



Thomas Mills High School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 124813
 Local Authority Suffolk
 Inspection number 293121
 Inspection dates 5 October 2006
 Reporting inspector Anthony Knight HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Saxtead Road
School category	Community		Framlingham
Age range of pupils	11 - 19		Woodbridge
			Suffolk
			IP13 9HE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01728 723493
Number on roll (school)	1121	Fax number	01728 621098
Number on roll (6th form)	307		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Barbara Howard
		Headteacher	Mr Colin Hirst
Date of previous school inspection	30 September - 4 October 2002		

Age group	Inspection date(s)	Inspection no.
11 - 19	5 October 2006	293121

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Thomas Mills is an oversubscribed slightly larger than average size comprehensive school with a sixth form. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is significantly below the national average. Relatively few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and very few pupils do not have English as their first language. There are considerably fewer pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities than the national average and fewer than average pupils with statements of special educational needs. The school has specialist status for technology and languages. It was designated by DfES as a High Performing Specialist School in 2005 and has developed strong links with the community and feeder schools. It has also achieved Artsmark and Sportsmark and is a FA chartered school. The headteacher joined the school in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Thomas Mills is an outstanding school. Effective monitoring of teaching ensures excellent learning which has resulted in outstanding standards and excellent progress being achieved, particularly in Key Stage 3. The quality of teaching and learning is mostly outstanding, although not all of it consistently matches the best, especially in the quality of teachers' marking.

The curriculum is good and sensible plans are in place to explore the development of vocational options in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extremely good extra-curricular activities including sport, music and art. These activities and the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support contribute significantly to the excellent overall personal development and well-being of pupils.

Leadership and management are excellent and the school has made good progress since the last inspection. Financial management is secure. The headteacher has quickly gained the trust and respect of staff, pupils and parents. He has a clear and appropriately challenging vision for the school that seeks to retain the best of the past while also moving the school forward. Parents express overwhelming support for the school but there is a significant minority who feel that their views and the views of their children are not given sufficient attention. The school has good capacity to improve and offers excellent value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form Grade: 1

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are outstanding. All the main aspects of its provision are at least good and there is much exemplary practice. Particular strengths are the quality of care, guidance and support which ensures all students achieve well and make good progress. Standards in history, geography and English literature are particularly high. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Teachers have high expectations and encourage successfully a strong work ethic. The sixth form curriculum provides a range of advanced level courses although there is only a small number of vocational options. Students' personal development is excellent. They are well motivated, mature and cooperative and respond well to the demands placed upon them. Many students make a strong contribution to the life of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enable all teaching to match the best and ensure consistency in the quality of marking
- Explore vocational options thoroughly to ensure the curriculum continues to meet the needs and interests of all pupils.
- Take more account of the views of pupils and find ways for them to contribute more directly to school improvement
- Ensure all parents feel that their views and concerns are considered.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils enter the school with above average attainment and make excellent progress through Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is outstanding. Pupils consistently attain significantly above the national averages in English, mathematics and science. Overall attainment in Key Stage 4 has been significantly above the national averages for the last five years, although standards in mathematics do not match those achieved in English and science. The percentage of pupils achieving at least five A*-C grades at GCSE is significantly above the national average. Standards are good in the sixth form and students make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities also make good progress throughout the school. The school sets challenging targets and, while these were not met fully in 2006, pupils achieved significantly above all national averages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils enjoy school and feel safe. Behaviour is excellent and pupils take care of each other. Attendance is good. Students in the sixth form act maturely and contribute significantly to the well-being of pupils in the lower school through, for example, taking a strong leadership role in the house system. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They make excellent healthy lifestyle choices and enjoy and appreciate the importance of physical exercise. They are actively involved in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and contribute significantly to the school and wider community. Pupils and students are prepared well for their future beyond the school. However, opportunities for pupils to contribute directly to the ongoing improvement of the school are missed as the school council only includes pupils from Years 10 and 11. Pupils are keen to contribute more and have much to offer the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers generally demonstrate expert knowledge of their subjects, have high expectations and clear learning objectives. There are good working relationships between staff and students. Learning resources are of high quality with good use being made of interactive whiteboards. Pupils say that in the best lessons, teachers make use of different learning styles and encourage them to contribute to the lesson. However, a minority of the teaching does not come up to the standard of the best and on occasions pupils feel that their views are not considered sufficiently. Assessment is used well to support learning although marking is variable, from the cursory tick to detailed comments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum offered by the school is good and meets the statutory requirements. All pupils study at least one foreign language in Key Stage 4 and there are good opportunities for pupils to extend their learning through an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are taught across the curriculum and are well planned, reviewed and assessed. The sixth form has a range of options with students mainly selecting AS and A2 courses. The school is sensibly exploring the development of more vocational courses and is involved in the local authority working group on the 14-19 curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are outstanding overall with particular strengths in the pastoral team and the help given to students in the sixth form. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are given good support and parents value the way pupils are made to feel welcome when they join the school. An effective focus on pupils at risk of exclusion has significantly reduced the numbers of pupils excluded over the last year. There are secure child protection procedures and risk assessments are completed thoroughly. Good use is made of academic assessment records although there is insufficient detail about the smaller steps of progress that pupils need to make in each year if they are to reach their expected targets at the end of the key stage.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding overall. The school is led very well by the headteacher who is confidently facing the challenge of making further improvements to effective established ways of working. This demanding process of change is being supported excellently by the chair of governors, the School Improvement Partner from the local authority and a good governing body. There is a strong and dedicated senior management team, including good leadership of the sixth form, and effective middle managers. Staff work well together and benefit from the well managed monitoring programme which provides excellent support and appropriate challenge, in particular for new members of staff. Good links have been developed with the community and with other schools, particularly the feeder schools. The school knows itself well but the school's 'self-evaluation form', which includes its judgements on which the inspection was based, contains too little evaluation and so it is not easy to identify clear priorities and see why they have been chosen. The judgements made by the school were understandably cautious in this form but too modest. Parents express overwhelming support for the school but a significant minority feels that their views are not given sufficient attention. A significant minority also feels the school does not take account of their children's views.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	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	1	2
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	2	NA

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	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	NA
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	NA



6 October 2006

Dear Pupils and Students

Thomas Mills High School, Saxtead Road, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP13 9HE

We enjoyed coming to your school and talking with many of you. We were pleased to see the excellent way you behaved around the school and how you are making the most of the excellent opportunities available to you. You and your parents are right that Thomas Mills is an excellent school.

Our visit focussed on the judgements made by your school about what it sees as strengths and what needs further development. We were able to completely endorse these judgements. For example, your school knows that the excellent teaching you experience in most lessons now needs to be developed in all lessons. We have asked your teachers to make sure they give you helpful information when they mark your work so that you know exactly what you need to do to improve your work further. You can help by reading these comments carefully and making sure that you apply them in your next piece of work. Your school is also looking at the courses available in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to make sure they continue to meet your needs and interests.

We understand that some of you feel that your views are not always listened to and that some of your parents and carers feel the same. We have asked your headteacher to find ways in which you can all contribute more directly to the ongoing improvement of the school. You have a good school council and I know they want to hear from more of you.

It is clear that your school knows what you need and what to do to improve the school even further. You have helped make the school excellent and have a key role in helping to make it even better.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Knight
Her Majesty's Inspector