

Thornhill Community Academy

Valley Drive, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, WF12 0HE

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good 2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Leaders did not react quickly enough to enable students to meet the requirements of more academic courses and end-of-course exams. As a result, they have not maintained good levels of achievement.
- Attainment at GCSE is lower than it should be, especially in English and mathematics.
- In 2014, some of the most able did not achieve well enough in GCSE English and mathematics. The most able are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks.
- The achievement of boys, students from different ethnic backgrounds and disadvantaged students is too variable from year to year and across subjects.
- The pupil premium has not been used effectively enough to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- Some students lack skills in understanding the meaning of text and in producing extended writing. This limits their success in examinations.
- Standards of presentation in books are not consistently good.
- Marking is inconsistent. Students do not always receive precise guidance and they do not make corrections regularly enough.
- Analysis of weaknesses in student progress has not been sharp or accurate enough. Leaders have not taken action early enough to accelerate progress.
- Staffing instability has limited progress in English.
- The academy trust has not developed a close relationship with a school or group of schools in the locality in order to provide prompt support for improving weaker aspects of teaching and learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and senior leadership team have established a positive culture for learning in classrooms and the school.
- Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Behaviour is good and managed well. Attendance has improved.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- The Thorn Centre provides good support for students with autistic spectrum disorder.
- Governors and staff at all levels communicate a strong sense of common purpose and commitment to bring about improvement.
- Well-managed professional development and the developing role of middle leaders have started to bring about necessary improvements in teaching and learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning in 32 lessons across the academy. Five of these were observed jointly with the headteacher or senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team looked at students’ work in their books and folders.
- As well as conversations in lessons and at social times during the inspection, discussions were held with four groups of students about the quality of their educational experience and the standard of behaviour in the academy. An inspector heard some Year 7 students read.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body who also represented the Thornhill Community Academy Trust. An inspector communicated with the Kirklees local authority designated officer for safeguarding.
- The inspection team took account of the 61 responses to a staff questionnaire and considered 30 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector met with some parents who attended the Year 10 parents evening which took place during the inspection.
- The inspection team examined: the academy’s own information about students’ recent and current progress and the academy’s evaluation of how well it is doing. They scrutinised its records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Bernard Campbell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Sheila Kaye

Additional Inspector

Alan Parkinson

Additional Inspector

Julie Rimmer

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thornhill Community Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students for whom the pupil premium provides support is above average.
- Almost 60% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is well-above average. The largest groups are of Pakistani and Indian heritage.
- Just over 40% of students are girls, which is lower than average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average.
- The academy has a specialist resource unit, funded by Kirklees local authority. The Thorn Centre supports students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and its associated social and communication difficulties.
- A few students attend off-site work-experience courses managed by external providers: Nexus and BJ Cool.
- In 2014, the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Thornhill Community Academy converted to become an academy on 1 December 2012. The academy is sponsored by the Thornhill Community Academy Trust. When its predecessor school, The Community Science College at Thornhill, was last inspected it was judged to be good overall.
- The headteacher is due to leave in May 2015 to take up a post as principal of another secondary school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - increasing students' skills in understanding the meaning of texts
 - providing better guidance on how to compose extended writing in different subjects
 - strengthening students' ability to respond accurately to questions under exam conditions
 - making sure that tasks routinely stretch the most able, especially in mathematics
 - ensuring that the good practice in marking is applied more consistently and results in higher standards of presentation in written work.
- Sharpen the evaluation of the progress of different groups of students in order to:
 - identify obstacles to learning more precisely
 - act earlier to reduce gaps in attainment and progress
 - analyse the impact of actions more rigorously.
- An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- Develop closer links with a good school to support improvements in specific areas of weakness or to alleviate temporary staffing difficulty.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Senior and subject leaders did not adapt teaching quickly enough to meet the requirements of more academic courses and the shift from coursework to end-of-course exams. As a result, they have not maintained good levels of achievement previously achieved with a more vocational curriculum,
- Senior leaders have accurately identified what they need to improve. They have begun to implement well-considered strategies designed to develop students' literacy skills. They are developing staff expertise in enabling students to meet examination requirements more successfully.
- Analysis and evaluation of student progress has not been deep or sharp enough to identify the reasons why some groups of students did not achieve well. Actions have not been taken early enough to tackle inconsistencies in performance.
- The wide variation in the performance of different groups shows that equality of opportunity and the use of the pupil premium require improvement.
- Instability of staffing in English has limited the progress of some classes in the current school year.
- The headteacher is highly respected and well liked. He leads by example and is highly visible in the academy. He has been robust in tackling weak performance in order to improve teaching and leadership. He has successfully re-branded the school, introduced a new uniform and raised the status and popularity of the school within the community. Well supported by senior leaders, the headteacher has established a positive culture for learning and school improvement.
- Tighter systems have improved standards of behaviour. Behaviour and attendance, including those at alternative provision, are monitored rigorously.
- Systematic observations and scrutiny of students' work enable senior leaders to accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching. A well-established coaching programme, tailored to individual development needs, is effective in helping staff to improve. The professional development programme is coherent and well managed but has not yet resulted in sustained improvements in learning and higher outcomes at GCSE. Six newly qualified teachers are well supported and developing appropriately.
- Since the academy opened, leaders have developed the middle leadership. Only one middle leader has been in post for more than three years. Some leaders are new to their post and are developing their management skills. Middle leaders have enthusiastically taken on increased responsibility for bringing about improvements in teaching and learning in their subject. Senior leaders are working effectively with middle leaders to identify and act on improvements and middle leaders are working collaboratively with each other to share best practice.
- Staff at all levels communicate a strong sense of common purpose and a shared commitment to bringing about improved achievement. Staff questionnaires communicated pride in the school and confidence in the leadership.
- Performance related pay has been implemented appropriately and not all teachers on the upper pay scale have been successful in gaining pay progression.
- The curriculum has undergone significant change. The wide range of vocational courses has been reduced appropriately to enable more students to take more academic subjects. The more exam-oriented curriculum has exposed weaknesses in students' literacy and ability to succeed in end-of-course exams. A range of literacy strategies are in place across all subjects to improve students' understanding of terminology and their writing but it is too early to see the impact on exam outcomes. One-to-one tutoring, mentoring and an extensive programme at the end of the school day provide helpful academic support for students at Key Stage 4.
- Students are well prepared for life in modern Britain. The programmes for religious education and personal, social, health and citizenship education are taught by specialists and effectively promote common values, understanding of social difference and respect.
- The academy is particularly successful in fostering good relations and tackling discrimination. For example, the consistent use of seating plans in lessons ensures that boys and girls and students from different ethnic backgrounds generally work together harmoniously and maturely. The positive ethos of the academy, the opportunities for students to take on responsibilities and the range of extra activities contribute well to students' behaviour and their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The library is successful in promoting reading and many books are borrowed. However, there is not enough analysis of which students are reading in order to extend reading habits more strategically.
- Careers education is well led. A comprehensive careers education strategy is in place, which includes all year groups. Students have good access to information. Specific programmes raise students' aspirations

