

Thornhill School Business & Enterprise College

Thornholme Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7NA

Inspection dates

3–4 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have not been strong enough to bring about sustained improvements since the previous inspection. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and the most able remains too slow.
- Leaders do not clearly and precisely identify weaknesses in the quality of teaching. They are, therefore, unable to provide effective enough support to help staff to improve.
- The achievements of disadvantaged pupils in both English and mathematics are well below those of non-disadvantaged pupils, both nationally and within the school.
- At the end of Key Stage 4, in both GCSE French and science, too few pupils reach national standards.
- The quality of teaching varies too much, both within and across different subjects, to secure good progress. Teachers' expectations of different groups of pupils are not always appropriate and are not sufficiently high.
- Governors are not well enough equipped to be able to provide the necessary strategic direction for the school.

The school has the following strengths

- British fundamental values lie at the heart of the culture of the school. They are characterised by a deep understanding of equality, tolerance and respect for others.
- Pupils say they feel safe at the school.
- Safeguarding is managed extremely well. Vulnerable pupils are well cared for. Pupils are taught about unsafe situations and how to guard against these.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better across all subjects, by:
 - urgently raising teachers' expectations of the difficulty and quantity of work that can be completed in lessons by pupils of all abilities, including pupils with special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and both the least- and the most-able pupils
 - making sure that teachers are crystal clear about the learning expected in each lesson so they can check whether pupils are making progress and adapt or provide additional support or challenge during the lesson
 - ensuring that teachers use the assessment information they hold about pupils' current achievements to plan work that moves them on quickly from their varied starting points
 - developing teachers' skills in questioning so that they are far more demanding and enable pupils to think more deeply about their learning and express their ideas clearly
 - ensuring that teachers' marking follows the school's policy and leads decisively to improvement in pupils' work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, managers and governors so that they are able to take decisive actions and drive improvements by ensuring that:
 - they create a vibrant culture of high aspirations for young people within which all strive for excellence and engage fully with their learning
 - leaders have the skills to identify exactly what the strengths and weaknesses are within subject areas so that they can effect change rapidly and with urgency
 - they provide high-quality, sharply focused training for teachers so that they are better equipped to drive forward pupils' achievement and meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability in their classrooms
 - leaders and teachers are held accountable for the progress of pupils
 - governors are fully equipped and able to provide the executive headteacher with effective support and challenge
 - literacy and numeracy policies are coherent, fit for purpose and used to good effect across the whole school.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Senior leaders and governors have not been successful in decisively addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have not been able to act quickly enough to bring about the required improvements and change.
- The leadership of teaching is weak. Leaders do not have an accurate or a sharp understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Nor do they have an incisive and perceptive understanding of the training needs of staff. They have not established a culture of consistently high expectations in all areas of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders at all levels, including subject leaders, do not monitor and evaluate subject departments effectively. This has hindered them in the task of swiftly improving the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement convincingly. The resultant negative impact is seen across different subjects, including English, mathematics, science and French, and across different groups of pupils.
- Leaders have taken a number of steps to address the situation. These include recent appointments but staff have not been in place long enough to demonstrate that they can secure improvements in key aspects of the school's work. Others have yet to begin.
- Leaders have sought to establish a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy in lessons through a whole-school literacy policy. This has not been widely implemented. They are still in the process of establishing a clear approach to developing numeracy across the whole curriculum, even though this was an area for improvement at the last inspection.
- Systems of accountability for the performance of teachers have not been used rigorously enough to address underperformance in teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with a clear focus on ensuring pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school has struggled, however, to implement the substantial changes needed to teach more academic qualifications at GCSE in both science and French, having taught a high proportion of vocational qualifications in the past.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities, with substantial choice in sports, ranging from fencing to trampolining, and art, film, musical and theatre groups. A very high proportion of pupils take an active part in these opportunities, although a much lower proportion of these are disadvantaged pupils.
- The whole school community is committed to ensuring that pupils are cared for and feel safe in school. This is well noted by one parent, who reported through Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View): 'A wonderful school, this school is a lovely, warm, fun and friendly family.' The school ensures that parents are well informed about their children's progress.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that procedures are very robust and go to great lengths to secure highly effective support, particularly for the most-vulnerable pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body does not have the knowledge and the skills that it needs to hold the school to account for its performance in key areas of pupils' achievement.
 - While supportive of the school and caring for the community, the governing body does not demonstrate sufficient capacity to bring about sustained improvement.
 - The governing body is not able to provide support for the executive headteacher as it does not have sufficient understanding of key educational issues and challenges.
 - Governors have ensured that the school's finances are within budget but have not been able to evaluate the effectiveness of how the school uses the pupil premium funding or catch-up grants.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough. As a result, too frequently pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable, given their starting points.
- A wealth of assessment information about pupils' current skills and knowledge is available to teachers but this is not always used to inform lesson planning. Consequently, the needs of different groups of pupils

within a class are not given appropriate consideration. The level of challenge for the most-able pupils is sometimes too low and for less-able pupils, too great.

