

Inspection of a good school: Thistley Hough Academy

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

Inspection dates: 4–5 May 2022

Outcome

Thistley Hough Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Thistley Hough Academy is a caring school serving a diverse community. Staff know pupils well. Pupils are confident they will get support when they need it. They say bullying is rare and that if it does occur staff deal with it well.

Leaders are ambitious for every pupil. They have developed a broad, balanced curriculum to support this ambition in conjunction with trust leaders. Teachers deliver the curriculum well. Learning is planned to help pupils develop new knowledge in each lesson. Pupils work hard, showing pride in their work. As a result, they know more and remember more as they make progress through the curriculum.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils understand these high expectations and live up to them. There is a calm and orderly atmosphere most of the time. Pupils behave well in lessons and during social time. They feel that any poor behaviour is dealt with effectively.

Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities that extend beyond their academic studies. These include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, residential trips and theatre visits. The Combined Cadet Force plays a particularly positive role in the school. Large numbers of pupils develop their camping and survival skills through this provision.

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

There have been several recent changes to the schools' leadership team. The trust has managed these changes well. As a result, there has been minimal disruption to pupils' education. Trustees and school leaders know the school well. They are aware of the schools' strengths and what needs to be improved.

Leaders have developed an ambitious curriculum. Curriculum leaders and their teams carefully consider the information they expect pupils to learn in each subject. They ensure

that this information is set out in a logical order and that it builds on what pupils already know. Teachers make checks on how well pupils learn the curriculum. They use this information to support pupils who need extra help. This helps pupils to learn and remember more over time.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and plan well-thought-out lessons. They make necessary adaptations to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the curriculum. Lessons have clear structures that pupils understand. Staff encourage pupils to reflect on prior learning before developing new knowledge. Pupils regularly complete independent tasks to practise using this new knowledge. Typically teachers check that pupils understand what has been taught. However, occasionally they move on without checking pupils' understanding fully. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

The school has an effective approach in place to help pupils who are still learning to read. Teaching assistants skilfully deliver phonics lessons to some pupils. The approach is proving successful. Pupils told inspectors that they read much more confidently as a result of the support they receive.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is mostly positive. However, some pupils and parents feel that poor behaviour sometimes hinders pupils' learning. Leaders are aware of this and have introduced a new approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils say that this has resulted in improved behaviour. However, there have been a high number of suspensions this academic year. The number of suspensions is now decreasing but leaders are aware that there is more work to do to promote pupils' positive behaviour.

Pupils benefit from a range of well-planned opportunities that develop their aspirations for the future. These opportunities are planned as a part of the school's 'ambition curriculum'. Lessons provide pupils with opportunities to explore such areas as healthy relationships, keeping safe and understanding everyday finances. Pupils' careers education starts in year 7 and continues through to year 11. All pupils have careers interviews during key stage 4 and undertake work experience in year 10.

Adults are proud to work in the school. They are well supported by leaders who carefully consider the well-being of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture. They make sure that staff receive appropriate training to recognise pupils who are potentially at risk of harm. Staff are clear on the procedures they should follow if they have a concern.

The 'ambition curriculum' teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. For example, they learn about knife crime, healthy relationships and online safety.

Safeguarding leaders work effectively with a range of external agencies. They ensure that pupils get the support they need at the right time. Leaders check that any alternative providers they use are appropriate and safe for pupils to attend.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes teachers do not check thoroughly enough that pupils understand what is being taught. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that systems for checking pupils' understanding are applied consistently by all teachers in all lessons.

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 as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 22–23 March 2017.

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	139068
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10226951
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1002
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Anderson
Principal	Noel Kennedy
Website	http://www.thistleyhoughacademy.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	22 – 23 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses part-time alternative provision for a small number of pupils at three alternative provision providers.

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

- 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 the headteacher and other senior leaders. Meetings were held with curriculum leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and English as an additional language coordinator. Inspectors also met with a range of other staff and governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited

a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors visited a range of other lessons and activities outside the deep dive subjects. These included: geography, art and 'ambition curriculum' lessons. They also visited literacy support sessions and tutor periods.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of safeguarding information, including the school's safeguarding policy, spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding and looked at how pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. The lead inspector spoke to the safeguarding leader about the reporting and recording of any safeguarding incidents.
- Inspectors took account of the 'free-text' comments and the responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online inspection questionnaire. Inspectors also considered the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Eddie Wilkes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Neil Warner

Ofsted Inspector

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