress.
- During the inspection, Year 13 students were revising for examinations and most Year 12 students were on work experience. The school's information shows that teaching in the sixth form is improving strongly and is now good. Observation of a few available lessons in the sixth form supported this view. Strong subject knowledge, high expectations and skilful questioning were extending students' learning well.
- Students enjoy life in the sixth form and they feel safe and secure. They welcome the opportunity to contribute to the wider aspects of life in school, for example by running the school and house councils. The school's vertical tutor system enables sixth-form students to mentor and support younger students and provides support in a variety of ways, for example in reading development.
- The school has a broad programme of careers' education and guidance for sixth-form students, which uses a combination of internal provision and local external expertise including entrepreneurs and companies. Opportunities are given to visit universities; the school has undertaken a significant drive in promoting students to apply to higher education. A large majority of Year 13 students have applied to university and they have almost all received provisional offers. Evidence indicates that all of the Year 13

cohort will achieve sustained education, employment and training. The work experience provided for the majority of Year 12 students helps to improve their employability skills.

- The sixth form has a designated link governor who provides challenge and a level of accountability of the sixth form leaders. The governor additionally supports the school by delivering presentations to sixth form students on employment and life beyond the sixth form.

School details

Unique reference number	137376
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10003253

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1130
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Terence Brown
Headteacher	Paul Jackson
Telephone number	01634 844809
Website	www.thomasaveling.co.uk
Email address	office@thomasaveling.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 January 2012

Information about this school

- The Thomas Aveling School is a larger than average-sized, non-selective 11–18 school in an area with selective education.
- In September 2015, the school became joint lead school with Fort Pitt Grammar School in the Fort Pitt Thomas Aveling Academy Trust. There are two sponsored academies in the trust: Robert Napier School and Phoenix Junior Academy.
- The school is led by an executive headteacher, who is also executive headteacher of the other three schools in the trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium (funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after) is the same as the national average.
- A lower than average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is just above average but the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is lower than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- No pupils attend alternative provision.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 31 lessons, nine jointly with school leaders. The lead inspector also visited five classes with the deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils and students, the executive and deputy headteachers, senior and middle leaders, newly appointed staff, the chair of the governing body and three other governors and a representative of The Fort Pitt Thomas Aveling Academy Trust.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' and students' work, observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at lunchtime and talked informally with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, taking into account the 68 responses on Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered the 60 free-text question responses. Responses to the 58 online questionnaires completed by staff and 67 by pupils were also taken into account.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including those associated with safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, progress information of current pupils, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school's evaluation of its own performance and improvement plans.

Inspection team

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