

Thornhill School Business & Enterprise College

Thornholme Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7NA

Inspection dates

17–18 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- A sustained programme of improvement has not led to all students achieving standards that are sufficiently high.
- Although teaching is improving rapidly it is not always challenging enough for more-able students.
- Teachers do not use questions well enough to help students think more deeply about their learning.
- Students supported by the pupil premium (additional funding) achieve less well than other students.
- Data are not yet always used systematically enough by teachers to identify and act upon the individual needs of all students, particularly those supported by the pupil premium.
- Opportunities are often missed for students to improve their numeracy skills through work in other subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher, supported by the head of school, has been relentless in driving up standards in the school. Leaders, including governors, have high expectations and are working hard to raise standards for all students.
- The percentage of students achieving five good GCSE grades that include English and mathematics has risen over the last three years.
- Students with disabilities and special educational needs make good progress due to the expert and effective support they receive.
- Students behave well throughout the school. Relationships between staff and students are warm and students feel encouraged by their teachers. Their attitudes to learning are good and they feel safe in school.
- The school has worked successfully to improve attendance, which is now average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons, of which five were joint observations with the executive headteacher and members of the leadership team.
- Discussions were held with senior staff, subject leaders, teaching staff, members of the governing body and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors spoke to students in lessons and at breaks and during lunchtimes. They also listened to students read in Year 8 and spoke formally to a group of students.
- Inspectors viewed the school's work and checked work in students' books. They looked at a range of documentation, including that relating to students' progress over time, the school's view of its own performance, and improvement planning and safeguarding procedures.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for the lead inspector to be able to access them, so inspectors took account of responses to the school's latest parental survey. They also took account of 50 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

David Griffiths	Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Blaylock		Additional Inspector
Julie Rimmer		Additional Inspector
Jim Hall		Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The school is part of a hard federation (which means they share a governing body and an executive headteacher with another school).
- Over 70% of students are of White British heritage and over 20% are of Bangladeshi heritage.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority, is above the national average.
- The school accesses additional vocational education for a small number of its Year 10 and Year 11 students through Sunderland College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which sets out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - continuing to share the good practice in teaching that already exists in the school
 - ensuring that all teachers take full account of the different ability levels, particularly the more-able students and those supported by the pupil premium, when planning and teaching lessons and have consistently high standards of what all students can achieve
 - ensuring that questioning is effective in helping students to probe into subjects more deeply
 - giving students of all abilities the skills to work independently, express and explain their own ideas and discover solutions for themselves.
- Improve students' achievement and raise attainment by:
 - increasing levels of progress for all students so that progress exceeds national expectations in all subjects and for all groups of students, particularly in English and mathematics
 - accelerating the progress of those students who are supported by pupil premium so that they achieve at least as well as other students in the school
 - embedding the development of numeracy throughout the curriculum to match the improvements being made in literacy and ensuring that all subject areas contribute to improvements in numeracy.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because rates of progress are inconsistent across different subjects and groups of students.
- The rates of expected progress in English in 2012 compare well to national figures but there are fewer students who make more than expected progress and this has not improved in 2013. Although there is an improving trend in the rates of progress students make in mathematics, it remains below national averages.
- Students join the school with below average standards. When they leave at the end of Year 11, their attainment is now closer to national averages. In 2013, 57% of students achieved five passes at GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. While examination results have improved for the last three years in this measure, not enough students are achieving the very highest grades.
- Students eligible for pupil premium funding do not make the same rates of progress as students who are not eligible. In 2012, these students gained GCSE results in English and mathematics that were about one grade below other students in the school. Results for GCSE in 2013 show that this has not improved on the previous year.
- Students with disabilities or special educational needs make good progress which compares favourably with other schools. An increasing number achieve challenging targets due to the effective support they receive.
- There is a clear commitment to developing students' literacy skills, as a high proportion enters the school with reading ages well below their chronological age and this reduces their enjoyment or willingness to read. Although it is too soon to see measurable impact of this on improving standards, there are signs of success in the accelerated progress being made by students in Key Stage 3.
- Students are entered early for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics at various times from Year 10 onwards. In mathematics, a high proportion of those students who were entered early increased their grade in the summer examination.
- Bangladeshi students and those who speak English as an additional language achieve well and this reflects positively on the school's success in promoting equality of opportunity.
- Students who attend alternative provision at Sunderland College make similar rates of progress to other students in the school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although most of the teaching seen during the inspection was good and a small proportion outstanding, the overall quality of teaching over time is not of a high enough quality to secure good achievement.
- Teachers do not always make the best use of the information given to them to plan lessons for students of different abilities. This is particularly so for more-able students in classes where there is a wide range of ability and for those students who are eligible for the pupil premium.
- Teachers do not always use questioning effectively to help students think through what they are learning for themselves. In many lessons, the vast majority of questions only require short replies and do not challenge students enough. When questioning is very good it draws out rich and comprehensive answers. This was observed in a Year 11 religious education lesson where probing questioning effectively increased students' confidence and understanding of Christian weddings.
- There are increasing opportunities for students to work together in pairs and groups. Students respond enthusiastically to this and say they learn well from each other. In a number of lessons, however, teachers dominate the learning and students rely on them too much. As a result of

this, students are not being given the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own learning by being provided with an increased number of independent tasks.

