

Inspection of Thomas Gainsborough School

Wells Hall Road, Great Cornard, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 0NH

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 November 2024

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Helen Yapp. This school is part of Unity Schools Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Tim Coulson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Christine Quinn.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Thomas Gainsborough School (TGS) attend a school that, at all levels, wants them to succeed both academically and socially. This culture is clear in the way in which pupils respond positively to the expectations placed upon them. As a result, pupils behave in a manner of which they can be proud. Equally, their academic performance reflects the school's value 'excellence for each, for all'.

Pupils describe feeling safe and happy. They trust that adults will look out for them if they have any concerns. They are respectful and polite to one another, staff and visitors. The pupils themselves say that bullying is exceptionally rare, that they almost never hear unkind language and that, once reported, any issues are dealt with quickly.

Pupils have high aspirations. Sixth-form students are captivated by their subjects and their experiences. High profile visiting speakers expand the students' horizons. Much of the enrichment in the sixth form is student-led. Fundraising, meeting with local business leaders, editing the school magazine, and leading mentoring in the lower school are all part of the sixth-form experience.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils achieve well at TGS. This is because the curriculum they are following is carefully considered and designed. Teachers are experts in their classrooms. They know their subjects well and provide clear explanations of subject content. The teaching materials used by the school focus very much on the needs of pupils, for example, by extending reading skills. Effective use is made of activities, which support pupils in retrieving knowledge. Pupils are able to respond intelligently and confidently to technical questions. Students and staff in the sixth form use technology very successfully in supporting their exploration of subject matter. In most subjects, pupils work is checked effectively. Where this is found not to be so, errors in pupils' work can go unaddressed. As a result, these errors are repeated.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are increasingly well supported. The school is now employing focused methods to ensure the needs of pupils are met consistently highly. Additional resources are being deployed to ensure that where pupils with SEND do not currently access the curriculum effectively, this is addressed to ensure they develop appropriate knowledge and skills.

The school is passionate about ensuring pupils become confident and fluent readers. The opportunities for pupils to read are extensive. This is encapsulated by one pupil who said, 'reading transports me to a different place'. In the sixth form, students are provided with extensive additional reading materials to enhance their understanding.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. Their conduct towards one another and staff is exemplary. During break and lunchtime they chat happily together in a calm and relaxed atmosphere. Pupils queue sensibly for lunch. In classrooms, pupils are able to learn well because they can concentrate fully. They are not distracted in any way. There are high

expectations of pupils' behaviour in the school. This ensures an ethos of respect. This is mirrored by the sixth form, where there is a culture of impeccable behaviour. Pupils absolutely know right from wrong. Most pupils attend school regularly, and they are universally punctual to lessons.

There is an extensive personal development programme that has a wide-ranging, and highly positive, impact. The taught curriculum provides pupils with a wide spectrum of opportunities to discuss and debate current topics. In the sixth form, students develop this into their highly popular and well-attended debate society. Pupils learn about healthy relationships. They articulate very clearly that they are well prepared to stand up to any form of harassment. The work of the school in this is pivotal. Pupils have a voice in the school. It is a voice that makes positive change through a variety of student leadership roles across the school. Students in the sixth form describe wanting to give something back to the school that has supported them. The highly successful careers education, advice and guidance programme is fundamental to the opportunities pupils have to be successful in their next stage of their education or employment.

Leaders have a very clear principled and moral purpose to ensure pupils receive the highest standard of education. They have an accurate understanding of what remains to be done to achieve this for all pupils. This is well supported and understood by trust leaders and governors. Staff comment very positively about the professional development opportunities they receive, in addition to the support with their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While the curriculum is increasingly ambitious for all pupils, some pupils with SEND are not always able to fully access their learning because the planning for their needs is not sufficiently precise. The school should ensure that support for pupils with SEND is consistently effective to help them achieve well.
- In a small number of subjects, the quality of written work is not always consistently well assessed. As a result, errors and misconceptions are not always picked up. This means they are repeated without correction. The school should ensure that the approach to checking pupils' work is sufficiently rigorous in all subjects.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141639
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10345401
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1614
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	250
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Christine Quinn
CEO of the trust	Tim Coulson
Headteacher	Helen Yapp
Website	tgschool.net
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 September 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school makes use of one registered provider of alternative education.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and

management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school’s education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher, the CEO and governors.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, history, art and design and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents through responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors gathered the views of pupils and staff through Ofsted’s pupil and staff surveys, as well as interviews and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Jonathan Rockey, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Steven Hogan	Ofsted Inspector
Ruth Brock	Ofsted Inspector
Carol Dallas	Ofsted Inspector
Victoria Hearn	Ofsted Inspector

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