

Townsend CofE School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117555
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358159
Inspection dates	11–12 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Joyce HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	867
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr I. Downs
Headteacher	Mr A. Wellbeloved
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2009
School address	High Oaks St Albans AL3 6DR
Telephone number	01727 853047
Fax number	01727 834523
Email address	admin@townsend.herts.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and by four additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 37 lessons taught by different teachers and held discussions with 21 teachers in a number of different meetings. Inspectors held meetings with members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, heads of year, school support staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a fellow governor, and with groups of students from Years 7, 8, 9, 11 and the sixth form. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at minutes of meetings, school improvement plans, subject reviews and many school policies. They analysed questionnaires from 367 parents and carers and a sample of over 150 students. At the time of inspection Year 10 students were on work-experience placements.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well is assessment information used to ensure all students make good progress in all lessons?
- How effective is the in-class support provided to students identified as requiring help?
- What has been the impact of the humanities specialist status in raising standards across the school?
- How effective are subject leaders at monitoring, evaluating and improving provision in their areas of responsibility?

Information about the school

Townsend Church of England School is a smaller than average school that draws students from a very wide geographical area and from over 60 primary schools. The school is oversubscribed with the majority of students being from White British heritage and the vast majority speaking English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school is a specialist humanities school with English, geography and religious education as its designated specialist subjects. Provision in the sixth form is offered in conjunction with other local schools and a further education college. The school holds many external quality marks including Healthy schools status, Artsmark and Sportsmark awards, Eco Schools award and the Careers and Guidance Kite Mark. The school has Investors in People status and has gained the Public Service Excellence Award and the International Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school that has many significant strengths that enable students to develop as well-rounded individuals. While students' academic achievement is satisfactory overall, their personal development is good because of the outstanding care, guidance and support and good curriculum. Together these important areas contribute significantly to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Students make satisfactory academic progress overall, although the rate of progress varies considerably between different subjects. In English and religious education progress is particularly good and students achieve well. However, in subjects within modern foreign languages and in creative and performing arts, students make much less progress and do not achieve to their full potential. In most other subjects students make the progress expected based on their starting points. The variability in the rate of student progress is closely linked to the effectiveness of teaching and teachers' use of assessment information in the planning of lessons. The school's sixth form is satisfactory following the recent improvements made to the rate of students' overall progress although there remains very significant variation in the quality of provision in the sixth form.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but varies both within and between subjects. Teaching is good where teachers use student assessment information well to plan lessons that ensure the work set for individual students closely meets their individual needs and ability level. However, in too many lessons teachers do not use assessment information effectively to ensure the work set is sufficiently challenging for all students and consequently some students do not make the progress of which they are capable. Learning support assistants work well with teachers to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in most lessons and this enables those students to make the same progress as their peers.

The school provides a very safe and secure learning environment where students feel extremely safe and confident that any issues or concerns they raise are swiftly dealt with. Students' behaviour around the school is good. The very broad and balanced curriculum enables students to experience a wide range of subjects and an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities further enhances students' enjoyment of school life. Curriculum activities enable the good development of skills that contribute to students' future economic well-being and also enable students to make a good contribution to both the school and local community. The specialist status is having a beneficial impact with attainment levels and participation rates, especially of subjects within the humanities specialism, rising. Student attendance rates are outstanding.

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are exceptional and the school's Christian ethos and 'respect for all' statement are well understood and practised by staff and students. They are significant factors that contribute to the inclusive, friendly

