

# Thornhill Community Academy Trust

Valley Drive, Thornhill, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire WF12 0HE

## Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

### Overall effectiveness

**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

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 a school that requires improvement

- Trustees and leaders do not make sure that additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively. As a result, these pupils are not benefiting from the recent positive developments in the school as much as other pupils.
- Middle leaders do not analyse the information they collect about different aspects of their work deeply enough. Consequently, they do not know what is working well for different groups of pupils.
- Attendance, while improving for most pupils, remains below levels of attendance in most other schools. The poor attendance of some pupils who require support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is not improving enough.
- The progress current pupils make across a range of subjects is improving but remains variable. Progress is much stronger in key stage 3 than key stage 4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making good progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Some teaching is not effective enough to ensure that pupils make strong progress in all subjects. This is because it does not build on what pupils already know and can do. Equally, some teachers do not use the available information about pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities well enough to ensure that these pupils learn well.
- The range of options in key stage 4 does not engage the interests or match the aptitudes of all pupils. As a result, some pupils' attendance and attitude to learning are poor.

### The school has the following strengths

- Since the last inspection, the new headteacher's relentless vigour has driven significant and effective changes across many aspects of the school's work.
- Pupils are polite and respectful of one another's differences. They are developing into citizens with personal and social skills that are an asset to their community and country.
- Staff, pupils, parents and carers are almost universal in their support for the pace of change taking place. One member of staff commented that it is the 'best it has been in 22 years'.
- Pupils placed in the specialist resource provision make good progress towards their personal development outcomes as a result of the effective support they receive.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by trustees and leaders ensuring the effective use of the additional funding available for these pupils.
- Leaders continue, with pace, to develop the range of subjects and qualifications offered to ensure that all pupils' interests and aptitudes are met.
- Improve middle leaders' use of information about the progress, behaviour and attendance of different groups of pupils so they develop approaches that are working well and stop using those that are not.
- Improve pupils' attendance, including that of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that it is at least in line with that of most other schools.
- Improve the consistency and effectiveness of teaching so that all pupils make more progress, by ensuring that:
  - teachers learn from the most effective practice in the school
  - teachers plan lessons that build on what pupils already know and understand
  - the most able pupils undertake tasks that challenge them to think more deeply and creatively about their work
  - teachers and other adults use the information available to adapt learning activities and resources for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
  - more opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their resilience, creativity and problem-solving skills when tackling difficult work, so they progress to higher standards.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Leadership requires improvement because the positive changes taking place, including for pupils who are disadvantaged and those who speak English as an additional language, have not changed the outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those who need support for their learning.
- The headteacher joined the school a few months after the last inspection. Her relentless drive for pupils to achieve the highest possible standards is having a positive impact. Critically, her presence and visibility at the school gate and in every classroom has secured the enthusiastic support of pupils and staff. Equally, her determination to enable senior and middle leaders to develop their skills is increasing the pace of change in most areas of school.
- Middle leaders, many of whom are new to their roles, are monitoring the difference new approaches to teaching and managing pupils' attitudes and behaviour are making. Overall, they have a good understanding what is working well. However, they are not as clear about what is working well for different groups of pupils, particularly pupils who need support for their learning because of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, they have not refined new approaches quickly enough in response to different pupils' needs.
- Since the last inspection, the range of subjects taught and the opportunity for pupils to achieve a wider range of appropriate qualifications have developed. Extra-curricular activities, including inter-house competitions, add to the breadth of the pupils' development. However, the current arrangements do not capture the interests or aptitudes of some lower-ability pupils and some of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders' plans to develop further the curriculum are robust and realistic.
- Leaders' drive to raise standards is based on an accurate understanding of the school's current performance. They know what needs to be done and systematically plan and introduce new approaches. Senior leaders regularly check on the impact of their work, for example 'every lesson, every lesson' drop-in visits mean they have an up-to-date understanding of the improvements in pupils' attitudes to learning. Their diligent approach ensures that they have a good understanding of the impact of the catch-up and pupil premium grants. Both grants are being used with increasing effectiveness, particularly in key stage 3.
- Leaders ensure that staff are fully engaged in improving the school. All staff spoken to, and the majority who responded to the online survey, were positive about the developments because they see the difference they are making to pupils' progress.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of what makes teaching effective. Their feedback to teachers is incisive and developmental. Training opportunities are closely matched to teachers' development needs as well as the school's priorities. Performance management is robust. Following the disappointing 2016 results, teachers' targets have been even more closely aligned to all pupils' progress and the accuracy of assessment.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is effectively supported. Through timetabled lessons, and supported by assemblies and enrichment activities, pupils learn about their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Respect and tolerance is the cohesive thread that binds the school as one community.

