

# THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH SCHOOL REVIEW

Review dates                      Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2015

<b><u>Overall effectiveness</u></b>	<b>Good</b>
Achievement of students	Good
Quality of teaching	Good
Behaviour and safety of students	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth form provision	Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good schools with some outstanding aspects:

- Leadership has vision, purpose and ambition and has successfully led the school through reorganization, academy conversion and transition to a new school.
- Increasingly strong teaching is leading to increased improvement across many subjects and key stages
- An imaginative curriculum, embedded in key stage 3 and following through to key stage 4 is ensuring that the needs of all learners are met, supporting strong progress and developing their spiritual, cultural, social and moral development as well.
- Students feel safe. Their behaviour is excellent and students are courteous in their interactions which has a positive impact on learning and progress.
- Students are confident about their futures. They benefit from good-quality information, advice and guidance reflected in the recent Careers Mark Award.
- The sixth form is good. Students study a range of courses that equips them well for the next stage of education and employment. Many are achieving very well across a range of subjects and display a clear enthusiasm for learning.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- There needs to be greater consistency in achievement at key stage 4; some key subjects need to make the same strong progress that others do
- In a small number of lessons, especially at key stage 4 students need to be more actively involved in their learning and engage more quickly.

- While feedback and marking is having a marked impact on student progress and has improved since the last review in January 2015, this is not yet consistently the case in all subjects.
- Although most middle leaders are effective at leading pedagogy, make good use of self-evaluation to plan for improvement and use data to raise ambition and support intervention, there are areas of inconsistency that need addressing

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

Improve achievement further by

- ensuring that all teachers plan for the engagement of students in learning as quickly as possible
- ensuring that all teachers embed examination and study techniques into well planned learning 'episodes'
- ensuring that feedback given to students on their work is acted on

Improve leadership further by

- ensuring that middle leadership is more consistent in realizing the high aspirations of the senior leadership
- ensuring that school's data is referenced to national figures to help benchmarking and that assessment data is used to generate conversations between students and parents about how to improve

## **Information about this review**

- 72 lessons were observed for about 30 minutes each
- Meetings were held with students, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers.
- A range of documents were scrutinised including self-evaluation forms, improvement plans and data analysis documents
- Student work was sampled in most lessons observed and a selection of work was scrutinized from 25 students covering different year groups and ability levels.

## **Review team**

Howard Lay	CEO SWAT
June McNaughton	Director of Teaching and Learning SWAT
Mark Neild	Director of Achievement and Standards SWAT
Darren Woodward	Director of Primary Learning SWAT
Andy Samways	Director of Suffolk Borders teaching Alliance

Matt Gibson	Vice Principal of Thomas Gainsborough School
Sean Douglas	Assistant Head of Thomas Gainsborough School
Gail Forster	Assistant Head of Thomas Gainsborough School
Sophie Gynn	Assistant Head of Newmarket Academy
Andrew Hammond	Head teacher of Glemsford Primary Academy
Andy Prestoe	Principal of Samuel Ward
Rachel Brown	Head of Key Stage 5 English and Acting joint Head of Sixth Samuel Ward Academy

## Information about the academy

- The academy is a much larger than average secondary schools.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the student premium (additional government funding) is below average.
- The vast majority of students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is broadly average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is below average.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.
- In September 2013 the school, previously for students aged 13 to 18, became a school for students aged 11 to 18 and introduced its first group of Year 7 and Year 8 students.
- In January 2014 the school converted to an Academy, joining the Samuel Ward Academy Trust.
- In September 2015 the old school was replaced by a new build.

## Student outcomes are good

- Across almost all year groups, current students make consistently strong progress, developing secure knowledge and understanding, considering their different starting points. The proportion of students making expected progress is in line with national averages for the majority of subjects. Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is less strong in drama, English iGCSE, media studies, textiles, engineering, and science additional.
- Students enter the academy with below average attainment and make good progress to achieve examination results in line with the national average in a wide range of subjects including in English and mathematics. The headline figure of five good GCSEs including maths and English declined in 2015 to 55% from 61% in 2014, although the conversion rates of higher and middle

ability students rose. The fall in the expected progress in English is due to a new course being followed by two classes. Actions put in place to address this are already reaping benefits including collaborative work across the Trust.

