

Thistley Hough Academy

Thistley Hough, Penkhull, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 5JJ

Inspection dates

22–23 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The inspirational leadership of the principal and drive for improvement from senior leaders has ensured that the school has improved considerably since the last inspection.
- Almost all groups of pupils make good progress across year groups and in most subjects.
- In 2016, Year 11 pupils made progress that was well above average across a range of subjects, including English.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- The vast majority of disadvantaged pupils make good progress and leaders have ensured that the school achieves good value for money from the additional funding that it receives to support these pupils.
- Leaders have made sure that pupils have many opportunities to develop literacy skills. This is a very important reason why pupils make good progress.
- Although improving strongly, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not always make the consistently rapid progress that they are capable of, particularly in science, history and geography.
- Teaching is good. Teachers accurately match activities to the skills and abilities of different pupils and this ensures that the vast majority are challenged at their own level.
- Support for pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils benefit from an extensive range of activities which help them to develop self-confidence and high aspirations for themselves. Safeguarding procedures are robust and pupils feel safe at school.
- Behaviour is good. Relationships across the school are positive and highly conducive to good learning. Pupils work hard and are polite, courteous and well-mannered.
- Although below average, attendance is improving. However, leaders, including the governing body, do not check the impact of all strategies as robustly as they could.
- The checks which senior and subject leaders do on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are effective. As a result, leaders are able to make any necessary improvements in a timely manner.
- The governing body has a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, it provides a good level of challenge and support to leaders.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, so that these pupils make consistently rapid progress, particularly in science, history and geography, by:
 - making sure that teachers always move pupils on to harder work as soon as they are ready
 - ensuring that teachers ask questions which require pupils to think deeply.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management even further by:
 - accelerating the improvements in attendance and persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, boys and some groups of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - sharpening up the checks which leaders and governors make on pupils' attendance and persistent absence so that the school knows which strategies are having the most impact.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal provides inspirational leadership to all staff and pupils in the school. Her determination and commitment to do the very best for each pupil is mirrored by the senior leadership team. As a result, the school has improved since the last inspection and all key areas are now good.
- Leaders have created a culture and ethos which is resulting in staff and pupils increasingly developing high expectations of themselves and each other. Consequently, the school is a continuously improving learning community where equality of opportunity and mutual respect prevail.
- Staff who inspectors met overwhelmingly feel valued by leaders. They recognise the improvements that have been made and the vast majority feel proud to be members of the school.
- Leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. Where standards fall below the high levels that are expected, prompt actions are taken to address any weaknesses. This ensures that the quality of teaching and pupils' progress is under regular review so that timely and well-focused improvements can be made, when necessary.
- In addition to these checks, leaders also commission external groups to check aspects of the school's work. This is a good strategy and further ensures that leaders have an accurate and detailed understanding about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Although some of the subject leaders are relatively new, senior leaders have ensured that these members of staff are well trained. For example, senior leaders work alongside subject leaders when checking teaching and pupils' progress. As a result, the large majority of subject leaders are effective in identifying any weaknesses and implementing appropriate actions to improve matters.
- All staff benefit from a structured approach to professional development. Leaders effectively use the monitoring information which they have to help them to identify how specific aspects of teaching need to improve further. This ensures that the training which is implemented is effective and staff value this support. The attention to detail with respect to continuously improving teaching is having a strong impact on pupils' progress.
- The targets which are set for teachers to help them to continuously improve their work make a strong contribution to the good teaching in the school. Targets are appropriately challenging and are indicative of the high expectations of leaders. Teachers are also able to access support in helping them to reach their targets. This approach is a further reason why pupils make good progress.
- Leaders use the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils very well. They have a range of good strategies to support eligible pupils, including smaller classes and small group work which helps pupils to catch up if they fall behind. The culture of continuous improvement ensures that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is regularly reviewed so that it is always having the maximum impact on the progress of eligible pupils. As a result, the vast majority of disadvantaged pupils make good

progress across year groups and in most subjects.