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community atmosphere that is evident in every part of the school. Students have a secure understanding of their rights and responsibilities as young people and are increasingly aware of the importance and benefits of healthy living. The school works exceptionally well with parents and carers to further promote care, guidance and support for students.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some leaders and managers are more effective at monitoring, evaluating and improving areas for which they are responsible than others. Arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of provision are not systematic and lack a framework in which to operate. Senior leaders are aware of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school, as reflected by the detailed self-evaluation, although they have over-estimated the effectiveness of the school's work in some areas. Improvement plans are appropriate and the school has a satisfactory capacity to make the necessary improvements.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all teachers use assessment information to plan lessons that meet individual students' needs and ability levels so the work set challenges all students and ensures they make good progress.
- Develop the effectiveness and consistency of practice by leaders and managers so they can more effectively improve areas for which they are responsible, by:
 - introducing a common framework for quality monitoring and evaluation activity
 - formalising and extending the sharing of good practice across the school.
- Ensure that improvements to provision in the sixth form continue and that variations in the quality of provision are reduced, by:
 - robustly monitoring students' progress in individual subjects
 - sharing best practice in teaching and learning
 - strengthening accountability arrangements of managers and subject leaders.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students make satisfactory academic progress overall and achieve as expected based on their starting points. Many students enter the school in Year 7 with above average levels of attainment and most achieve above average GCSE results in Year 11. Observations of lessons and students' work during the inspection confirm that students' overall progress is satisfactory. In most lessons students settle quickly and are attentive. In the best lessons, where students make the most progress, challenging work is set that closely matches students' ability level. However, in too many lessons inspectors observed whole groups completing the same activity irrespective of their individual needs or ability level and consequently many were not sufficiently challenged to make good progress. Inspection evidence confirms that all groups of students make similar overall progress with no significant underachievement for any specific group including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those in receipt of free school meals. The school is meeting the majority of its specialist subject attainment targets.

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Students' wider personal development is good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Curriculum activities and the school's strong caring and supportive ethos ensures students carefully reflect on their experiences, understand the difference between right and wrong, develop and use a full range of social skills and willingly explore and respect different cultures. Students thoroughly enjoy school life and develop good team-working, communication and employment skills that contribute well to their future economic well-being. They are involved in a number of community activities where they represent the school well including participating in funding raising events and services in the cathedral.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have secure subject knowledge and have strong working relationships with students. Behaviour in lessons is usually good and most students are willing to learn. In a small minority of lessons, usually where students are not sufficiently challenged by the work set or where they are passive for long periods of time, low-level disruption does slow the pace of learning and this is not consistently managed by staff. Arrangements for tracking and monitoring student progress against their targets are not consistent across the school. While tracking and monitoring arrangements for Year 11 in English and mathematics are highly effective, and the information is used by teachers to plan lessons,

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this is not routinely the case. The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were satisfactory.

The curriculum contributes significantly to students' personal development and a number of pathways allow access to a range of both academic and vocational options. Guest speakers, trips and visits further enhance the curriculum and students' enjoyment of school life. Extra-curricular activities are extensive and participation rates are high. The specialist status has enhanced the profile of geography, history and religious education in the school and is starting to impact more widely. Care, guidance and support arrangements are highly effective. Transition arrangements from primary schools work well. The school works extremely effectively with external support agencies to further enhance the well-being of students. Exclusion rates are exceptionally low and attendance rates are high. Arrangements for providing care, guidance and support through year group tutors are highly effective and arrangements to support students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable or have special educational needs and/or disabilities are outstanding.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, very ably supported by two deputies, is strongly committed to the caring ethos of the school and promotes the school's values to staff and students very effectively. Targets are set for improvement and senior leaders know what they need to do to improve the school further. However, the effectiveness of leaders and managers in making improvements to their areas of responsibility is variable throughout the school. Targets, especially for the rate of student progress, are not always sufficiently challenging and accountability measures for some staff are not always sufficiently robust. While leaders and managers do undertake monitoring and evaluation activity, no common framework exists to ensure their efforts are effectively coordinated to have the most beneficial impact. Much effort has been invested in making improvements in teaching and learning and the quality of teaching is improving. However, as recognised by the school, too little outstanding practice exists and the use of assessment data to track and monitor students' progress and to plan lessons is not embedded.

Governors are very supportive of the school and play an active role in school life. They fulfil their statutory duties and provide adequate challenge to hold the school to account for its academic performance. The school's safeguarding arrangements are exemplary. Policies and procedures are very detailed and work well. Staff training is thorough and recruitment procedures are robust. Risk assessments are detailed and access to the school

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site is controlled and monitored exceptionally well. Students are well-informed and extremely aware of how to keep themselves safe. The school's work to engage with parents and carers is developed extremely well. This ensures they are well-informed about their child's progress and about school events and that they can be actively involved in decision-making processes within the school.

