

Inspection of Thornhill Academy

Thornholme Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7NA

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Thornhill Academy is an improving school. The leadership of the school, and many of the teachers, have changed a lot over the past year. This has brought about improvements which leaders are seeking to embed. The quality of education is improving because teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, many pupils lack confidence in their lessons and do not have the knowledge and understanding that they need to support their learning.

Pupils have an increasing number of leadership opportunities in school. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their contribution as digital and sports leaders. There are good and warm relationships between pupils and staff. However, some pupils do not behave as well as they should. Pupils said that the new behaviour system is beginning to improve things, but there is still disruption in some lessons. Outside of lessons, pupils do not routinely behave in a calm and orderly way.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know who to approach if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils say that there is some bullying in school. They know who to report bullying to, and they say that it is usually dealt with effectively. Inspectors' evidence supported this view.

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

Leaders have begun to put in place a more ambitious curriculum. The curriculum structure has improved, to make work more demanding. This structure shows the important knowledge that pupils should learn. In most subjects, it is planned logically. In some subjects, there is more work to do to ensure that pupils can build their knowledge and skills in the correct sequence. Pupils in key stage 3 are benefiting more than pupils in key stage 4 from these improvements because they are at an earlier stage in their education.

Teachers are placing more emphasis in lessons on how pupils can learn and remember important information. However, pupils often struggle to recall what they have learned. Teachers start lessons by revisiting important content from previous learning. They do not check regularly enough whether pupils understand this recap. This means that some teachers do not recognise gaps in pupils' learning. As a result, this limits the progress pupils make in the curriculum over time.

The school has an effective system for checking pupils' reading ability. Those pupils who struggle to read well have effective support. Reading recovery programmes have been in place for four years and this is working. There is less emphasis in school on reading for pleasure. However, leaders do recognise the importance of this and more reading activity is taking place, along with author visits. Pupils' understanding of the more technical language needed for some subjects, such as science and mathematics, is not strong. As a result of this, pupils' have additional barriers to overcome before they can learn new knowledge in some subjects.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are benefiting from a better experience in school. This is partly because the school curriculum has improved. It is also because other things are improving for these pupils, such as their attendance. Although the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has a good overview of pupils with SEND, individual teachers need more understanding of what strategies will help these pupils to learn more effectively.

Staff's morale at the school is high. They appreciate the support of the trust and school leaders in bringing about improvement. They feel well led. Staff say that leaders carefully manage their workload and consider their well-being. Subject leaders have received effective support and training to help them improve the curriculum.

Governors of the school are well informed, and they have a clear understanding of the priorities of the school. Although leaders at all levels have developed a shared vision for the school, and consistent practice is emerging, it is not embedded.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are improving, but they are not good enough. The number of suspensions has decreased. However, low-level disruption disturbs some lessons. Behaviour in the corridors and around the school is not routinely calm and orderly. An important part of the new behaviour system is for pupils to have restorative conversations with their teachers, rather than detention. Although some older pupils are sceptical of the new system, it is improving relationships and behaviour. The pastoral structure has changed. Instead of three heads of house, there are five leaders of year groups. As a result of this, accountability for and management of behaviour is clearer.

The school's personal development offer is improving. This is important, as many pupils have not been well prepared for the skills and attributes expected of them when they leave school. There are some good examples of leadership opportunities for pupils. A number of female pupils said they learned a lot from a programme to link them with high achieving women in industry. Work on mental health, diversity and fundamental British values are included in the curriculum, and pupils are beginning to discuss these issues in a more informed way. However, the work pupils access in the core curriculum, alongside the personal development programme, has not enabled enough pupils to be confident, resilient and independent.

Pupils receive independent careers advice. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 learn about local college courses and post-16 options choices. Many local colleges and education and training providers have visited the school. This means that the school meets the demands of the Baker Clause. Very few pupils leave school without a definite destination.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have robust systems in place to identify any safeguarding concerns. The school works well with other partner agencies that help to safeguard pupils. Support for pupils who need it is swift. The culture of safeguarding in the school is effective. This is achieved through regular training. Staff and governors have a good understanding of the specific safeguarding issues that are most relevant to pupils at this school and in this area. The guidance and personal development curriculum for pupils is planned so that pupils learn how to stay safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers' use of regular assessment strategies to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge is not consistent. For some pupils, this prevents them from taking the next step in their learning. Leaders should ensure that all teachers routinely identify and address pupils' misconceptions effectively.
- There are many recent appointments of staff at the school, including new leaders at all levels. A lot of the work to make improvements at the school is recent. Until recently, pupils have not always benefited from school initiatives. Leaders should ensure that staff across the school embed the values and policies that leaders have worked hard to establish.
- The application of the school's behaviour policy is not consistent. A significant minority of pupils are not behaving as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the behaviour policy is fully implemented so that behaviour in and out of lessons continues to improve.
- The programme of personal development does not do enough to ensure that pupils are confident in debate and discussion and that they are resilient and independent. Leaders should consider how the delivery of the personal development curriculum, alongside traditional school subjects, will support more pupils to demonstrate these attributes.

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	144990
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10200748
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	591
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Woodmancy
Headteacher	Susan Hamilton
Website	www.thornhillacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-size secondary school.
- The school is part of Consilium Academies, a multi-academy trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- A very small number of pupils attend registered alternative provision. This is delivered by Consilium Evolve and Beacon of Light.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- Inspectors met with members of the senior leadership team, including the designated safeguarding lead and those with responsibility for attendance, behaviour and personal development. We also met with subject leaders and the SENCo.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: mathematics, science, history and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and visited lessons in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with teachers, including early career teachers, support staff and pupils.
- The single central record was scrutinised, as well as the records the school holds on safeguarding.
- A range of documents were reviewed, including the school development plan and the school self-evaluation.
- Meetings were held with the trustees. An inspector had a phone call with the school's improvement partner.
- An inspector visited one of the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors considered the views given in Ofsted's online questionnaires by 51 parents and 40 members of staff.

Inspection team

Carl Sugden, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Sheriff	Ofsted Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Ofsted Inspector

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