

Inspection of a good school: Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre

Maypole Road, Tiptree, Colchester, Essex CO5 0EW

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 November 2021

Outcome

Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre continues to be a good school.

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel that staff go out of their way to find out how well they are doing and to help them learn. Pupils value the school's excellent facilities and the additional activities provided for them in physical education (PE) and sport, music and performing arts. They like the new uniform introduced this year.

Pupils and sixth-form students say that the school has improved since the arrival of the new headteacher. They feel that behaviour in lessons is better. Pupils are encouraged to be more ambitious and aspirational. Pupils also consider that more improvements are needed. They want staff to act more promptly when they raise concerns about wanting to feel safe outside. Some want a more consistent approach to tackling bullying and harassment incidents. They would like more information about different jobs, the qualifications needed and how to manage money.

Until recently, pupils started studying GCSE and vocational courses in Year 9. Leaders have changed this. They want pupils to have more breadth and depth in their learning. Staff are revising curriculum plans so that all pupils gain a thorough grounding of knowledge, skills and understanding in key stage 3, so pupils are fully prepared for the next stage.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders took prompt action to check that all pupils remained safe and could continue to learn at home during the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time,

they looked closely at the school's overall performance. Leaders identified that improvements to the curriculum were needed. Leaders and governors share the same ambition and vision for the school and have worked together to bring about improvements.

Staff training has focused on the key components of an ambitious curriculum and what they need to do to develop five-year curriculum plans in their subjects. They have identified the end-points they want pupils to reach each year. Leaders have considered the order in which learning is taught so that pupils can build on what they already know and can do. Staff report that their increased workload is generally manageable. They feel well supported by leaders.

The implementation of the curriculum remains variable. In some subjects, pupils are still catching up on learning missed due to the pandemic. In a few subjects, leaders are at an early stage of developing their plans. Most pupils can recall what they have learned previously. They can explain how this had prepared them for new learning. However, not all teachers check that pupils fully understand the important information needed before moving on. Tasks set at the start of lessons help pupils to settle quickly and recall what they have already learned. At times, the learning of some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is left incomplete. These pupils do benefit from additional support provided by teaching assistants, but they do not learn as well in lessons where this support is not available.

Pupils have a broad choice of GCSE and vocational subjects. Teachers show a detailed understanding of course requirements, enabling them to structure pupils' learning and check on how well pupils are learning. An increasing proportion of pupils choose to study languages, enabling more of them to gain the English Baccalaureate qualification. Sixth-form students are provided with good study facilities and regular one-to-one support and guidance in small classes. An established partnership with the University of Essex and a consortium of other local schools enables students to pursue a broader range of subjects taught off site, such as law, government and politics, and economics.

The school is calm and orderly. Behaviour in lessons is usually good. Outside lessons, it is not as good as it should be. Records show that very few incidents of bullying occur. However, not all pupils feel free from bullying. Some pupils are not confident that they can approach staff to help them sort concerns out. Some pupils report that homophobic language is used too often. Staff do not always challenge 'banter' that some pupils find hurtful.

Older girls reported that they feel generally safe, but there are too many sexual comments and incidents of sexting. Leaders have recently taken action to raise awareness of what pupils and staff should do when these incidents occur. Girls feel that more still needs to be done to eradicate this unacceptable behaviour. Leaders have planned more training for staff to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

In discussion with the headteacher, inspectors agreed that ensuring that new curriculum planning is used consistently in all subjects, and improving the behaviour and attitudes of pupils outside lessons may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All of the necessary checks are made when appointing adults to work with children and young people. Experienced designated leaders oversee the safeguarding of all pupils. There is a culture of safeguarding.

Staff are suitably trained and understand their responsibilities if they have concerns. New electronic procedures are in place. Staff record safeguarding concerns systematically, and leaders follow them up in a timely way. Links with external agencies are well established. Access to the school site is carefully controlled.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have reorganised the curriculum. They have chosen to provide pupils with a three-year key stage 3. Subject leaders are currently updating their curriculum planning so that all pupils gain the knowledge, skills and understanding they need for further learning in key stage 4. Leaders should ensure that these revised plans are implemented fully as intended. They should also monitor and evaluate the impact the implementation of the new plans has on improving the quality of pupils' learning and progress.
- Behaviour outside lessons is not as good as it should be. Not all pupils feel free from bullying. Some pupils are not confident that if they raise concerns, staff will sort things out. There is too much homophobic language used, and pupils have concerns about inappropriate sexual behaviour. Leaders should take prompt action to ensure that all pupils understand the expectations of them around school. They must ensure that all pupils feel safe and know that if they raise a concern, staff will resolve matters fully, to a satisfactory outcome.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	137241
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10199705
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of students in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,208
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	160
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Neil Phillips
Headteacher	James Ketley
Website	www.thurstable.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 December 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than average.
- The school converted to an academy in August 2011.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2020.
- Most pupils are White British. A smaller than average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The school makes use of the following alternative provision: North East Essex Cooperative Academy, Essex; Heybridge Cooperative Academy, Colchester; CTP Training Academy, Witham; Rallysport Engineering Academy, Colchester; and Yarra Farm, Colchester.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, a range of middle leaders, support staff, early career teachers and three groups of pupils. An inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science and PE. This included discussions with subject leaders, visits to lessons, meetings with staff and pupils, and scrutinising pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record and met with the designated safeguarding leads.
- Inspectors considered 251 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, 66 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 148 responses and free-text comments to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents and carers.

Inspection team

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