- The school has strengthened the quality of marking and the majority of teachers apply the marking policy well. There are good examples of high quality marking and feedback to students on how to improve their work, particularly in English. Students value this highly, especially in lessons where they are given time to make suggested improvements. This is not always consistent, however, across subject areas. In mathematics, for example, some students said they do not always understand the advice they are being given and are therefore unable to act upon it.
- Students are increasingly expected to use literacy skills in a range of subjects and there is emerging good practice in making sure that students practise specific grammatical skills. Across subjects, however, the application of numeracy skills is not developed as well and many opportunities are missed. When students are provided with opportunities to apply their numeracy skills to real life situations they learn at a rapid and enthusiastic rate. For example, in a Year 8 food and technology lesson, outstanding teaching enabled students to use digital measurements and apply their understanding of proportion to pizza making.
- Homework is set consistently and there are opportunities for students to access this on the virtual learning area. Although it is early into the new school year, a check of student planners showed that homework is being set regularly.
- Students with disabilities or special educational needs are supported well. Teachers are kept informed about individual needs and can plan appropriate activities. As a result, these students generally make good progress because any gaps in understanding are addressed.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for students who need additional support.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour in lessons is good. They have positive attitudes to learning and contribute well in lessons. For example, they readily give an answer in lessons and take part in discussions.
- The overwhelming majority of students agree that behaviour in the school is good. Students say that the atmosphere in almost all lessons allows them to get on with their learning.
- The school is calm and orderly. There is a sense of friendliness and students are considerate when they move around the school, showing courtesy and good manners to each other and to visitors. Students take pride in the school and in their own work.
- Parents and students feel the school is a safe place to be. Students understand the dangers they may face, for instance, on the internet or from drugs and alcohol. They are well taught to assess risks to their well-being.
- Bullying is rare in the school. When it does occur, it is dealt with effectively and quickly by staff. Students who have volunteered to become anti-bullying ambassadors are proud of their work and the support they offer to other students.
- In 2012, attendance was below the national average. Action taken by leaders and managers, including the appointment of an attendance officer and improved systems to monitor attendance, has led to rapid improvement. As a result of this work, attendance has risen to average levels. The number of students who are persistently absent has also reduced.
- The large majority of parents agree that the school makes sure its students are well behaved.

The leadership and management are good

- The experienced executive headteacher and head of school lead a senior team that shares high expectations for students. These high expectations are central to the school's mission and are shared by the school staff. Staff work hard to promote equality of opportunity for all and they do not permit any kind of discrimination.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching.

Although not good yet, standards of teaching are rapidly improving as a result of careful checks. Leaders and managers work extremely well together to tackle any teaching that requires improvement or is inadequate.

- Leaders have ensured that the performance of students is robustly tracked and that teachers are held to account regularly for the performance of their students. This has lagged behind for students eligible for the pupil premium but is now being tackled by the school and current tracking shows an improvement in their progress.
- There are robust and rigorous systems in place to manage the performance of staff, which link to their progression through pay scales. Support programmes and wider professional training are closely matched to the needs of the school. Training, however, is not closely linked to meet the needs of teachers who are at different stages in their careers.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 that meets the needs and aspirations of its students. For example, there is an effective mix of vocational and academic subjects for students to choose from. A key focus on improving literacy skills has been particularly effective and has led to improved standards across the school. The curriculum is also enhanced by a rich range of local, national and international visits.
- Sometimes, however, opportunities are missed to develop mathematical skills in meaningful situations. The curriculum does not stretch the more-able students enough.
- Systems for keeping students safe are robust and comply with statutory requirements. The school works highly effectively with other agencies to keep students safe.
- Opportunities for promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural values are strong across the school. Lessons and other activities are planned to take account of these values so that students develop a broader understanding of the world in which they live. Students have well-developed and valued leadership opportunities, often mentoring other students or helping to resolve difficulties.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body provides a range of skills and expertise which the school can draw on. They give generously of their time and under the strong leadership of the Chair of the Governing Body, they support and challenge senior leaders effectively. They closely monitor how much progress different groups of students are making in the scrutiny committee.
- Governors ensure that statutory and safeguarding requirements are met. They have carefully considered how to spend additional funding, such as the pupil premium money, to overcome barriers to learning for the most disadvantaged students. They are less clear, however, on the impact this is having on how well these students are achieving.
- The governing body has been closely involved in monitoring the performance of staff and receives regular reports from the executive headteacher and senior leaders on this and other matters. Governors and senior leaders have worked together highly effectively to bring about the rapid improvements that have taken place since the last inspection.

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	108860
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	425873

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	744
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Clarke
Executive Headteacher	John Hallworth
Date of previous school inspection	29 February 2012
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