The school's work to promote equality of opportunity and community cohesion is good. The 'respect for all' statement is fully understood and practised by students and this promotes understanding of equality issues throughout the school. Students' understanding of different cultures, religions and beliefs are developed well through the curriculum and the school's work with local, national and international organisations. Students form positive relationships with each other, gain a good appreciation of different cultures and backgrounds and show respect for different views, opinions and beliefs.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form is satisfactory overall. The rate of pupil progress and their attainment levels vary more significantly than in the main school. They are improving following more effective student tracking and monitoring procedures but significant variations remain. Students enjoy the sixth form and make a good contribution to the life of the school. The quality of teaching is variable. In the best lessons teachers use probing questioning well to engage students in discussion and debate and set tasks that are well-suited to different ability levels and require students to learn independently. However, in too many lessons, although satisfactory overall, students are not sufficiently engaged or challenged to make good progress as activities are too teacher-led.

Students are able to access a broad range of courses through partnership arrangements with other schools and the local college. The range of courses offered by the school is

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developing and these now include some intermediate level options. The enrichment programme continues to develop and participation rates are increasing. Students receive high quality pastoral care and have access to a wide range of personal and welfare support services. Academic guidance and support is not as effective as pastoral support, although students are well supported when making university applications. A high proportion of pupils progress to university on leaving the sixth form. Leaders and managers have recently introduced improved student tracking and monitoring systems and monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision more closely. However, opportunities for sixth form teachers to share best practice are limited and accountability arrangements are not sufficiently robust.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers who returned questionnaires were extremely supportive of the school and their views mostly reflect the findings of inspectors. Many parents and carers made additional positive comments in support of the work of the school. Many commented about the caring nature of the school and the excellent support provided by staff. Parents and carers were extremely happy with the arrangements in place to keep their children safe and many made positive comments about the way the school engages with parents and carers to keep them informed. One parental comment, reflective of many positive comments received, said 'the school seems to genuinely care for the pupils.' Of the few parents and carers that raised concerns about one or more aspects of the school's work, these concerns were followed up by the inspection team, but followed no specific pattern and did not relate to any one specific issue.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils in Years 7, 8, 9, 11 and the sixth form registered at Townsend CofE School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. Questionnaires could not be sent to the parents and carers of Year 10 pupils as they were on work-experience placements at the time of inspection.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 367 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 867 pupils registered at the school including 140 Year 10 pupils.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	134	37	208	57	18	5	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	177	48	182	50	6	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	175	48	182	50	8	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	140	38	201	55	18	5	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	105	29	251	68	5	1	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	99	27	239	65	22	6	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	77	21	257	70	21	6	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	145	40	194	53	12	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	139	38	203	55	13	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	119	32	204	56	24	7	5	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	101	28	216	59	15	4	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	181	49	173	47	4	1	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	179	49	173	47	7	2	4	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



13 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Townsend CofE School St Albans AL3 6DR

Thank you for making such a positive contribution to our recent inspection. We appreciated you sharing your views about the school with us. We enjoyed visiting the school and your views, alongside the questionnaire responses from your parents and carers, were very helpful in informing the judgements we have made.

We judged the school and the sixth form to be satisfactory overall but noted the many significant strengths in the main school that enable you to develop as mature, responsible young people. We were particularly impressed by:

- the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by the school
- the good curriculum that prepares you well for later life
- the way you behave and show respect for each other
- the way the school keeps your parents and carers informed
- the high attendance levels at the school.

It was clear to us that the school provides a very safe and supportive environment for you and we were pleased to hear that the majority of you said you felt very safe while at school and that you enjoyed school life. During our visit we identified a few areas where we would like the school to improve and we have asked the headteacher to:

- ensure all teachers use assessment information to plan lessons that meet your individual needs and ability levels to ensure you make consistently good progress in all subjects
- help subject leaders and heads of year make further improvements to their areas of responsibility
- continue to improve the quality of provision in the sixth form.

You can help the school and your teachers by continuing to work hard in all of your lessons. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Joyce

Her Majesty's Inspector

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