and widen their horizons. Vulnerable students are supported well. The academy recently gained an award from the local authority for careers education and guidance.

- The Thorn Centre is well managed and provides effective support for students with ASD.
- Links with other schools have provided helpful advice and guidance, for example in geography. The school is developing further links to increase staff expertise in preparing students for examinations. The academy continues to benefit from regular visits from the local authority and the local authority has provided useful support for English and mathematics. The academy trust has yet to secure a close relationship with a school or group of schools to provide prompt support for tackling particular weaknesses in teaching and learning or to alleviate temporary staffing difficulties.
- The academy works well with parents and the wider community. Most parents expressed positive views of the school in an academy survey, the online questionnaire, Parent View, and in meetings with an inspector.
- The academy's policy and procedures meet safeguarding requirements. Staff recruitment procedures comply with national guidelines. Staff receive appropriate training to identify students at risk of harm and are up-to-date with the range of issues to be aware of and the action they should take. The academy takes appropriate action to ensure the safeguarding of students and to promote a culture of safety, including the use of the internet and social media.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are challenging and ask relevant questions of school leaders. The governing body was not satisfied with the 2014 GCSE results and was disappointed with the inaccuracy of leaders' predictions.
 - Governors do not have access to a clear enough analysis of the reasons for the variation in performance between different groups of students. They are not clear enough about which initiatives funded by the pupil premium are most and least effective.
 - The governing body rightly values the impact the headteacher has had on improving systems and procedures, the climate for learning and the reputation of the school. Governors have good links with middle leaders and are well informed about current improvements in particular subjects. They understand the performance management systems and what leaders are doing to reward good teaching and tackle underperformance.
 - They have made sure that academy staff are properly accountable for the quality of safeguarding. They carefully checked that the making of a television programme was well managed and that the interests of students and staff were protected.
 - Academy finances are managed diligently. Additional income from speaking at education conferences and television appearances is donated to a range of charities locally and nationally. This demonstrates the strength of the academy's values and its important role in the community.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students have positive attitudes to learning fostered by clear behaviour management procedures. Effective strategies ensure boys and girls and students from different ethnic and social backgrounds routinely work together in a respectful and mature manner. As a result students collaborate well with each other and are cooperative in carrying out tasks. They work responsibly on their own and concentrate well.
- In the best examples, students show initiative, speak with confidence and take leadership roles in explaining their views and discussing them in whole-class dialogue. Occasionally, when teaching is less effective, students can become distracted and engage in off-task chat. However, low-level disruption is rare.
- Students value the clear consequences for misbehaviour and the opportunities to correct behaviour before they reach a detention or isolation. They say that the tightening of procedures and greater consistency by teachers have improved standards of behaviour. Temporary exclusions rose when expectations were raised but have subsequently fallen as new rules have been accepted. Responses from parents, staff and students support the view that behaviour is generally good.
- Students take pride in their uniform. They generally move about the school in a calm and orderly fashion. They are usually punctual to school.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Bullying is infrequent. Systems for reporting bullying are well-known to students and the few incidents that occur are recorded and dealt with

well. Students understand issues in relation to homophobic bullying and racism.

