

Inspection of a good school: Thurston Community College

Norton Road, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP31 3PB

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 March 2024

Outcome

Thurston Community College continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils benefit from the high aspiration reflected in the school's curriculum. They secure and retain important knowledge and produce high-quality work. However, for a small minority of younger pupils, this ambition is not always realised in their lessons. Some pupils struggle to remember what they have been taught.

There are a very small number of pupils who struggle to meet the school's high expectations of conduct. This causes interruption to some lessons. This frustrates other pupils who are well behaved, polite and respectful. Pupils have confidence in adults to help them if they need it. They feel safe in school. However, sometimes it takes too long for pupils to find out how the school has addressed the issue that is worrying them. This causes some pupils increased levels of anxiety while they wait for information.

Students in the sixth form enjoy high-quality learning experiences. They value the support provided by both pastoral and academic staff. Students value the independence that studying in a positive, calm college atmosphere creates. However, sixth-form students are not routinely part of the main school life. This results in opportunities being missed to enrich experiences for pupils and sixth-form students alike.

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

The school has given careful thought to what pupils need to know. It has precisely defined what knowledge should be taught and in what order. This supports pupils to learn and then apply important information to different situations. The curriculum design enables all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to achieve success.

Reading is integrated within the curriculum. Pupils access a broad range of engaging texts. They read widely across all subjects. The support for pupils who struggle with reading helps them keep up effectively.

Curriculum plans are generally transformed into engaging and well-thought-out learning experiences. Complex ideas are clearly and precisely explained in small, easy-to-digest pieces. Teachers use well-crafted examples to link these pieces together. They model clearly how pupils should construct their responses.

In most cases, teachers check carefully what pupils know. They spot gaps and identify misconceptions. When these are fixed quickly, pupils move on to successfully complete learning activities. However, in some cases, this checking lacks the same level of finesse and precision. Consequently, sometimes teachers are not fully aware of what pupils know and understand. They cannot adapt their teaching to meet individuals' needs, including for pupils with SEND. In these cases, gaps remain, and misconceptions continue. As a result, some pupils find it difficult to accurately recall important information.

The school has provided teachers with key information to support pupils with SEND. Strategies guide teachers to help pupils overcome individual barriers to learning. When enacted, these help pupils with SEND make similar rates of progress to their peers.

Expert teaching helps sixth-form students understand complex, often abstract, ideas. The work set by teachers is demanding. Expectations are high and students respond well. The curriculum content ensures students build on what they know, extending and deepening their knowledge.

The school has set high standards for how it expects pupils to behave. It has communicated these to all staff and pupils. However, the systems in place to manage pupils' behaviour are not consistently applied. Some teachers allow certain behaviours that others do not. This makes it difficult for some pupils to understand how to meet the expected standards. Many lessons progress without disruption. However, some pupils get frustrated by this inconsistent approach and the impact it has on their learning.

The personal, social, health and economics programme is well planned. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of important concepts, such as how to form a healthy relationship. Pupils also learn important information about careers. Pupils enjoy access to a range of educational providers, employers and other organisations. This provides pupils with the information they need to make informed choices. However, information about how individual subjects relate to specific careers is less extensive. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to participate in sport, the arts and general interest clubs. Pupils respect this offer.

Some staff feel that the impact of procedural or system changes on their workload has not always been considered. However, they recognise that recent changes to the leadership of the school have made this issue much better. The majority of staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not apply the school's policy to manage pupils' behaviour consistently. This means that some pupils struggle to understand what is expected of them and to meet the school's high standards. The school should ensure that all staff understand what is expected, are trained to deliver the agreed policies and then enact them consistently at all times.
- Not all teachers use assessment effectively. This means they do not have the information they need to adapt their teaching and move pupils on when they are ready. Pupils' learning is compromised. The school should ensure that all teachers use assessment strategies well and use this information to adapt their approaches to meet the needs of all pupils.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2018.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	124802
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10295017
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,501
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robert Davie
Principal	Maéve Taylor
Website	www.thurstoncollege.org
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 March 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The interim principal took up her post in January 2024.
- The school is currently working in partnership with a local trust: Penrose Learning Trust.
- The school operates across two campuses. Years 7 to 11 are based on the Thurston Campus, with sixth-form provision based on the Beyton Campus.
- The school uses four registered and two unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the principal and vice-principals. The lead inspector also met with governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To further inspect the curriculum, the lead inspector reviewed curriculum documentation for physical education and modern foreign languages.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector reviewed a wide range of documents, including school development plans, and policies and documentation for behaviour and attendance.
- To gather pupils' views, inspectors spent time observing and speaking to pupils. The lead inspector reviewed the 272 responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke with several staff and reviewed the 95 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- To gather parents' views, inspectors reviewed the 280 responses and 197 free-text responses submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Dave Gibson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Carol Dallas

Ofsted Inspector

Dan Leonard

Ofsted Inspector

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