- Leaders make sure that funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well spent. As a result, pupils benefit from additional resources and staff time which helps them to make good progress.
- Leaders make good use of the additional funding which the school receives to support Year 7 pupils who join the school with attainment below the expected standard. The additional support which these pupils receive is having a strong impact and they are catching up quickly in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' good progress, behaviour and outstanding personal development and welfare. It is well planned and provides a good balance of subjects to interest and motivate pupils. The development of pupils' literacy skills is central to the way the curriculum is planned. For example, pupils have two extended opportunities to read every day. Regular 'theme' days, the 'Widening Horizons' curriculum and assemblies help pupils to develop their understanding of British values, including the importance of the rule of law and democracy. The 'theme' days also help pupils to understand safety matters and develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Pupils in Year 7 benefit from taking part in the 'in harmony' project which leaders have introduced to help pupils develop greater self-confidence as well as extend musical skills.
- Leaders place a high priority on developing pupils' self-confidence and aspirations. The wide and diverse range of extra-curricular activities has an excellent impact on this. In addition, numerous opportunities exist for pupils to take responsibility, including responsibilities for picking up litter and preparing refreshments for staff at breaktime, for example. These activities, as well as many others, make a significant contribution to the outstanding provision for pupils' personal development.
- Leaders are aware that teaching and learning in science, history and geography is not as good as other subjects. They also know that more needs to be done to ensure that the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make consistently rapid progress, particularly in these subjects. Leaders have implemented effective actions which are resulting in these subjects improving strongly, though greater consistency is needed.
- Attendance has been too low in the past and persistent absence has been too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, boys and some groups of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders, including governors, have made this a high priority and, as a result, attendance is improving and persistent absence is reducing for these groups of pupils. However, the rate of improvement is not as rapid as it needs to be.
- Leaders make appropriate and regular checks on the progress, attendance and behaviour of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Governance of the school

- The Creative Education Trust Board delegates powers to the school's governing body. Members of the governing body and the trust share the principal's high expectations and they are committed to ensuring that the school continues to improve further.

- The governing body has a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, governors provide a good level of challenge and support to school leaders. They ask probing questions of leaders and hold them to account for their plans and actions effectively.
- Governors are appropriately focused on holding leaders to account for the improvements that are needed in science, history and geography. They also know that more needs to be done to secure consistently rapid progress for the most able pupils. The strong improvements that are taking place in these areas are indicative of the good impact of governance.
- Governors check attendance and persistent absence regularly because they know it needs to improve. However, their monitoring of attendance is not sharp enough because the impact of all strategies is not checked with sufficient rigour.
- Governors monitor the impact of the additional pupil premium funding and the Year 7 catch-up funding well. This is an important reason why most of the eligible pupils are making good progress. As a result, governors are ensuring that the school achieves good value for money.
- Governors ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to manage the performance of staff and the trust manages the performance of the principal.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that the well-being and safety of pupils and staff is a high priority.
- The school fully complies with all statutory requirements and all staff are appropriately vetted as required. Staff know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare or safety.
- Leaders are highly effective in making sure that staff are well trained. Training has included support for staff to recognise the signs that a child may be at risk of sexual exploitation and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, for example. Most recently staff have received training related to gang cultures. All staff have read and acted upon the latest government guidance about keeping children safe.
- There is a culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are appropriately vigilant. One member of staff summed this up by saying, 'No issue is too small to raise'.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved considerably since the last inspection and are now good. This is because leaders have effective strategies to support teachers in improving their work and also because many skilled teachers have joined the school since the last inspection. As a result, pupils make consistently good progress.
- Teaching and learning in English have been positively transformed since the last inspection. Teaching in this subject is now a significant strength. In addition to developing pupils' reading and writing skills, English teachers place a high degree of

importance on supporting pupils with speaking skills. The use of 'speaking boards' is a highly effective teaching strategy which supports pupils' oracy skills as well as contributes well to wider school strategies for helping pupils to develop greater self-confidence.