- In a wide range of subjects, the progress of disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs currently on roll is close to or is improving towards that of other students with the same starting points. Overall progress of those with special educational needs who receive help in the school's Access provision is above average. These students significantly improve their basic skills and their self confidence.
- The progress of the vast majority of disadvantaged students is similar to or improving in relation to other students nationally. All work observed in class and during a work scrutiny activity showed no discernable gap in current progress of pupil premium students.
- Students read widely and write extensively across all subjects. Students are articulate and express themselves well when speaking.

## **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good**

- Across the school, including in the sixth form, teaching is typically good, with some that is outstanding. This is securing good learning and progress.
- Teachers show strong subject knowledge. They have high expectations and show tangible enthusiasm for their subjects. They use their good subject knowledge to tackle and pre-empt misconceptions well and build on students' strengths.
- They give clear explanations and skilfully question students to gauge their understanding. They probe students' responses to promote deeper thinking and they reshape explanations so that students better understand new concepts. Some forensic questioning in Law and in English makes students think very hard.
- Work for the students is well planned. Where learning is most effective, teachers use all the information available to them about students' prior achievement to plan and provide work which builds on this. In the best lessons they set clear tasks that challenge students and encourage independence. Usually, students are clear as to what they will be learning because teachers share the lesson's objectives with them. Objectives are often staged in difficulty and linked to examination criteria, but are not always matched to adapted tasks to help students achieve them.
- Some outstanding planning uses the 100 minutes in lessons very productively to build and then embed subject knowledge, using a variety of approaches and learning episodes that are well chosen to bring about deeper learning and good study skills. However, in some lessons, teacher talk goes on for too long. Then students do not have enough opportunities to take an active part in their learning and develop the ability to think and work more independently, to help them achieve their potential. Students say that they learn best when they are actively engaged in challenging tasks that enthuse them.

- The quality of marking has improved since the previous review and students are often now given good advice on how to improve their work. In the best instances, feedback is personalised, focused and very formative, but it is not always frequent enough. Students are encouraged to respond to marking. Where they do so, they make good progress and can explain how the guidance improved their understanding and their work. However, this is inconsistent. There is not always an expectation that students will respond to the feedback and advice they are given and therefore they do not always make as much progress as they could. Excellent examples were seen of teachers providing DIRT (Dedicated Individual Reflection Time) for students to respond to the marking, for instance in science.
- The school identifies and supports effectively those students who start to fall behind and intervenes quickly to help them to improve their learning. In the Access group, students make outstanding progress, as shown by rigorous individual tracking. Students not only improve their skills but show remarkable, growing confidence.
- Increasingly teachers set homework, in line with the school's policy, that consolidates learning and prepares students well for work or examinations to come. Excellent examples were seen of homework diligently completed and rigorously marked though this is not yet universal.
- Literacy and numeracy are promoted widely across the curriculum. In many lessons teachers focus on helping students to improve their literacy skills by using key subject words, correcting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar and providing good opportunities for writing. Presentation of work is excellent and there is no unfinished work in students' books. Among the students there is significant culture of pride about their work. Consequently, over time the quality of written work improves well.
- Teachers are ambitious for their students and have high expectations about good behaviour and conduct which students are well aware of. Excellent relationships contribute to a supportive and positive climate for learning. In some Key Stage 4 lessons students are passive and do not engage enough with discussion. Elsewhere students respond well to their teachers and to each other and in the best lessons they make very good contributions to their own learning and respond well to opportunities to take the initiative.

