

Thornhill School Business & Enterprise College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108860
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	377833
Inspection dates	29 February 2012–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Gina White HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	893
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Clarke
Headteacher	John Hallworth
Date of previous school inspection	4 December 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Gina White
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Lynne Horton

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 43 lessons and the same number of teachers was seen. This resulted in inspectors sampling learning in every subject taught and in many of the courses provided at Key Stage 4. Inspectors observed students' reading, visited a number of tutor group sessions and examined the specialist 'drop-in' provision for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, governors, and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and took account of a range of other evidence such as safeguarding arrangements, development plans and self-evaluation documents. They evaluated questionnaire responses from 149 parents and carers, 148 students and 47 staff. There were insufficient responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) for inspectors to take account of in planning the inspection.

Information about the school

Thornhill School is similar in size to the average secondary school. The large majority of students is White British. Over a quarter of students originate from an increasingly diverse range of ethnic heritage of which Bangladeshi students are the largest group. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is higher than average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs at 'School Action' is well above average and the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is in line with average. The school has gained the Sportsmark and Football Association Charter Marks. The school meets the government's current floor standard; this sets the minimum expectation for attainment and progress for secondary schools.

Thornhill is part of a collaborative arrangement with a sixth-form college, a local further education college and four neighbouring secondary schools. This provision was not inspected as part of this inspection.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- Thornhill is a satisfactory school. Students behave well and act responsibly. Students' attendance and punctuality are monitored effectively by leaders and managers and are improving rapidly towards the national average. The school is not yet good because teaching does not always meet the needs of students effectively, data are not used consistently or effectively in the planning or delivery of all lessons and inconsistencies remain in the use of assessment and feedback and provision of homework.
- Attainment is close to national averages and is well-supported by the curriculum's breadth of courses and qualification routes. Many students' attainment accelerates in Years 10 and 11 from their well below average starting points as a result of the strategic decisions taken by leaders, and the governing body, to enable them to take examinations early and to re-take them to achieve high grades.
- Teaching is satisfactory. The best lessons capture students' interest effectively. Use of assessments helps to structure learning and intervention. This was particularly so in Years 10 and 11. In many lessons the learning objectives and outcomes are overly focused on the completion of tasks rather than what students are expected to learn. Consequently, students of all abilities, but particularly the more-able, failed to make good progress in half of the lessons seen.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Strategic changes to the curriculum and a focused approach to the monitoring of behaviour, attendance and punctuality have promoted improvements to support students' progress in learning. However, performance, particularly at Key Stage 3, is not tracked or analysed in sufficient depth to accelerate the progress of all groups of students and gaps exist in the tracking of students' performance in reading and writing across the school.
- Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leadership and management at all levels must secure consistently good teaching by assiduous monitoring of teaching to ensure that:
 - lesson objectives and outcomes are specifically focused on learning in all lessons

- marking and feedback to students enables them to improve their learning and understand precisely what is required to improve and meet their targets
 - the implementation of policies is such that homework effectively supports students' learning and consolidates their knowledge, understanding and development of essential skills.
- Embed tracking systems and analysis of data securely to ensure that students' progress is analysed robustly, particularly at Key Stage 3, to inform:
- the school's knowledge of students' performance in reading and writing
 - teachers' planning to accelerate progress in lessons for all students.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

- Students' progress in the classroom is at least satisfactory but varies between subjects and classes. Students made good and better progress when there was a clear focus to what they were expected to learn. For example, in one Year 11 biology class students learnt about the features of animal behaviour and applied their knowledge effectively verbally and in writing to answer key questions pitched to their different abilities. More-able students were rarely seen to make good progress because teachers do not take sufficient account of their abilities to challenge them.
- When compared to the national average, students' attainment by the time they leave the school has declined overall in two out of the last three years. Signs of improving attainment and progress, particularly in mathematics, are now evident in Year 11 and gaps are narrowing for some groups including less-able students, those for whom English is an additional language and those eligible for free school meals. Students in Key Stage 3 are making steady progress and data are helping teachers to identify those students requiring intervention and support.
- A focus on the weakest readers is purposeful in closing the gap and improving reading scores. Opportunities for students to develop skills in reading, writing and communication take place in most lessons. Students demonstrated good awareness of and modelled language for various care scenarios in a health and social care lesson.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make slower progress than that of their peers in Key Stage 3, but progress quickens by Year 11.
- The vast majority of parents and carers feel that their children make good progress and, although inspectors found some groups to be making good progress, this was not the case for all.

Quality of teaching

- Inspectors saw some good and occasionally outstanding teaching, but much was satisfactory in its impact on students' progress. Key strengths include teachers' good knowledge of their subjects, effective questioning techniques and well-constructed opportunities for students to participate actively in learning. Teachers invariably expect the best from students. Weaker features include a slower pace, too much teacher talk and tasks that make little challenge or demands on learners or do not encourage them to think for themselves.

