

# Thirsk School and Sixth Form College

Topcliffe Road, Sowerby, Thirsk, North Yorkshire YO7 1RZ

**Inspection dates** 20 – 21 September 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Students thrive in the aspirational, friendly, safe and caring atmosphere. As a result, all achieve well and make good progress from their average starting points on entry.
- From the last inspection until 2011, students' attainment rose steadily. Provisional 2012 results show rapid improvement in the proportion attaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, to well above the most recent national average.
- The sixth form is good. Students here also attain well and make good progress in their learning. Their achievements compare favourably to that found nationally.
- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Such teaching is interesting, intriguing and captivating.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers' strong subject knowledge, perceptive questioning and feedback builds students' knowledge, understanding and skills well.
- Students behave well, attend regularly and display very good attitudes to learning. They, their parents and staff report positively about behaviour across school.
- Students state bullying, including prejudice-based bullying is not tolerated and when incidents occasionally occur, they are quickly stamped out.
- Astute and insightful leadership from the headteacher, senior team and the governing body is successfully driving the continued improvement in students' achievement.
- Accurate evaluation of what is working well and what needs to be better makes certain weaker areas are identified and tackled quickly and robustly.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching and learning is not consistently outstanding. Occasionally, teachers plan the same work for all students so it is too easy for some and too hard for others.
- The high quality questioning, feedback and marking used by many teachers is not used consistently by all. Occasionally, teachers do not provide enough opportunities to develop students' independent learning skills.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in thirty nine part-lessons; eight of which were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with a representative from North Yorkshire local authority, two representatives of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff.
- Inspectors spoke formally to students in focus groups at break time on day two of the inspection and informally in lessons, around the school, at break and lunch times.
- They looked at a number of documents including the school development plan, records on the quality of teaching, information on students' provisional 2012 examination results and students' current progress across the school.
- The inspection team analysed responses to inspection questionnaires returned by staff, results from the school's own student survey and 171 responses to Ofsted's parent online questionnaire (Parent View).

## Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steven Goldsmith	Additional inspector
Graeme Clarke	Additional inspector
Geraldine Hutchinson	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a broadly average sized secondary school with a higher than average proportion of boys. The number of students in the main school has fallen; at the same time the number in the sixth form has increased.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below average.
- A much lower than average proportion of students are of minority ethnic heritage.
- A small proportion of the school's population are from families who serve in the country's armed forces.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is below average.
- A small number of students attend a Motor Vehicle Maintenance course at a local college for part of a school day. This provision was judged good at its last Ofsted inspection. A small group of students attend a vocational course provided by Darlington College on the school site.
- The school exceeds the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations of students attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is outstanding across the school so that all students can make the best possible progress by:
  - making certain teachers' regular assessment information about students' current achievements is always used to plan and deliver activities that are well-matched to students' individual starting points
  - making sure the high quality practice in marking, written guidance, oral feedback and insightful questioning used by many teachers is implemented consistently by all
  - challenging all teachers to provide opportunities for students to actively participate in lessons to develop their independent enquiry skills.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- The proportion of students gaining the key threshold of five GCSEs grade A\* to C including English and mathematics improved steadily from the last inspection to summer 2011; with good improvement in the proportion achieving grades A\* to C in mathematics. The 2012 provisional results show a seven percentage point improvement in the key threshold and an eleven percentage point improvement in the proportion gaining A\*-C in English. Results are significantly above the national average of 2011.
- Students' attainment in the sixth form has also improved and their achievements compare favourably to that found nationally. Attainment was not as good as it should have been in information and communication technology and music in 2011. School leaders have tackled the issues successfully, with good support from the local authority, so that attainment in those subjects improved significantly in 2012.
- Actions taken by school leaders to tackle the relative underachievement of a small proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, for example, students eligible for free school meals, have also been successful. The gap between these students' achievements and their peers has narrowed dramatically as a result.
- Good quality academic and pastoral support and care is provided to students who are in families of service personnel. Detailed, regular tracking of their progress and early support in times of need helps them to enjoy their time in school and achieve well.
- A very few students with identified special educational needs or a disability were identified by the school as not attaining well enough. Improved, coordinated actions to raise attainment, including more regular tracking of their achievements, targeted support and close evaluation of the interventions they receive, have borne fruit. The school's data from all year groups and provisional 2012 Year 11 examination results indicate these students are achieving well from their individual starting points.
- Evidence from the school's assessment information, students' books and lesson observations show that most students are making at least good progress in lessons and over time. Some make outstanding progress. Occasionally, when teaching is not matched well enough to the different starting points of students, progress slows and is not good.
- Students' reading, mathematical and communication skills are good and improving well through improvements to the quality of teaching in English and mathematics and teachers' increasingly successful focus on developing literacy, speaking and listening and numerical skills in other subjects.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- A typical strength of teaching, including that found in the sixth form, is the high level of mutual respect and trust between teachers and students and between students themselves; contributing successfully to students' moral and social development.
- It is rare to see any student not engrossed in their lessons. Well-chosen activities stimulate students' interest and often contribute to students' reflection on moral, ethical or religious issues and dilemmas.
- In the many good or better lessons, teachers capitalise on the productive relationships to take risks, to challenge students further and enable them to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, in one sixth form mathematics lesson, challenging and fun activities stretched students' high-order thinking skills and independent enquiry and ensured outstanding progress for all.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge and high quality questioning skills build students' knowledge, understanding and skills successfully in many lessons. However, in a few, teachers' questioning is not always sufficiently extensive to ensure they capture students' understanding

fully or enable students to develop their critical thinking skills further.

