

Inspection of Thames Valley School

2 Conwy Close, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire RG30 4BZ

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 April 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Gemma Buley. This school is part of the Liberty Academy Trust LTD, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Dr Nicola Crossley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Tucker.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and motivated learners in this inclusive school. They are well known and supported by the staff here. They are clear about the adults they would go to if they had any concerns and know adults will get help if they need it. This means that pupils feel safe and have the support that helps them to learn. Pupils benefit from the high expectations that staff have for how well they will achieve. Due to this, pupils work hard and strive to achieve their best, which they do.

This is a calm school community where pupils treat each other, and adults in the school, with respect. Pupils play and interact very well together during breaks and lunchtimes. Pupils' conduct is kind and courteous through the school. This means that social times are consistently positive and purposeful environments. During which, it is clear to see how warm and trusting the relationships are between pupils and staff. Sometimes, as a result of their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), a pupil may find their emotions difficult to manage. When this happens, adults in school skilfully support pupils to use effective strategies that help them to self-regulate.

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

The school is highly ambitious for what pupils will achieve. The curriculum is broad and mostly well sequenced. A small number of foundation subjects do not yet fully match the ambition of the school. They have not been mapped out with the specific knowledge that pupils will learn in the same detail as the rest of the curriculum. However, where the curriculum is well established, pupils are achieving very well. Key stage 4 pathways are extremely well designed and matched to pupils' needs. They provide pupils with a range of options that will enable them to pursue their goals.

Most teachers have secure knowledge to plan well matched and effective lesson activities to help pupils learn. Pupils have their specific SEND met well by the expert therapeutic team. Additionally, effective learning support ensures that gaps in knowledge are found and filled. This includes spotting when pupils need help with their reading. Assessments are used well to spot any specific reading needs which pupils have. A personalised package of support is then put in place to help pupils become fluent and enthusiastic readers.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Classrooms are focused environments where pupils are enthusiastic to learn. Adults set high expectations for how pupils will behave, and pupils consistently meet these. The school methodically monitors pupils' behaviour and attendance. From this, they put in place highly effective support to pupils and families. This ensures high attendance and calm and respectful behaviour.

Pupils' personal development underpins everything in this school. The school has crafted bespoke personal development programmes, specifically linked to pupils' SEND. These ensure that pupils will learn the personal and life skills required to be

ready for life beyond school. Pupils are inclusive and have strong awareness of difference, including different cultures. Immersive religious education days help them to learn about the practices of various religions.

Pupils, from primary age onwards, learn about the world of work and careers. The careers programme for the school is currently in development. Pupils now have exposure to further education providers and employers. As such, they learn about the various options available to them, post-16 and beyond. However, the school's work experience programme is not yet providing opportunities for pupils to develop valuable employability skills. The school is aware, and has plans to improve this.

Staff love to work at this school. They are motivated by school leaders but also by the vision of the trust. They are respected and valued members of the school community and actively play a role in shaping the future of the school. The school recognises the crucial role parents play. They continue to develop their approach to engage pupils, so they feel fully involved in the school community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are changes to a small number of foundation subjects which are not yet embedded across the school. This means that pupils are not learning as well as they could across the entire curriculum. The school should ensure that all staff have the subject and pedagogical knowledge they need in all curriculum areas to ensure that pupils can build coherent knowledge effectively over time.
- The school is still refining the approach to careers education. Currently, pupils do not yet develop employability skills as well as they could. The school should now consider how it can create meaningful work experience opportunities, so that pupils are able to build these vital skills over time and be as ready as possible for life beyond school.

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	139728
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10296386
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Tucker
Principal	Gemma Buley
Website	www.thamesvalleyschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 November 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Thames Valley School provides specialist support for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and additional learning barriers such as autism and speech, language and communication needs. All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan.
- Thames Valley School is part of the Liberty Academy Trust.
- Since the last inspection, there has been a change in the leadership of the school. The current principal has been in an interim role since September 2023 and was made substantive head by the trust in April 2024.
- The school makes use of four unregistered alternative providers.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the principal and other members of the leadership team. They also met with the chair and one other member of the governing body.
- The lead inspector also met with the chair and vice chair of the board of trustees. Additionally, they met with the CEO of the trust.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils in lessons and during play and lunchtimes.
- The inspectors considered a range of documents including leaders' evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan, and minutes from governors' and trustees' meetings.
- The inspectors considered parents' responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- The inspectors took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.
- 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

Nina Marabese, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Maxine McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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