

School Returners/Young Mums Provision

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

Inspection dates

12–13 October 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Members of the management committee, and the local authority, do not support and challenge senior leaders with sufficient rigour.
- Leaders' plans for school improvement do not include precise milestones by which the school's progress can be measured.
- Leaders do not check regularly on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent across the school and across subjects. Some teachers do not address incisively the gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers do not provide challenging enough work for the school's most-able pupils.
- The school's data tracking system is new and not embedded. There is no accurate data about pupils' attainment on entry.
- Leaders have not ensured that funding from the local authority is spent well to ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- There are no formal systems and procedures to check the improvements to pupils' social, emotional and mental health. Consequently, leaders cannot measure accurately the effectiveness of the school's work in this area.
- Pupils do not attend this specialist provision often enough. Too many arrive late for school every day. Consequently, they miss too many lessons and do not make sufficient progress.
- Teaching assistants do not have the skills they need to provide effective support in lessons for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are ambitious for the pupils who attend both units. They provide specialist teachers to deliver subjects to GCSE level.
- Pupils who attend every day and on time make good progress from their individual starting points, especially in English and science.
- All pupils go on to further education, training or employment. The school has very strong links with local colleges and businesses.
- Pupils appreciate the help and support of the provision's counsellor.
- Unit managers work closely with mainstream schools and external agencies to ensure that pupils access the professional support they need.
- Pupils know how to stay safe online. They understand the importance of keeping personal information private.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the effectiveness of leaders further by:
 - ensuring that members of the management committee understand their roles and responsibilities fully and provide effective challenge and support to senior leaders
 - developing the school's systems and procedures to track the progress made by pupils to include improvements in their social, emotional and mental health
 - checking on the quality of teaching and learning in both units regularly
 - making sure that the school's improvement planning contains measurable targets by which progress can be evaluated
 - establishing regular support and challenge from the local authority or another external body.
- Ensure that teaching leads to pupils making good or better progress by:
 - working in partnership with mainstream schools to establish each pupil's attainment on entry
 - using accurate assessment information incisively in all subject areas to plan work which meets individual pupils' needs
 - having the very highest expectations of the school's most-able pupils
 - providing teaching assistants with regular training to deliver more effective support to pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Improve pupils' attendance so that a greater proportion attend school, on time, every day.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Subject specialists from Thornhill Academy teach all of the lessons in the School Returners unit and some of the lessons in the Young Mums unit. Senior leaders have not checked on the quality of teaching and learning in the units. They have relied on observations of the subject specialist teachers in the mainstream school. Consequently, leaders did not have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching at the beginning of the inspection.
- Senior leaders identified accurately the strengths and areas for development of teaching and learning during joint observations of lessons undertaken during the inspection. The leaders provided honest and supportive feedback to staff. They noted that teachers do not challenge the school's most-able pupils to reach the very highest standards.
- A new system to track pupils' academic achievements was implemented during the summer term 2017. As a result, senior leaders are better informed about the progress and attainment of individual pupils and sizeable groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. The local authority funds pupils' places. Leaders' use of this funding does not ensure that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make good progress from their starting points. Leaders have identified correctly that pupils do not attend school often enough to make the progress required to catch up with their peers.
- Leaders have not done enough to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality. This is a key area for development in the school's improvement planning. Pupils are delighted that the rewards for attendance were reintroduced recently. They enjoy receiving certificates for improved attendance.
- The local authority does not check on the effectiveness of this specialist provision (the school) with sufficient rigour. This lack of oversight is especially concerning because of the impact on vulnerable pupils. At the time of this inspection, officers had not visited the school to check if leaders had addressed the areas for development that were identified during a review carried out at the local authority's behest over a year ago. The local authority identified a school improvement officer to support the school during the inspection.
- The two unit managers are passionate about improving the life chances of the vulnerable pupils who attend their settings. They have established warm and welcoming environments for learning in which each pupil's individual differences are celebrated. The managers work in partnership with the pupils, their families and a very wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils access targeted professional support.
- Leaders reviewed the curriculum recently. Their aim is for the rich diet of visits and visitors to entice pupils into school every day. A recent visit to Seaham to study the 'British Tommy' sculpture reflecting on the horrors of World War 1 has inspired the pupils to create their own remembrance sculpture in the school grounds. Pupils particularly appreciate their weekly music lessons that are facilitated by workers from the Sage, Gateshead. They are not as keen on the renewed emphasis on homework.