- In a small proportion of lessons there is too much whole-class teaching with the same work set for all students; for some too hard and for others too easy. When this occurs, students are provided with limited opportunities to work independently, at a pace matched to their individual starting points, consequently their progress is steady rather than rapid.
- High quality marking and written and oral feedback is typical of many lessons and teachers generally carry out the school's marking policy diligently. However, leaders are aware that the good practice seen in some departments is not fully embedded across all and they are taking action to iron out the remaining inconsistencies.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Behaviour in lessons is invariably good and managed well. Outcomes from the staff survey and the Parent View questionnaire responses confirm this view.
- Students are confident, friendly and articulate. They think behaviour in school is usually good and say they welcome the school's rewards system and positive approach to managing behaviour. No students have been permanently excluded recently and the number excluded temporarily for very short periods has reduced rapidly and is low.
- Attitudes to learning in lessons are usually very positive. Students come to lessons promptly and work successfully in pairs, groups or independently. They were regularly seen to be having fun and enjoying learning. In the few less successful lessons, attention occasionally wanes and then students become slightly disengaged and partake in low-level chatting.
- Students say they feel safe around the school and are cared for well through high quality pastoral arrangements. They speak knowledgeably about bullying, including prejudice-based bullying such as racist and homophobic bullying. They are adamant that any rare incidents are rooted out and tackled robustly.
- Students' 'sense of safety' is in part due to the school's successful anti-bullying strategy that includes identification of students in need of additional peer-support through analysis of responses to the autumn term anti-bullying week.
- Students say they value the support from trained 'student listeners' who are there to help them throughout the school day and during the transition from their primary schools. Sixth form helpers also provide valued mentor support and act as good role models and ambassadors to the younger students.
- Good arrangements are in place to ensure the safety and care of the few students accessing a Motor Vehicle Maintenance course at a local college. Darlington College provides an additional alternative vocational course for a small number of students. Because this is delivered on the school site, students remain in their safe environment.
- 'Parent View' reports very positively on parents' views of their children's enjoyment of school. Students confirmed this during discussions with them. This is also evidenced in students' above average attendance rates that are increasing annually.

**The leadership and management** are good

- Good, insightful and inclusive leadership is successfully driving improvement across the school. This is making a positive difference to students' progress and achievements.
  - Senior leaders, middle leaders and the governing body have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement as a result of robust, regular monitoring and evaluation of the school's work.
  - Outcomes from evaluation drive future priorities successfully. For example, the headteacher has rightly prioritised improving teaching and learning to continue to raise attainment across the school; and to good effect.
  - The judicious appointment of an external candidate to the post of assistant headteacher for teaching and learning has strengthened the school's approach and provided a consistent understanding of what good or better teaching looks like.
  - Senior leaders and middle leaders are fully involved in the rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching across the school. Good practice is shared widely through a cross-departmental teaching and learning group and this is supporting the increasing proportion of lessons that are judged good or better.
  - Performance management arrangements are robust. Together with regular performance meetings between senior leaders and departments, they are increasingly successful in holding teachers to account for their students' achievements and in directing professional development opportunities for staff.
  - Staff provide high quality pastoral care and good actions are taken to ensure all students, including those from service families, achieve well and are well-supported, particularly in times of need.
  - Students develop into caring, thoughtful, articulate and mature young people during their time in school. They all undertake Religious Studies and this provides high quality insight and understanding of ethical, moral, spiritual and cultural issues at a personal level, community and global perspective.
  - Students are well prepared for their future lives through the broad and balanced curriculum that is tailored well to their individual needs and aspirations. It is responsive to local need and adapted to meet both national and local priorities.
  - Good pathways at all key stages, including progression into the sixth form, ensure high numbers of students successfully move into higher education, training or employment.
  - Leaders, including the governing body, promote equality and tackle discrimination well. They analyse the performance of individuals and different student groups and take action when there is evidence of any underachievement.
  - In the few instances where achievement gaps existed in 2011, such as between students known to be entitled to free school meals and others, the gaps have narrowed significantly in 2012.
  - **The governance of the school**
    - The governing body provides a good balance of challenge and support to school leaders and carries out its statutory duties well. Robust procedures have been put in place to tackle discrimination of any kind and to ensure students' safety and care. All current safeguarding requirements are met.
    - It is increasingly well informed, using data and information to ask pertinent questions and hold leaders to account for students' achievements and for the performance of staff.
    - The achievement of groups of students at risk of underachieving is monitored closely, including those known to be entitled to the pupil premium, to make sure that any underachievement is identified and successfully tackled.
    - The views of parents, carers and students are canvassed regularly to ensure these inform future developments of the school.
    - The governing body reviews its own effectiveness and seeks ways to improve its impact. For
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example, it is currently reconfiguring the governing body committee structure to ensure a continued and successful focus on promoting learning.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	121666
<b>Local authority</b>	North Yorkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	403476

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11-18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1046
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	198
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Graham Cressey
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Stuart Mason
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 January 2008
<b>Telephone number</b>	01845 522024
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