- Teachers use assessment information to plan activities which are well matched to different pupils' skills and abilities. This means that most pupils are working at the right level for their ability and are able to make good progress.
- Pupils benefit from teachers following the school's marking and assessment policy consistently. The feedback that pupils receive helps them to understand how to improve their work.
- The school places a high importance on helping pupils to improve literacy as many join the school with low attainment in English. Teachers in all subjects have made this a priority. For example, pupils receive consistent written feedback about how to improve the accuracy of their writing in all subjects. As a result, pupils are improving their literacy skills.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to guide pupils towards higher levels of attainment. Teachers regularly help pupils to apply their mathematical skills and understanding in different ways to solve problems. This prepares pupils well for GCSE mathematics examinations.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are taught well because teachers have a detailed understanding of the learning needs of these pupils. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the progress of these pupils and they provide effective, bespoke support to individual pupils.
- Teaching for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is not always as good as it is for other groups of pupils. This is because pupils often complete work quickly but are not routinely moved on to harder work as soon as they are ready. As a result, time is lost, particularly in science, history and geography.
- Teachers' questions do not always require the most able pupils to think deeply enough. This is a missed opportunity to help these pupils to develop deeper understanding and ultimately reach the highest standards.
- Teaching in science, history and geography has not been as good as most other subjects since the last inspection. In science, this is partly because the school has found the recruitment of high-quality teachers difficult. However, as a result of effective support from leaders, teaching in these subjects is improving strongly but the quality of teaching does not yet match the best in the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders are successfully unlocking the academic and personal potential in all pupils. Pupils are developing high levels of self-confidence, maturity and self-awareness and the vast majority are committed to achieving their personal best.

- Pupils are increasingly becoming independent learners, taking an appropriate degree of control over their own learning and using their initiative and resilience to overcome both academic and personal difficulties.
- The numerous opportunities to take responsibility are contributing significantly to helping pupils to develop self-confidence. Most pupils thrive on these opportunities, which include membership of the school council, literacy leaders, librarian responsibilities, pupil 'ambassadors' and reading 'ambassadors', to name but a few.
- Pupils enjoy taking part in the school's community initiative. This includes cleaning dishes in the staff room and offering support to teachers before the main lessons begin. These activities help pupils to develop important 'life skills' as well as demonstrating their commitment to the school and playing their part in its development. Pupils are keen to get involved in these activities because most are proud to be members of the school.
- The curriculum is planned by leaders to promote self-confidence, leadership, teamwork, 'racial harmony' and physical well-being. For example, the large number of clubs, which are available and well attended by pupils, include a wide range of sporting activities and arts clubs as well gardening and debating clubs. Leaders strategically place pupils from different backgrounds in some of these clubs to further promote and celebrate the multi-cultural ethos of the school.
- Pupils are well cared for at the school and the parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, as well as the one that the school administered, agree. Pupils are confident that, if they have any personal or emotional concerns, they can always speak to their form tutor or receive support from someone in the pastoral office. Some Year 7 pupils are very well supported through the nurture group.
- Pupils feel safe at school and they have a good understanding of safety matters, including how to stay safe when working online. Most pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. They say bullying is rare and school records confirm this. Pupils are entirely confident that when bullying does occur staff deal with matters swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils in all year groups benefit from good careers education and guidance. In addition to advice and support from the school careers officer, pupils are helped to understand the opportunities available to them through a wide range of visiting speakers, for example.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision are developing higher levels of commitment to learning than they had previously. This is because the courses that pupils are following are well matched to their skills and interests.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The vast majority of pupils behave well and show a good level of respect for each other and their teachers. Behaviour is good in lessons and disruption to learning is rare. Pupils also behave sensibly at social times, which are well supervised by staff.