- In most lessons, the teacher's good subject knowledge is evident and used well to explain new concepts. Some teachers also use questioning successfully to probe pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking. Time is given for pupils to think things out for themselves and pupils' responses are then used to further develop and deepen learning. Too frequently, however, superficial questions yield superficial responses, which are too readily accepted by teachers, and opportunities for developing pupils' understanding are missed.
- Teaching assistants are usually well deployed to support pupils who have special educational needs or disability, enabling them to make good progress in lessons. However, the small number of pupils who are at an early stage of English language development are not well supported in lessons and, as a result, make poor progress.
- Most teachers mark pupils work regularly, although this is not always in line with the school's marking policy. Some marking provides detailed guidance to pupils to help them improve. However, very few pupils act on the guidance. As a result, marking does not have a consistently positive impact on improving pupils' learning over time and pupils are losing valuable opportunities to learn from their mistakes.
- Within the school's literacy policy, leaders have provided clear directions for tackling corrections and improving spelling. Actions to improve spelling were rarely evident in pupils' work.
- Reading is well promoted across the school and time is set aside on a weekly basis for independent reading. Those who struggle with reading are effectively supported through a range of reading activities that take place at the start of the school day.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- A significant minority of pupils do not value the importance of learning and are therefore insufficiently engaged. However, most pupils have a positive attitude to learning and try hard in lessons.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement, so as to engage more deeply with this minority of pupils who have cut themselves off from learning.
- Pupils have a deep understanding of diversity and equality. Tolerance for others of different faiths and different ethnic origins is deeply rooted in the culture of the school. Pupils show respect and consideration for others within the school community. They learn about many aspects of being British through lessons and assemblies and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils benefit from the careers education they receive and as a result they are able to make informed choices when leaving the school at the end of Year 11.
- There are a number of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities; for example, older pupils can become 'peer mentors' for younger ones, who appreciate their help and support.
- Pupils say they feel safe and they are aware of the dangers around them. They have been taught how to keep themselves safe online. The school takes care to protect pupils from radicalisation or sexual exploitation. Pupils are aware of different forms of bullying. They say that incidents are infrequent and dealt with effectively.
- Many pupils are involved with sports and understand how to keep themselves healthy. The school's caring ethos ensures that pupils feel safe and they know where to go if they need any help or support.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves sensibly and safely around the school site and their behaviour in lessons is good.
- The school is proactive in ensuring that the environment is calm and orderly and any poor behaviour is firmly and effectively managed. Systems in place develop good behaviour patterns and pupils know exactly the consequences for any poor behaviour. No derogatory or racist language was heard at all around the school.
- Last year, the school successfully and significantly reduced the proportion of both fixed-term and permanent exclusions so that they are below national averages. The school is acutely aware that the attendance of pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils fell below the national

average. Despite the very best efforts of the school, it was unable to resolve the difficulties in a small number of cases. This year, new systems have been put in place which have increased the school's capacity to manage attendance and address the underlying causes of absence. Attendance has improved compared to the same period last year.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- In 2015, the proportion of Year 11 pupils making the expected progress or more than expected progress from their starting points in Year 7 in English and mathematics was below average and only slightly better than that found at the time of the last inspection. Gaps between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and others in school remained wide. Improvements were made in 2014. However, these have not been sustained.
- The progress made in English and mathematics by pupils who have special educational needs or disability was less than other similar groups nationally and other pupils at the school. Teachers do not have clear information and guidance as to how best to help their pupils learn, which is hampering the effective development and learning of significant groups of pupils.
- In 2015, achievement in science and French was poor for all pupils in Year 11, including more-able pupils, boys and girls.
- Progress seen in lessons and in pupils' work was variable, both within subjects and across year groups, and therefore requires improvement. In mathematics, the progress seen was slightly stronger than in English. In both subjects, the most-able and the weakest pupils did not always make the progress of which they were capable. The progress seen in lessons and in pupils' work is directly related to the quality of teaching received.
- The school's new assessment tracking systems are used to identify pupils who may be falling behind. If pupils fall behind in English or mathematics at Key Stage 4, they may be directed to additional English or mathematics lessons for a short time in order to help them catch up. The impact of this work is variable, although some pupils say that they find the additional lessons helpful.
- The school's own internal assessment information supports broadly positive end-of-year predictions for progress in Year 11. Underperformance appears limited to more-able boys and some subject areas, namely French, geography, physical education and chemistry. In Year 10, school information points to this group of pupils making broadly average progress by the end of Key Stage 4, although more-able pupils and those with special education needs are predicted to make poor progress. The school asserts that current progress in Key Stage 3 is good.
- Information, advice and guidance to pupils on their future career choices are good. Most pupils move to a local college of further education or sixth form college to pursue their career plans. The numbers who are not in education, employment or training are very low.

School details

Unique reference number	108860
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10002031

This inspection 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	640
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Clarke
Executive Headteacher	John Hallworth
Telephone number	0191 553 7735
Website	http://thornhillschool.org.uk/
Email address	thornhill@schools.sunderland.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The school is part of a hard federation (which means it shares a governing body and an executive headteacher with another school).
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils whose learning is supported by the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- Over 70% of pupils are of White British heritage and over 20% are of Bangladeshi heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across a range of subjects and year groups and carried out a small number of joint observations with senior leaders. They talked with pupils about their learning and scrutinised their work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school and with both senior and middle leaders. They also met with the vice-chair and other members of the governing body, and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors met formally with pupils from each year group and talked informally with staff and pupils. One inspector listened to a small number of pupils in Year 7 read. A meeting was held with teachers new to the profession and their mentor.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including performance management documents, minutes of governing body meetings, monitoring of teaching and progress information. They examined carefully safeguarding and child protection documentation, attendance data, records relating to behaviour and documentation available on the school's website.
- While there were not enough responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire to register parental views, there were a small number of written comments for consideration.
- Inspectors also looked carefully at a range of other evidence, including information for parents on the school website and documentation relating to extra-curricular activities.

Inspection team

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Andrew Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Ofsted Inspector

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