- The on-site police constable makes a valued contribution to educating students about dangers such as drugs. Her work in the community helps the academy to anticipate and respond to issues that arise.
- Effective use is made of external agencies to support students at risk.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe. The positive responses from parents and staff confirm this.
- Attendance is improving and similar to most secondary schools. Persistent absence has been reduced. Students at alternative provision are checked appropriately. Students at alternative provision improved their attendance because they were motivated by the work-experience programme.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has not been precise enough to ensure that sufficient students gain good or better grades in end-of-course examinations. Improving teachers' understanding of examination requirements is a focus of current professional development.
- Mathematics teaching did not prepare students well enough to understand written problems and to produce written answers in examinations. The new leader in mathematics has taken appropriate action to rectify these weaknesses but it is too early to see improved GCSE results.
- Weaknesses in students' understanding of the meaning of text and their difficulty in writing extended answers led to underachievement in GCSE geography and business studies. Teachers' stronger focus on these skills and earlier completion of coursework has begun to show improvement in students' written work in these subjects.
- Some students, particularly some who speak English as an additional language, lack a wide vocabulary and the skills to comprehend the subtler meanings in a piece of writing. The Year 7 extra reading programme has begun to tackle these weaknesses and to improve the progress of students in English in Key Stage 3.
- Expectations of written work are inconsistent, leading to uneven standards and some carelessly presented work. Teachers have started to provide more detailed guidance to help students compose extended pieces of writing in different subjects but this is at an early stage.
- Marking is inconsistent within and across subjects. The best marking follows the academy policy and provides specific praise and constructive advice. Students respond promptly with written corrections that move them forward. Students like the marking policy and understand the value of responding to comments. However, feedback is sometimes not precise. In some classes, students are not required to respond to marking sufficiently often. Sometimes teachers do not follow up students who do not complete work or correct spellings.
- In some teaching, learning tasks do not meet the needs of the most able and, as a result, they are not sufficiently stretched to achieve well, particularly in mathematics.
- In the past, teaching has not consistently met the needs of different groups to enable them to make good progress. Additional one-to-one teaching and extra support is valued by students but these are not evaluated regularly. As a result, it is not clear enough which strategies are most and least effective.
- The quality of teaching in English has been reduced due to instability in staffing. Students in some English classes made limited progress in the autumn term but have started to make better progress this term.
- While teaching over time has not been consistently good, current teaching has evident strengths. Teaching usually communicates high expectations and teachers often create a positive climate for learning. Lessons are generally structured effectively and the pace of learning in many lessons enables students to enjoy their learning and make progress.
- The homework policy has changed recently and the majority of teachers set homework in line with it. Homework is increasingly consistent in extending learning and setting a challenge.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Since the academy opened, the proportion of students that gained five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics has fallen below the national average.
- The proportion of students gaining grades A* to C in English and mathematics has declined. In 2014, progress in English and mathematics was below average.
- The most able in mathematics have not made enough progress. For the last two years the proportion of students gaining the top grades in mathematics has been significantly below average. In 2013, in GCSE

English, the progress of the most able compared favourably with the national average. However, in 2014, their progress was well-below average.

- The academy stopped early entry for mathematics, except for a group of disaffected students who were entered early to ensure they gained some GCSE results. The academy is one of a small number for whom the rules for early entry in 2014 meant that students who took English Literature in May did not have their English Language results from the English Language and Literature paper, taken in June, counted in the school performance tables.
- When these results are counted, the 2014 GCSE results in English are closer to the previous year. However, fewer students in 2014 made or exceeded the expected rates of progress in English compared to the previous year.
- Instability in staffing has limited students' progress in English.
- In GCSE English and mathematics, the gap between disadvantaged students and other students in school, and nationally, fluctuates between two thirds and three quarters of a grade. In GCSE mathematics, disadvantaged students made less progress than in the previous year and fewer gained at least a grade C.
- The achievement of different groups of students is inconsistent. In 2014, the progress of students from a Pakistani background improved in English GCSE but remained significantly below average in mathematics. White students and boys made less progress in English compared to their progress in mathematics. Students from an Indian background achieved well in 2013 but less well in 2014. In the current Year 11, boys are making less progress than girls.
- Leaders expect higher achievement at GCSE in 2015, however current predictions are not secure and reliable.
- Academy data indicates that achievement is improving more strongly at Key Stage 3. The recent improvements in teaching and subject leadership are bringing about improved rates of progress, as seen in lessons, students' work and teacher assessments.
- A high proportion of students leave the school with five GCSE qualifications at grades A* to G. This demonstrates the academy's success in engaging and teaching less able students, including those with special educational needs.
- Students with special educational needs make sound progress, supported by clear information about their needs and recommended strategies for teaching and support staff.
- Effectively targeted alternative provision has improved the attendance of particular individuals. Current students on work experience with external providers are on track for their target grades in English and mathematics.
- Students with ASD supported by the Thorn Centre make good progress in their social and emotional development, which supports their learning. For example, students with poor attendance and behaviour difficulties at their previous school have now taken on leadership responsibilities in the academy.

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	138959
Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	449708

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	815
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Hagger
Headteacher	Jonny Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2010
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