- Pupils from different backgrounds get on well together. The school is a harmonious multi-cultural community.
- Pupils are predominantly polite and friendly. Several offered to shake hands with inspectors which is indicative both of the respectful and mature behaviour of pupils but also of how pupils are improving their self-confidence.
- The school environment is well respected by pupils. There is hardly any litter around the school and inspectors saw no evidence of graffiti, for example.
- Exclusions have been too high in the past, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, although above average, exclusions are reducing rapidly as pupils increasingly value the educational provision which they receive.
- Attendance has been too low in the past and persistent absence has been too high, particularly for boys, disadvantaged pupils and some groups of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, attendance is improving and persistent absence is reducing for these groups of pupils.
- The school uses a wide range of strategies to improve attendance, including telephoning or texting parents on the first day when a pupil is absent and a 'high profile' system of rewards for good attendance. However, leaders, including governors, do not check the impact of all strategies in enough detail so that they can establish which are the most effective.
- Most of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision have improved their attendance, some significantly so. These pupils behave well when studying at their respective institutions.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The determination and commitment of the school's leaders has resulted in strong improvements in pupils' progress since the last inspection. Almost all groups of pupils in most subjects make good progress.
- Most pupils join the school with attainment which is well below average and many pupils join with weak literacy skills. The school has placed a great deal of focus on helping pupils to improve literacy skills and this is an important reason why pupils make good progress.
- Pupils read widely and they have opportunities to read every day. As a result, reading skills are improving quickly and pupils who have fallen behind in the past are catching up well. Improvements in reading and wider literacy skills are helping pupils to make good progress across the curriculum.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress. The good provision in the school for these pupils ensures that, after a period of effective support to develop language skills, pupils are moved into the usual timetabled lessons as soon as possible. The local authority recognises that the school is well equipped to teach pupils who speak English as an additional language. Newcomers to the country who speak little English are placed at the school for short periods of time.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support. As

a result, most pupils make good progress because their learning needs are accurately met by teachers and teaching assistants.

- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not always make consistently rapid progress across the curriculum. Although improving, this is particularly the position in science, history and geography.
- The school uses the additional Year 7 catch-up premium well. Many lower-attaining pupils are catching up quickly in English and mathematics because the small groups which pupils are taught in provide pupils with high levels of attention and support.
- As a result of the effective use of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils, these pupils are either matching the progress of others in the school or catching up quickly, including in English and mathematics. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils do not always make the rapid progress that other pupils enjoy.
- In 2016, Year 11 disadvantaged pupils made above-average progress across a range of subjects and the difference between the attainment of these pupils and others nationally is diminishing.
- Outcomes for Year 11 pupils in 2016 were good. Pupils made particularly good progress in English which was well above average. Low-attaining pupils made good progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Attainment in art was well above average, including for the most able pupils.
- The school prepares pupils very well for the next stage of their education or employment. As a result of effective impartial careers advice and guidance, every Year 11 pupil who has left the school over the past three years has moved on to higher education or employment with training.
- The large majority of pupils who attend alternative provision make good progress because the curriculum that these pupils follow is well matched to their learning needs.

School details

Unique reference number	139068
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10025193

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	644
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Howland
Principal	Holly Hartley
Telephone number	01782 883500
Website	www.thistleyhoughacademy.org.uk/
Email address	office@thistleyhough.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is part of the Creative Education Trust.
- The school is smaller than most secondary schools.
- Just under half of all pupils are of minority ethnic heritage, which is above average.
- Two thirds of the pupils speak English as an additional language, which is well above average.
- The school provides support for pupils who are new to the country who speak English as an additional language, on behalf of the local authority. Pupils move to other schools or stay at the school once they have adequate language skills to join

mainstream classes.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average.
- The pupil premium provides support for just over two thirds of the pupils. This is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' progress by the end of Year 11.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision on a full- and part-time basis. These pupils attend centres called Reach, Peak Pursuits and Merit.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 31 lessons, the vast majority of which were jointly observed with senior leaders. The inspection team made several short visits to other lessons to check on the progress and behaviour of different groups of pupils. Inspectors also looked at a wide range of work in pupils' books.
- Meetings were held with four groups of pupils from all year groups. Other meetings were held with members of the governing body and with senior leaders and staff, including those responsible for leading subjects. The lead inspector met with a representative from the trust. One inspector met with a group of staff which included teachers, administration staff and teaching assistants.
- Inspectors analysed the 16 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, Parent View. They also analysed 36 responses to a questionnaire that the school used with parents who attended the parents' evening at the end of the first day of the inspection. Inspectors analysed 98 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and eight responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching and the targets set for teachers to improve their work. They also looked at records relating to attendance, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding and the school's development plan. In addition, inspectors analysed a wide range of information on pupils' performance.

Inspection team

Richard Sutton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
David Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Badyal	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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