- Since the last inspection, leaders have ensured that they work with a range of other schools, external consultants and more closely with the local authority. This outward-facing approach has accelerated the pace of improvement.

### **Governance of the school**

- Earlier this academic year, members and trustees of the academy trust realised that the governance arrangements were not as strong as the school needed. An external review has supported their decision to make changes to the board of trustees. This includes a new chair of the board. Further new appointments have begun to increase the capacity of the board but it is too soon to see an increase in the effectiveness of the trustees' work.
- Despite the trustees' increasing knowledge, skills and continuing commitment to the school, they have not ensured that they use the additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively enough. Trustees have a much firmer grasp on the effective use of the pupil premium and the catch-up grant. They challenge and support leaders about the emerging gains for disadvantaged pupils to ensure that they are consolidated and further improved.
- Following the external review of governance and the 2016 results, trustees are taking a more decisive approach to the strategic development of the school. They are investigating the efficacy of more formal collaborative partnerships with other schools.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Since the last inspection, leaders' approach to safeguarding has been revolutionised. The student well-being service is a new team of skilled and knowledgeable staff dedicated to the safety and well-being of the pupils. Pupils hold this team in high regard because they know they can get help from them to maintain good emotional health.
- Staff are trained in key aspects of safeguarding, including radicalisation and extremism, and use their knowledge effectively. Work with other agencies is timely and robust. Records are maintained in an appropriate way.
- Leaders ensure that all necessary checks are made on staff before they start to work at the school. Detailed records of these checks are maintained.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Requires improvement**

- There is too much variability in the effectiveness of teaching in different subjects and within subjects. As a result, pupils do not consistently learn as well as they could.
- The most common inconsistency, seen both in pupils' books and during visits to lessons, is a lack of high expectations for pupils. This includes a lack of challenge for the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils. Pupils do not get enough opportunities to think creatively or to solve complex problems.
- Sometimes teachers' questions also limit pupils' responses. When this happens, the pupils' progress slows and learning is superficial because pupils do not get the

opportunity to give alternative opinions or debate ideas.

- The effectiveness of teachers' verbal and written guidance is also variable. Most teachers follow the school's chosen approach. Some pupils, particularly those who are less proficient English speakers, do not always have enough time understand new concepts while grappling with new vocabulary.
- Leaders have developed an approach to planning that ensures all teachers consider the needs of different groups of pupils. Some teachers' planning for some groups of pupils is superficial and does not address the specific barriers to learning these pupils encounter. Some teachers do not use the information on individual learning plans provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, some work is too hard and pupils either rely too heavily on adults to support them, or lose interest.
- Where teachers consistently and creatively use all the school's procedures, teaching is highly effective. Strong examples were seen across the range of subjects. The school's 'TCA way' of well-planned activities closely matched to pupils' next steps in learning; questioning that probes pupils' understanding and challenges them to think deeply; opportunities to reflect on their own work, and learn from other pupils' work, results in pupils making strong progress.
- Teaching in the resource provision linked to pupils' social communication needs and mental health is effective. Teachers and other staff work closely with the behavioural psychologist, employed by the school, on programmes of work specifically linked to pupils' personal development outcomes. The benefit individual pupils gain from this is seen in their increased attendance and engagement in learning. For some pupils, these approaches are successfully continued into mainstream classes as a result of the skilful support provided by teaching assistants.
- Most teaching enables pupils to learn how to revise for assessments and answer examination questions. Literacy skills are well developed across a range of subjects, for example extended writing opportunities in art and clear expectations about the correct spelling of scientific words.
- Homework is a regular and purposeful activity that builds on pupils' knowledge or prepares them for the next step in learning. The use of online learning tools is growing in popularity and use with pupils, especially those revising for examinations.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**Requires improvement**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils learn to respect each other's differences and tolerate other people's views that are different to their own.
- The student well-being service ensures that pupils' emotional and mental health needs are well supported. A life coach gives specific individual support when needed.
- Pupils appreciate the valuable advice and guidance they receive to help them make good choices for their key stage 4 options and placements when they leave school.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe online. Their parents are

well supported with sound advice through the school's website.

- The vast majority of pupils are confident that infrequent incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Leaders' detailed records of the actions they take to resolve incidents between pupils demonstrate the effectiveness of their responses.
- Leaders ensure that they have prepared the pupils for a range of emergencies, including a forced lock down. This reflects the care and attention given to the pupils, particularly in the resource provision, who, without the preparation they have had, may not be able to cope with emergencies if ever they occur.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Leaders' vigorous attention to improve pupils' attendance has led to an overall improvement, including for pupils who are disadvantaged. However, pupils who need support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities do not attend regularly enough.
- Leaders' higher expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school have led to an increase in detentions and exclusions, particularly fixed-term exclusions. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are disproportionately missing time in school due to the high rate of fixed-term exclusions. Leaders understand that some of the difficulties experienced by these pupils stem from the current organisation of the curriculum. As a result, they have invested in an on-site unit, 'The Bridge', which will be run by school staff, including specialist subject teachers. This provision will open in September. This demonstrates leaders are systematically identifying the needs of vulnerable pupils and developing provision that is better matched to their needs and aptitudes.
- The majority of pupils appreciate leaders' and staff's consistent application of the school's rules. Their school is a calm and orderly place. There are very few incidents when lessons are disrupted by pupils' poor behaviour. When lessons challenge pupils to think deeply and stretch themselves, pupils are keen and eager to learn.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Pupils enter the school with significantly lower attainment than that of most pupils in other schools. Over the last few years, the progress and attainment of pupils by the time they leave the school has not been good enough.
- Poor outcomes for Year 11 pupils continued in 2016. The progress of disadvantaged pupils was in the lowest 10% of all schools across a range of subjects. The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those requiring support, has been equally poor.
- Leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching have led to current pupils, across all year groups and a range of subjects, making more progress. Extensive internal and external moderation of teachers' assessments boosts leaders' confidence in teachers' assessments of current rates of progress. Pupils' work in their books confirms most are making stronger progress.
- Currently, most disadvantaged pupils are making progress that is at least in line with that of other pupils across a range of subjects. This has halted the previous trend of

increasing the difference between these and other pupils. The difference between the standards reached by disadvantaged and other pupils in Years 7 and 8 is reducing because of the targeted work on literacy skills for lower-ability pupils.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making the same strong progress as other pupils, particularly in English, mathematics and science. However, pupils, who have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs, particularly those in the resource provision, are making strong progress towards their individual personal development outcomes.
- The previously low rate of pupils moving on to further education, employment or training at the end of the Year 11 is improving. In 2016, more pupils secured positive destinations than previously, including an increase in the number of pupils moving on to study Level 3 qualifications. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils with successful destinations also improved significantly.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138959
<b>Local authority</b>	Kirklees
<b>Inspection number</b>	10023807

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	849
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Academy trust
<b>Chair</b>	Margaret Campbell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Beverley Matthews
<b>Telephone number</b>	01924 324 890
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thornhillcommunityacademy.co.uk">www.thornhillcommunityacademy.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	Bev.Matthews@thornhillcommunityacademy.co.uk
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	4–5 February 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.
- Thornhill is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils are disadvantaged and speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils represent a range of ethnic heritages, but predominantly White British, Pakistani and Indian.
- A much higher-than-average proportion of pupils have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. This includes 16 pupils on the school's roll who have places in the enhanced resource provision, The Thorn Centre, for pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition.
- There is a similar proportion of pupils who need support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities as in most other schools.
- The school does not currently use alternative providers of education.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum



standards for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a range of lessons covering all year groups and a range of subjects. A significant number of the lesson visits were with senior leaders. During the lesson visits, inspectors discussed pupils' work with them and listened to them read their work. Inspectors also reviewed a significant number of pupils' books.
- An inspector visited The Thorn Centre and spoke with pupils and staff.
- Meetings were held with pupils from every year group and informal discussions took place with pupils at lunchtime and breaktime. Pupils were observed as they arrived and left school. The 63 responses to the online pupil survey were considered.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the chair of trustees (who also represented the members of the trust) and three other trustees. Telephone calls were held with the school's Kirklees learning partner and an external consultant who advises leaders.
- 77 staff responses to Ofsted's online survey were taken into account. The 14 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online survey for parents) were taken into account alongside the 10 free-text responses to the same survey.
- A wide range of the school's documents was reviewed.

## Inspection team

Susan Hayter, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Morrissey	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Crossley	Ofsted Inspector
Gordon Watts	Ofsted Inspector
Beverley Clubley	Ofsted Inspector

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