### **The personal development, behaviour and welfare of students are outstanding**

- Students' behaviour around the school is outstanding. Highly respectful relationships are habitual and students are proud of their new school. They are courteous, self-confident and proud to celebrate successes.
- The school's ethos and values are embedded throughout the school day. The personal development and well-being of students are equally as important as their academic progress and attainment. The school has taken the opportunity provided by the move to a new building to further develop a culture of high expectations and an aspirant ethos; display, the grand piano, student performance are now central to the school day and create a unique atmosphere at circulation times, giving students further opportunities to express themselves. Sixth Form

students set excellent examples to younger students, especially through the highly visible newly introduced prefect system .

- In lessons, students show consistently high levels of behaviour for learning, especially where challenge is evident through effectively planned and differentiated objectives within distinct episodes of learning in the 100 minute lessons. Instances of low level disruption are rare and the systems in place to support positive behavior ensure that these instances are effectively tracked and monitored so as to drive improvement in individual behavior.
- Students' attitudes to learning are overwhelmingly positive, especially in Key Stage 3 lessons where behaviour for learning is consistently outstanding; students show a high degree of involvement in lessons and contribute significantly to generating active engagement and resulting progress. At Key Stage 4, students show considerable commitment to their learning however some students are prone to listening intently but are less forthcoming and so appear more passive in their learning.
- The school's approach to careers guidance is outstanding. This is evidenced by it recently being awarded the Careers Mark and the recognition of the careers lead against national standards. As a result, the school clearly provides excellent guidance on the next steps in education, employment and training to all of its students. Students are successful in their applications to university and those lower down the school are increasingly challenged to look to higher education including Russell Group universities.
- Students feel very safe at all times at school, even more so in the new building. They trust leaders, teachers and Learning Mentors to take appropriate action to resolve any issues that may arise. The positive behavior management systems are applied consistently and well. Records are detailed and instances tracked to ensure that where needed, specific students are targeted with further support.
- The Student Support Team are increasingly proactive and highly effective in supporting students in their school life, especially those with vulnerability or particular needs. The award of Family First School is recognition of the high quality leadership, systems, processes and relationships that have been developed in this area. The location and visibility of Learning Mentors at the heart of the school provides all students with the access to high quality and effective support throughout the school day.
- Transition of pupils is a particular strength of the school with clearly defined roles, systems and strong relationships with primary schools contributing significantly to smooth and effective transition (280 students this year with exceptionally high degree of parent satisfaction).
- Attendance is above the national average and is checked rigorously. Systems are continuously being evolved to support and encourage even better attendance levels, particularly in groups such as boys with persistent absence. As a result, attendance statistics continue to rise.
- Permanent exclusions are very rare and the school has a comprehensive system for the use of internal exclusions, for tackling issues and working with students to improve their behaviours as

necessary. Once again, the systems in place have been further evolved to provide even clearer consequence for the rare instances where repeated issues with behaviour may arise.

- The school deals highly effectively with E-safety issues, keeping detailed records of any issues and being proactive with matters relating to social media.
- The school's approach to safeguarding and preventing radicalisation is outstanding. Its safeguarding leads are extremely knowledgeable and highly reflective. They have ensured the growth of a highly skilled Student Support Team who through daily interactions support students' mental health and well-being highly effectively. Update and training is rigorous, regular and places a high expectation on the staff to report as per guidelines. PREVENT training for all staff is in the process of being updated (October 2015).
- Issues of homophobia and racism are exceptionally rare. This is backed up the school's proactive approach to discussing the issues with students as soon as they arrive at the school through assemblies and PSHE Enrichment Days. Consequently, bullying is rare, tackled quickly and highly effectively if required.

