

Inspection of a good school: Townsend Church of England School

High Oaks, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 6DR

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

Outcome

Townsend Church of England School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils arrive from a very large number of primary schools. Frequently, others join at different times during the year. Some have experienced difficulties engaging with education or with bullying in their previous schools. At Townsend, such difficulties are uncommon. All are made to feel safe, welcomed and valued. This makes most pupils happy to be at school and able to build good friendships. The behaviour of the great majority of pupils is very good. They are polite and show respect to everyone. While misbehaviour from a small number sometimes frustrates other pupils, it is dealt with fairly.

Pupils benefit from knowledgeable teaching. Lessons are orderly, although pupils sometimes do not have opportunities to practise and apply their skills and knowledge. Although they are expected to complete work and pass their examinations, pupils do not always think as deeply as they might. The new curriculum is helping to make a difference, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

Pupils have opportunities to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. They participate in musical productions, and they benefit from having the St Albans Music School based on the school site.

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

In September 2023, leaders and governors took some decisive actions. Many key policies and procedures were revised, including around behaviour. The school made significant changes to the curriculum, notably extending the key stage 3 curriculum to again include Year 9 and starting GCSE courses in Year 10. In many subjects the new programme for Years 7 and 8 has already been implemented. This allows topics to be covered in much more depth, giving a stronger foundation for later study. Plans are also in place to offer a wider choice of languages, to increase the number of pupils studying subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc is a range of academic subjects that provide a broad foundation for future study and/or employment. In the sixth form,

additional A-Level courses are being offered. However, in some arts and technology subjects, plans to extend and deepen the curriculum are not as clear.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are nurtured well and helped to develop their self-confidence. The school is successful in finding support from outside agencies, even when this is hard to secure. Those who find coming to school difficult are monitored and supported well. The school has made new appointments to strengthen its efforts to improve attendance. Pupils who struggle with reading are given thoughtful and effective support. This includes pre-reading any texts they will encounter in subject lessons.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They present ideas and information clearly, including in the sixth form. Those teaching outside their main areas of expertise are well supported. Regular assessments are made to check pupils' understanding and recall of information. This all helps pupils and students achieve in line with others nationally at GCSE and A-Level. However, in a few classrooms, not enough time is given for pupils and students to practise their skills, apply their knowledge or engage in discussion. Sometimes, activities given to pupils are not always appropriate, for example spending too much time writing in practical subjects. This limits pupils' enthusiasm and excitement for learning and, in some instances, means that pupils do not work as hard as they might. Additionally, when this occurs, it limits opportunities for pupils with SEND to be supported effectively.

The behaviour of the great majority of pupils is impressive, particularly as they move around the school site. Classrooms are positive places in which to teach and learn. When required, sanctions are applied consistently, fairly, and firmly but also with kindness. Sixth-form students are excellent ambassadors for the school. The school's ethos of respecting everyone is certainly lived out in the way that staff and pupils behave. People from all backgrounds, beliefs and lifestyles can be themselves and thrive at Townsend. The new, expanded humanities curriculum enables pupils to explore cultural diversity in greater depth.

Staff are supportive of the changes made. They understand the time and effort needed to provide a good quality of education and care for pupils, but also say that consideration is given to their workload and well-being. This includes changes to assessment procedures that have made them more manageable and meaningful.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few foundation subjects, planned changes to the key stage 3 curriculum have yet to take effect. This means that pupils are not yet studying topics in the depth necessary for them to understand and achieve as well as in other subjects. They do not

have a strong foundation of knowledge that supports future study in these subjects. The school should ensure that all foundation subjects provide pupils in Years 7 to 9 with opportunities to build the depth of knowledge and skills needed to access further study and achieve well.

- On occasions, teachers place much more emphasis on presentation and demonstration than on enabling pupils to apply and practise using knowledge and take part in discussion or debate. This means that, sometimes, pupils lose interest or enthusiasm for learning and do not work as hard as they might. It also limits opportunities to support pupils with SEND in the classroom. The school should work with staff to ensure that all lessons are highly effective in supporting pupils' learning and application of knowledge.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in December 2015.

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	117555
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10294986
Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
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	780
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Quenet
Headteacher	Anthony Flack
Website	www.townsend.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher joined the school in September 2023.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers.
- The sixth form operates as a consortium with five other local schools; St Albans Girls' School, The Marlborough Science Academy, Samuel Ryder Academy, Loreto College, and Nicholas Breakspeare School.
- The school is part of the Diocese of St Albans. The last inspection of the school's denominational education and worship under Section 48 of the Education Act (2005) took place in July 2016. The next Section 48 inspection is due to take place by July 2024.
- 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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, modern languages, history, and design technology. 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.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum with a group of subject leaders and visited classrooms in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. They also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with representatives from the local authority and from the diocese.
- 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.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff, and with pupils and students from across the school. They took account of 78 responses to Ofsted's inspection survey for school staff, 179 responses to Ofsted's inspection survey for pupils and students, and 239 responses to Ofsted's survey of parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mark Phillips, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Likhon Muhammad

Ofsted Inspector

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