- Careers information and guidance are strong. All pupils access further education, training or employment at the end of Year 11. Leaders support pupils' applications, involve parents and offer personalised support to pupils during transition. Pupils who left the Young Mums unit at the end of the 2016/17 academic year went on to study health and social care at college, hairdressing at a local campus and mathematics and English GCSEs at B2b (bump to baby). The pupils who left the School Returners unit at the same time are studying a wide range of subjects, including hair and beauty, motor vehicles, graphics and art and design.
- The managers of both units work cooperatively and in partnership with the coordinator for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SENCo) from each pupil's mainstream school. They attend review meetings, provide information about the progress and attendance of pupils and contribute to support plans effectively.

Governance of the school

- Members of the management committee meet regularly and receive comprehensive reports from the unit managers.
- They do not support and challenge leaders with sufficient rigour because they do not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. A full review of the terms of reference of the management committee was already underway at the time of the inspection.
- The local authority has been slow to address the committee's shortcomings. During the inspection, a national leader of governance was identified to support the improvement of the management committee.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school works in accordance with the safeguarding policies and procedures of the host school, Thornhill Academy.
- The school's safer recruitment procedures and records are fully compliant with government requirements.
- Safeguarding records are stored securely. Records include a full chronology of events and the actions undertaken by the school when dealing with child protection incidents or concerns.
- Staff, including staff new to the school, are trained fully in all aspects of safeguarding. They are sensitive to pupils' needs and safety. Pupils told the inspectors that they feel safe in both units. All pupils have at least one trusted adult to talk to when the need arises.
- The unit managers work proactively with a wide range of agencies to ensure that the pupils have access to the specialist support that they require.
- All staff are aware of the need for pupils to attend the provision on a more regular basis. Unit managers make telephone calls to find out where the pupils are when they are not in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent across the school and across subjects. Pupils make the most rapid progress when the work they are set by teachers addresses the gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding caused by periods of poor attendance in their mainstream schools.
- Teachers do not use the information they have about pupils' prior learning consistently well to plan work that challenges pupils to achieve to the very best of their abilities. In mathematics, for example, pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11 are taught the same subject content at the same time. The work is too easy for the most able pupils and much too hard for the least able.
- Teaching and learning in English are strong. The subject specialist teacher uses assessment information well to plan bespoke work for all pupils. As a result, pupils experience success, their confidence grows and they make rapid progress.
- Teaching is also stronger in science. The specialist teacher works hard to gain pupils' trust to ensure that they have the confidence to use the laboratories in the host school. Pupils' poor attendance and timekeeping in the School Returners unit affect the progress they make in science. They miss too much of the specialist teacher's input to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' progress in the lessons in which their work is directed well. The quality of planning for teaching assistants is variable. Sometimes teaching assistants give their pupils too much help. They do not encourage pupils' independence sufficiently well. They have not accessed up-to-date training in the support of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development requires improvement.
- Pupils' self-confidence is poor. Many suffer from acute anxiety that is linked to their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Despite constant reassurance, the vast majority do not have the confidence to tell teachers when the work is too easy or too hard.
- The unit managers work hard to improve pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence. A recent and notable success involved six pupils accessing the host school's swimming pool for a lesson.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. They understand why they should not give out their personal information to strangers. Pupils know about the inherent dangers of sexting. One pupil told an inspector, 'Once out there, always out there.'
- Parents, responding to a recent survey of their views, are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school's provision, including the school's work to boost their children's self-esteem.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Both units are welcoming. School returners have access to a dedicated space in which to have some quiet time to think and reflect. They make appointments to meet with the school's counsellor and often confide in the unit's manager. Pupils feel safe and supported across the school.
- There are few incidents of poor behaviour and bullying in the school. When they do occur, behavioural incidents are linked to pupils' anxieties and their special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils do not attend this school often enough. Too many are late for school in the mornings. As a result, they do not make the most of the teaching, learning and assessment on offer. They do not make the progress that they could if they attended every day.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not make good progress from their starting points at the end of key stage 2 or their starting points on entry to the school.
- The small number of pupils who left the School Returners unit and the Young Mums unit at the end of the summer term 2017 did not make good progress overall. A small minority made good progress in English and mathematics. The majority did not. The most able pupils at the end of key stage 2 did not fulfil their potential. The disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils made similar progress.
- The school's newly established data-tracking system indicates that a larger proportion of pupils currently on roll are making better progress in English and mathematics this year. Again, current pupils who were the most able pupils at the end of key stage 2 are not fulfilling their potential. Currently, disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress. Pupils are making better progress in English than in mathematics because teaching is tailored carefully to their individual needs in English.
- Leaders are aware that the pupils do not make good progress because they do not attend often enough. However, the attendance of most pupils on roll in the school, while not good, is much better than when they were single registered at their mainstream school. Disadvantaged pupils attend less regularly than non-disadvantaged pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	135642
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10003928

