

Inspection of The Thomas Hardy School

Queen's Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2ET

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 February 2025

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

The headteacher of this school is Nicholas Rutherford. This school is part of Wessex Multi-academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Michael Foley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Baker.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since March 2015. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Thomas Hardye School is highly ambitious for all pupils, and students in the sixth form. There is a strong focus on academic achievement and many pupils achieve exceptionally well. The curriculum is broad. Pupils can study a range of subjects and courses that reflect their interests and prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Teachers are passionate and highly knowledgeable about their subject areas.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct. The vast majority of pupils behave very well. They value the warm and respectful relationships they have with staff. Students in the sixth form particularly value the opportunities to learn beyond the academic curriculum, for example going on trips and meeting alumni.

The extra-curricular provision is a significant strength of the school. Many pupils are part of the Combined Cadet Force and complete the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Alongside this, there are a number of successful sports teams and music ensembles, which play to an exceptionally high standard. There are school plays and musicals and a huge variety of clubs, ranging from chess to literary societies. The school participates successfully in a range of nationally recognised competitions and initiatives, including debating and scientific research projects.

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

The school provides an ambitious curriculum. The majority of pupils study the full range of subjects in the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc). The curriculum has been planned well. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They prepare pupils well for public examinations, reflected in the school's very strong published outcomes. There are areas of the school where pupils, including students in the sixth form, are inspired to complete challenging work, read widely and take part in extra-curricular activities linked to those subjects. This is a strength of the school.

However, the delivery of the curriculum is not consistently effective, including in the sixth form. In some lessons, teaching supports pupils effectively to know and remember more. This is not consistently the case across all areas of the school. In some lessons, staff do not design activities that support pupils' learning. This means that, in some cases, pupils learn less effectively, and do not produce work of a high standard. The school's systems for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum are more established in some subjects than in others. Where systems are less strong, the actions taken to address weaknesses have not yet had an impact, so pupils' learning remains inconsistent.

The school has strong systems in place to accurately identify and monitor the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school's two resourced provisions provide high-quality support to pupils with complex communication needs and physical disabilities. These pupils thrive and are well integrated into the school community. Teachers have accurate information about how to support pupils with SEND. However, where the delivery of the curriculum is less strong, pupils with SEND learn less effectively.

The school promotes a love of reading, with some success. Pupils enjoy using the well-loved library. The school organises author visits and competitions. Pupils who have fallen behind with reading receive effective additional support.

The school's sixth form is vibrant and ambitious. Many students achieve well and are successful in gaining places at academically selective universities. The Student Union provides opportunities for students to organise events, raise money for charity and support younger pupils. The school's impressive extra-curricular offer is very much part of sixth-form life.

Most pupils have positive attitudes towards school. The school is calm and orderly. When pupils' behaviour falls short of the school's expectations, pupils are supported to take responsibility for their actions and limit lost learning time.

The school's personal, social, health and citizenship education programme is well planned. However, the delivery of this curriculum is not always effective. Staff do not always have the expertise to deliver this as intended. As a result, some pupils' understanding of healthy relationships and the fundamental British values is not as strong as others. However, this curriculum is supplemented with assemblies, workshops, visits from guest speakers and opportunities to take part in activities such as a mock general election. The information that pupils receive about their next steps, including apprenticeships and universities, is of high quality. As such, the school ensures that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Leaders, local governors and trustees know the school and its community well. They are mindful of staff well-being and workload. As a result, staff are proud to work at the school, and many parents value the work they do to support pupils both academically and pastorally.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas of the curriculum, staff do not consistently link their pedagogical approaches to the intended learning. This means that some pupils do not learn as effectively as they do in other areas, where there is high-quality provision. The trust must ensure that staff utilise the most effective pedagogical tools, so that more pupils develop a deep understanding of their subjects over time.
- Oversight of some areas of the curriculum is not sufficiently robust. This means that leaders do not have a detailed and accurate view of where curriculum implementation needs to be improved. The trust must strengthen its systems to check the impact of

the curriculum, so that pupils benefit from high-quality implementation across 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	137163
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10366171
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2,055
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	719
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Baker
CEO of the trust	Michael Foley
Headteacher	Nicholas Rutherford
Website	www.thomas-hardye.dorset.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	19 and 20 March 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average upper school.
- The school is part of Wessex Multi-academy Trust.
- The school hosts two specially resourced provisions on behalf of Dorset Council. One provides support for 10 pupils with physical disabilities. There are currently four pupils on roll. The other provides support for 10 pupils with complex communication needs. There are currently 10 pupils on roll.
- 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.

- The school currently uses six registered alternative provisions, and five unregistered alternative provisions.

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.
- 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 met with the headteacher, other senior leaders from the school and a selection of staff during the inspection.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and other members of the local governing body, and the chair and other members of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, food technology 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.
- Inspectors analysed responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the responses of staff and pupils to Ofsted's online surveys.
- An inspector discussed how the school identifies and supports pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils during lessons and social times. They met with staff who oversee the personal development and behaviour of pupils.
- 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.

Inspection team

Victoria Griffin, lead inspector

Matthew Collins

Stuart Smallwood

Rob Coles

Simon Tong

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025