- Targeted planning and differentiated resources supported Year 10 students effectively in a geography lesson. The purpose of the lesson, to understand conflicts in the operation and use of the national parks, is clear. The lesson moved swiftly as students explored the resources, independently at first and then in pairs, deepening their knowledge and sharing the results of their investigations. The teachers' well-focused questions and use of criteria supported students in assessing their research skills and enabled them to understand what they were learning and how they were getting better.
- The impact of teaching on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Good opportunities to widen students' experience of different cultures were seen in music and poetry lessons. An assembly, focused on cheating and using drugs in the Olympics, initiated good topical discussion of morality in some tutor sessions. Opportunities for students to develop independence, social skills and to serve others are developing well through formal programmes such as peer readers, Youth Parliament and the School Council. However, weaker lessons in which students followed instructions and completed tasks with little discussion, did little to inspire their passion for learning or foster their independence.
- The curriculum caters well for the specific interests of some groups such as Bangladeshi students to learn how to read and write their language. Students undertaking vocational courses such as hospitality and catering and health and social care are developing a secure understanding of working practices in these sectors.
- Parents' and carers' views of teaching and learning tended to be more positive than those of students, but both groups considered that teaching was good. In discussions students said support for learning in lessons was good, but varied in and between subjects and courses. This variation was seen in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

- Students' attitudes to learning are good. Most want to do their best in lessons and readily follow instructions. Opportunities for them to take responsibility for their learning are more developed in Key Stage 4. Students are courteous and welcoming.
- Behaviour in lessons and conduct around the school are good. Behaviour over time is improving as a result of concerted efforts by leaders, including staff and governors to uphold standards.
- Students assess and manage risks appropriately and behave safely. Students say they are well-informed about different forms of bullying, particularly text bullying and persistent name-calling. They know how to stay safe as a result of lessons and assemblies and anti-bullying strategies. They are keen to help each other for example, through the peer support programmes.
- Most students arrive at school on time and punctuality has improved significantly in the last year. Attendance is improving but remains below the national average. School monitoring is strong and enables leaders and managers to target support and actions to the individuals and groups who most need it.
- Students and their parents and carers have a very positive view about the effectiveness with which bullying is dealt with in the school and the steps taken to keep students safe. Most students, parents and carers agreed that there is a good standard of behaviour, but a quarter of them felt that lessons were disrupted by bad behaviour. Inspectors investigated and found that teachers managed the few instances of poor behaviour quickly and effectively to avoid disruption to learning. Scrutiny of behavioural records shows that this is the case over time too.

Leadership and management

- Leaders, managers and governors share a vision to provide meaningful education that is appropriate to the needs of students and to ensure that their next steps are well-supported. This has informed particular improvements to the curriculum offered to older students. It is helping to accelerate attainment for many students in Key Stage 4 and results in 95% of students regularly continuing in employment, education or training. Strategic actions over the structure of the school day have brought improvement in students' equality of access to and positive outcomes from enrichment opportunities in clubs and activities. Provision for promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is contributing well to their learning in lessons and to their understanding of how to stay safe. However, the curriculum is satisfactory rather than good, because the steps taken have yet to embed good provision to support students' performance in reading, writing and communication.
- Effective monitoring and well-focused actions have led to improvements in behaviour and attendance.
- Recent approaches to developing teaching and learning have followed a generic analysis of outcomes from lesson observations and work scrutiny. This is a useful starting point but the pace and rigour of monitoring is not timely enough to highlight the inconsistencies in practice that exist.
- The professional development of teachers has helped some to use data effectively and promote their subject knowledge, but this is not enough to ensure that all students make good progress. Consequently the capacity for improvement is satisfactory.
- Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, ensure that arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and procedures for child protection are comprehensively documented and effective. Equality and discrimination are tackled decisively by governors and staff.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



2 March 2012

Dear Students

**Inspection of Thornhill School Business and Enterprise College,
Sunderland, SR2 7NA**

- Thank you for your courtesy, your contribution to discussions and support during the recent inspection of your school.
- Thornhill is a satisfactory school.
- Achievement is satisfactory. Many of your parents and carers felt that you were making good progress. Although some of you are, this is not the case for all. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Half of the lessons we saw were not helping you enough to make good progress.
- Behaviour and safety of pupils are good. Many of you have significantly improved and arrive on time to school and attend more regularly.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Improvements that have been made to the curriculum and more activities at lunchtime are helping your learning.

To improve your education further, leaders and managers must ensure teaching is consistently good so that:

- lesson objectives and outcomes are specifically focused on what you will need to learn in each lesson
- marking and feedback to you helps you to know precisely what is required to improve your learning and meet your targets
- homework is of consistently high quality and helps to support and improve your knowledge and understanding and development of essential skills.

The school has also been asked to ensure that it uses data in ways that help you to make faster progress in lessons and to show how well you are doing in your reading and writing. Teachers will be looking for you to play your part in co-operating with them and continuing to do your best.

Yours sincerely,

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector