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Headteacher	Ian Redford
Telephone number	01915 537735
Email address	ymsr.pru@schools.sunderland.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 March 2013

Information about this school

- School Returners/Young Mums is a pupil referral unit for pupils in key stages 3 and 4. School Returners and Young Mums are discrete units, providing individualised programmes of learning and support to pupils who have a range of vulnerabilities and complex needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The two units form part of the local authority's alternative provision. The units are funded by the local authority with payments of £10,000 for every pupil each academic year. This includes funding in respect of special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Many of the pupils who attend the School Returners and Young Mums units are anxious pupils. Most have a history of persistent absence.
- The School Returners unit is hosted by Thornhill Academy and has 18 pupils on roll. The Young Mums unit is located in Hendon Health Centre and has one pupil on roll. Each unit is led by a unit manager.
- Pupils in both units are dual registered, remaining on the roll of their mainstream school. All are of White British heritage.
- The pupil referral unit does not have a coordinator for special educational needs. The

SENCo at each pupil's mainstream school manages the provision for their special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Half of the pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. No pupils were eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium at the time of the inspection.
- Young mums access the on-site provision available to them in the health centre. This includes the B2b childcare provision, which is not run by the management committee and is subject to a separate inspection. Inspection reports of this provision are available on the Ofsted website at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.
- The local authority had a service level agreement, in respect of the pupil referral unit, with the governing body of Thornhill School during the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years. Thornhill School became a sponsored academy school, Thornhill Academy, on 1 September 2017. The local authority is currently arranging a service level agreement with the governing body of Thornhill Academy for the current academic year.
- Subject specialist teachers from Thornhill Academy teach pupils in both units, except for mathematics in the Young Mums unit.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across a range of subjects in both units. Observations, on both days of the inspection, were carried out jointly with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher of Thornhill Academy.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work to find out more about how well they were learning. An inspector read with a Year 8 pupil.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the units. A formal meeting was held with a group of four pupils, two from key stage 3 and two from key stage 4.
- The lead inspector met with the vulnerable children's services manager from Together for Children, the company that delivers children's services in Sunderland.
- Discussions were also held with senior leaders, members of the management committee, unit managers, subject specialist teachers and Thornhill Academy's coordinator for special educational needs.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school more broadly and looked at a range of documentation. These included policies, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school's improvement plan, data about pupils' attendance and safeguarding records.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil, parent and staff surveys. Inspectors considered the school's own recent survey of parents' views.

Inspection team

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Tudor Griffiths

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017