

Thurston Community College

Norton Road, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, IP31 3PB

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
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 make good progress with their learning and literacy skills are good. They are articulate and have a good understanding of moral issues and current affairs.
- The college prepares students well for the next step in their careers, for further or higher education and for future employment.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers know their subjects well and are adept at finding interesting ways of conveying information, developing understanding and teaching skills.
- The behaviour of students is outstanding in many respects. They are mature, courteous and eager to learn.
- The sixth form is good. The great majority of students who start A level and AS level courses go on to complete their studies here and get good examinations results.
- The leadership and management of the school are good. Senior leaders and governors share common goals. They recognise where improvement is needed and make sure that time and resources are deployed effectively to remedy shortcomings.

It is not an outstanding school because

- There is still some variability in the teaching, and this requires improvement.
- Attendance is much the same as it is in other Suffolk schools of this type, but is below the national average for all secondary schools.
- The school's self-evaluation is too fulsome and is not sufficiently based on progress and standards achieved by the students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons and two assemblies, and visited five registration sessions. Senior school leaders observed 16 lessons jointly with inspectors.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, school leaders and managers, teachers, and students of all ages. They also talked to students about their work during the lessons they visited.
- They took account of 122 on-line questionnaires completed by parents (Parent View) and 61 confidential questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a wide range of documents, including: school self-evaluation and performance management documents; records relating to attendance, behaviour and the monitoring of teaching; and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Keith Wheeldon, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Simon Hughes	Additional Inspector
Frances Le Pla	Additional Inspector
John Mason	Additional Inspector
Ian Starling	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thurston Community College is a school for students aged 13 to 19 years and is larger than average. It serves a largely rural area so four out of every five students travel to school by bus.
- The organisation of education in this part of Suffolk changes in September 2014, when this school will receive students aged 11 to 19. Staff and governors at this school have led this reorganisation and have formed a formal partnership with the 17 primary schools which serve the area, and established a school company with 13 of them.
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium is much lower than average. (Pupil premium is funding provided by the government to support pupils who are looked after by the local authority, those who are eligible for free school meals and those who have a parent serving in the armed forces.)
- The proportion of students with special educational needs supported by school action is very low and the proportion who have statements of special educational needs or who are supported by school action plus is lower than average.
- There are very few students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language.
- Vocational education is provided for 24 students for one day a week at West Suffolk College, Bury St Edmunds; one student spends one day a week at Otley College, Ipswich; one student spends one day a week at Hill Farm Stables, Elmswell; and one student spends two days a week at Bardwell Manor Equestrian Centre, Bardwell.
- Thurston Community College takes a leading role in the Eastern Training Consortium, a professional development partnership funded by the local authority, and is also a key strategic partner with Linton Village College, Cambridgeshire, which has teaching school status.
- School results meet current government floor standards, the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are identified and shortcomings, such as weaknesses in marking books, are eradicated methodically so that the progress of all students is at least good in every lesson.
- Ensure that self-evaluation is sharper and more analytical, and judgements about teaching, leadership and management are directly linked to the objective evaluation of students' attainment.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The attainment of students when they arrive at the school varies year by year. In the last few years, there have been more middle-attaining students than average but among those in Year 10 there are now more higher-attaining students than might be expected.
- GCSE examination results of those at the end of Year 11 were about average in 2010, rose substantially in 2011 but fell back again in 2012. This was mainly because of poor results in mathematics after a change of examination.
- Despite these poor mathematics results, those who took their GCSEs last year made steady progress in English and mathematics, compared with their starting points at age 11.
- Inspection evidence and school data show that those in Years 9, 10 and 11 are making much better progress than in the past. This is because the school has made a determined effort to bring standards back in line with those achieved at the time of the last inspection. Progress in English and mathematics compares very well with that expected.
- Typically, by the time students who were eligible for the pupil premium reached the end of Year 11 in summer 2012 they were four terms behind other students at the school in their English and more than two years behind them in their mathematics.
- Compared with others in Year 11 currently at the school those students who are eligible for the pupil premium are catching up slightly in their English while in mathematics they are catching up a little faster. Those in Year 10 are making much better progress in both subjects and so the gap between their attainment and that of other students is closing rapidly.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are making better progress than might be expected. Their progress is more rapid in English than it is in mathematics.
- Students who attend alternative provision enjoy the range of work they are given, and their progress in English and mathematics compares well with national figures for all pupils of the same age.
- The progress made by students in the sixth form compares well with national figures, and value added in the sixth form is good. There has been a steady improvement in the performance of students at AS level and this is evident among those currently studying for A levels. The great majority of those who join the sixth form stay on and complete their courses through to the end of the second year sixth.
- Literacy and communication skills are strong among students of all ages. They read fluently, write well, spell accurately, answer questions clearly and are articulate during discussions.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Students say they learn a great deal in subjects like English and religious studies and during 'deep learning days' when the usual timetable is suspended. They say these days provide excellent opportunities to focus on topics which are important to them, such as drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, personal identity and homophobic behaviour, and environmental issues.

- Tutor time and assemblies also contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, students develop an understanding of current affairs through debates held in tutor time. Those in the sixth form develop a very open approach to personal, social and cultural issues. During the inspection, sixth form students were absorbed by a series of highly topical short films presented in assembly by film studies students.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

The quality of teaching is good

- Although there are variations, the quality of teaching is good in the main school and in the sixth form. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they are particularly adept at using different approaches to make learning interesting and memorable. For example, in an excellent science lesson the teacher used drama to improve students' understanding of electrolysis. They know the sort of difficulties students are likely to face when introducing a new topic, and can usually predict where they might need help to overcome any misunderstandings.
- Teachers also set a very positive atmosphere in lessons and so students do not feel the least intimidated. They freely ask for further clarification if they are puzzled and do not understand, and enthusiastically offer different ideas and solutions when solving problems. This means that teachers can be confident that students have grasped a new concept and can move on quickly.
- Teachers plan lessons carefully so that work is sequenced well, they structure and order their lessons effectively to make good use of the full 100-minute sessions, and they set a pace which ensures students make good progress.
- As in the main school, academic and pastoral support is very good for students in the sixth form. Those who are underachieving are identified promptly, and teachers use a wide variety of strategies to ensure students rapidly overcome their difficulties.
- Teachers assess students' work regularly and accurately, and they use lesson time well to give one-to-one feedback to help students make good progress. Sometimes their marking of exercise books is infrequent and lacks useful comments that would help students to move on more rapidly in their learning.
- Most students' exercise books and folders are neat and their notes are easy to follow. Where work is poorly presented, handwriting is difficult to decipher, or students do not persevere with their spelling, teachers are sometimes reluctant to intervene and demand better standards.
- In the best lessons, teachers set work that students of different abilities find demanding but, as was the case at the time of the last inspection, in some of the other lessons teachers do not expect enough of their students. They are too ready to accept that students have reached the usual standard instead of pushing on to higher-level work.
- Teachers' management of behaviour in lessons is good, although students and parents recognise that there are some inconsistencies among staff. None of the teachers who responded to the survey expressed any concerns about behaviour management.
- Teachers and other staff make a very positive contribution to other aspects of the school's work. They lead many after-school clubs and sports activities, and also led the recent production of *Les Misérables*. In subjects such as mathematics, teachers organise competitions, museum visits and

other events which provide variety, promote greater interest in study and help raise standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- In many respects, the behaviour of students is outstanding. They are well motivated and behave well in lessons and around the school. They are mature, polite and courteous in their dealings with adults and other students. Most parents agree that the school makes sure students behave well at the school.
- Attitudes to learning are also very good. For example, in one excellent lesson students worked in pairs to solve a mathematics problem. Two boys agreed to tackle the problem in different ways because they relished the extra challenge.
- Students feel safe at the school. They say there is very little bullying and any that occurs is swiftly dealt with. There have been no recent racist incidents.
- Sixth form students provide good role models for younger students. They act as mentors and a large number of them regularly volunteer their time to help with a variety of worthwhile community projects.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are good.
- The behaviour and safety of students are not outstanding because the number of fixed-term exclusions is too high, especially among girls who are entitled to free school meals and those with special educational needs. Furthermore, attendance rates are not as good as they should be. Having compared data with other schools, the governing body charged the Principal with reducing the use of exclusions. As a result, the number of fixed-rate exclusions has fallen.
- Attendance rates are steady and are in line with other Suffolk schools for students of this age but they are not as good as those for all secondary schools in the country. Attendance in the sixth form is good and improving.

The leadership and management are good

- The recent consultation about the organisation of schools in this area has taken a good deal of senior leaders' time over recent years. Points for improvement identified in the last inspection report were addressed in part but have been given insufficient priority of late. Results dipped in 2012 and this served as a warning to the school to refocus on raising standards and improving the quality of provision.
- That refocusing has been successful. Senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers are now checking the progress of students much more carefully and acting more readily to ensure progress does not falter. The drive for improvement is shared equally by governors, leaders, managers, teachers and other staff. Morale among this large staff is good.
- With good support from the local authority, senior leaders are observing lessons regularly, helping to diagnose shortcomings and, where teaching is not good enough, providing professional expertise which has been successful in bringing about improvements, for example, in students' progress in English, mathematics and other subjects.

- The school has a well-established self-evaluation programme with a clear timetable for critical review. Subject leaders and teachers are held to account by senior managers who in turn are held to account by the Principal and the governing body. Self-evaluation is sometimes too generous because judgements about teaching, leadership and management are not linked sufficiently to outcomes.
- Professional development is well organised and focuses on priorities in the school development plan. Teachers have good opportunities to attend training which meets their individual needs and interests. Here, and with other initiatives such as pupil premium spending, there is insufficient forensic scrutiny to determine which programmes have the most impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement, and so help direct spending in future.
- For their first year at the school, students study a broad range of compulsory subjects and, thereafter, have a very good choice of subjects, most of which lead to GCSE qualifications at age 16. The range of on-site courses is supplemented by a small number of well-chosen courses which students pursue at other venues. The breadth of study contributes well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Good leadership of the sixth form has led to steady improvements in the value added for the past three years. As in the main school, the range of courses offered in the sixth form is very good, and the school very successfully promotes the involvement of students in a variety of activities to the benefit of the wider community.
- At the end of their schooling at Thurston, almost all students move into further or higher education or into apprenticeships or directly into employment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors make a very valuable contribution to the work of the school. They ask tough questions and are good at holding the Principal to account.
 - They are well informed about the quality of teaching, and about the performance of students compared with those in other schools. They act to tackle underperformance where necessary, linking pay and rewards to performance.
 - As with other aspects of the budget, the governing body monitors pupil premium spending well, but recognises it has not asked enough questions about the impact of the many different initiatives.

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

Unique reference number	124802
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	411759

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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1376
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	323
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel McCartney
Principal	Helen Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2010
Telephone number	01359 230885
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