## **The leadership and management are good**

- Leadership by the head, supported by a committed and focused leadership team is excellent. The head has high ambition, reflected in his desire to make the school outstanding, a clear vision demonstrated in the clarity of his strategic thinking and a strong approach to leadership which both challenges and supports. His Vice Principals share his vision and bring a balance and commitment to a high performing team
- Leaders and managers, over the last three years, have transformed the school's culture and ethos, steering it through reorganisation, the transition to a new build and academy status. At the heart of the school is a set of core values which students, staff and leaders understand and which give the school a strong sense of shared moral purpose.
- Leaders have outstanding clarity of purpose and this is translated into a clear plan to take the school to outstanding. The focus over the last few years has been on the development of the culture, leadership and the future capacity of the school. This has been highly successful and leaders are now bringing about greater consistency and energy to teaching and learning which will result in rapid progress in outcomes.
- Leaders have created a culture of high expectations, reflected in the outstanding behaviour of students, so that respect and courtesy are the norm. They welcome the security that this culture brings, encouraging them to express their views and opinions and make mistakes in their learning, which is especially evident in Key Stage 3 and in lessons where the teachers feel confident to let the students challenge their own thinking.
- Data is used effectively to inform interventions and support accountability. The schools has this year changed its identification methodology from one based on thresholds to Progress 8 scores. This better reflects the schools ethos of 'excellence: for each, for all' and will ensure a further

closing of the achievement gap. However, a further refinement would be for the school to analyse subject progress in relation to national expected and better than expected baselines.

- The school is more confident in its approaches to self-evaluation; there is an honesty and willingness to accept challenge and this is bringing about greater rigour and securing a culture of continual improvement.
- Although many middle subject leaders see themselves as leaders of pedagogy there are inconsistencies in the way that they support and challenge colleagues, use data to set targets and monitor progress. This is detrimental to progress in some subject areas and is a key issue for action.
- The curriculum is excellent and supports students' spiritual and cultural development with opportunities to engage in debating, music and sport and a wide range of cultural visits. There is a strong focus on student leadership which helps develop them as responsible citizens and is celebrated through assemblies and the awards of ribbons which is valued by the students.
- Leaders and managers have focused on raising the quality of teaching and learning. This is reflected in the way that marking and feedback, planning and the outcomes for higher attaining students have improved since the 'Review' last year. However, although this has been successful in many subject areas, there is still a need to ensure that planning engages students in a more active way in some lessons, that examination preparation is embedded within smaller learning 'episodes' within each lesson and that marking and feedback brings about real progress in the work of all students.
- Leaders use performance management effectively to improve teaching. They have a clear teaching policy which is providing clarity for the staff and the baseline for more accurate monitoring, supporting training and development

## **The sixth form provision is Good**

- Achievement is good, for although the average point score per student for A-levels in the Sixth Form has reduced from 2014 to 2015, this is due to the school no longer offering General Studies as it felt this qualification was not giving their students an advantage when applying for university. The average point score per entry has remained broadly similar from 2014 to 2015 (C-). Value added in the Sixth Form has increased for A-level qualifications and is now positive at 0.07. The outcomes and value added for vocational courses in the sixth form is outstanding. The average point score per entry when expressed as a grade is now Distinction+ with an excellent value added score of 0.52.
- Leadership of the sixth form is excellent; there is a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, ambition to make the sixth form outstanding and clarity about how the vision translates into planning. Leaders are now managing individualized study programmes that build on learners' prior attainment, meet 16-19 requirements and prepare them for the future.
- The school has adopted the right post sixteen strategy, for although numbers have fallen this is partly the result of adjustments to the curriculum which over time will create a sixth form which

more fully meets the abilities and interests of the students ensuring progression opportunities are stronger and outcomes higher. The school needs to communicate this clearly to the lower school and community and particularly engage with years 10 and 11.

- The information and guidance offered to students entering the sixth form is comprehensive and effective. Students follow courses that suit their abilities and ambitions. They are well prepared for employment or higher education and increasing numbers are entering the top Russell group of universities.
- Teaching, learning and assessment support and challenge learners so that they make strong progress across all aspects of their study programmes. Learners who fall behind are supported to succeed and the most able are stretched in most subjects. In a small number of lessons, teachers need to ensure that their planning challenges students to engage more fully through increased pace.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning in the sixth form are outstanding. Students feel safe, secure and well cared for. They enjoy excellent relationships with staff. They express confidence in their teachers and welcome the excellent support they receive.
- Learners develop personal, social and employability skills. They are punctual and attendance is high.
- Students contribute well to the life of the school and to the learning of others. They act as excellent role models for younger students and many coach and help support their development in academic subjects and in other ways.

Howard Lay