

Inspection of Thornhill Academy

Thornholme Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7NA

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Sue Hamilton. This school is part of Consilium Academies, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Michael McCarthy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Fleetwood.

What is it like to attend this school?

Thornhill Academy is a warm and inclusive school. The school celebrates the diversity of its pupils. Many pupils join the school at different times of the year. They are often new to the country. These pupils are well supported by the school to settle in. Pupils value the diversity of cultures and the friendly community in school. Staff build an environment where pupils treat each other with respect. Pupils feel safe. They are confident to talk to each other and visitors.

The school has high expectations for all pupils. The school aims to be 'a place where all pupils have the chances that they deserve'. Pupils benefit from this ethos because of improvements in the curriculum and a wide range of opportunities to engage with extra-curricular experiences.

Behaviour around the school is calm. On the whole, pupils are focused in lessons. Where this is not the case, the school has clear systems to support pupils. Teachers and staff use these systems consistently. Pupils know that they have an adult who they trust and who they can talk to about any worries that they have.

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

The school is ambitious for its pupils. Leaders ensure that pupils study a wide range of subjects. Pupils take qualifications that allow them to progress to the next stage of their education. The curriculum has improved over time. This is helping pupils to learn a secure base of knowledge. The school has developed routines for the way pupils learn in lessons. These routines are not consistently in place. Sometimes, pupils are moved on to new learning before they are ready. Pupils do not routinely practise new learning to secure their understanding.

The school understands the challenges that many of the pupils and their families face. Many pupils arrive at or leave school at different times of the year. Leaders help pupils to address the challenges this brings. For example, additional teaching is offered for pupils who have gaps in their learning. Pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning English are offered additional support. There is a dedicated English as an additional language (EAL) team. This expert team guides teachers towards the best resources and strategies to help pupils with English as an additional language. The historical outcomes in external examinations do not reflect the improving curriculum and the good quality of education that pupils experience. These outcomes are also negatively affected by the high mobility of pupils.

The school accurately identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff receive appropriate training to identify pupils' SEND needs and the barriers to learning that they face. This means that pupils with SEND get the support they need to learn well.

The school has a planned approach to reading. Pupils are supported with different programmes to improve their reading. For example, staff use phonics programmes

appropriately to teach the weakest readers to decode words. All pupils read for pleasure daily and classrooms have a class library that is used by the pupils.

The school encourages pupils to attend school regularly and all staff are involved in giving attendance a high profile. The school has effective processes to support pupils to improve their attendance, including work with external partners. Attendance is improving. The highly supportive environment and pastoral care allows pupils to develop and improve. The school celebrates pupils' achievements. Pupils are keen to share their successes through regular events, such as 'wow Wednesday'.

Since the last inspection, the school has made changes to the personal development and careers programme. The school's aim for pupils to be 'world ready' is reflected in assemblies and the quality of careers information. Extra-curricular experiences take place during the school day to allow all pupils to take part. Additionally, most pupils take part in further enrichment events from a wide range that the school provides. Pupils feel that they have a voice in bringing about change in the school. They value this. Pupils have leadership opportunities through the student council. They are keen to be selected to serve.

Leaders at all levels have a clarity of the vision for the school. They monitor the actions taken to improve the school regularly. Leaders are vocal in their desire for the school to be at the heart of the community and to improve further. Staff are happy and proud to work at the school. They feel well supported. Staff are confident that leaders carefully consider their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some inconsistency in how well teachers are implementing the curriculum. On occasions, pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to practise or build their knowledge over time. The school should work with staff to ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently well across all subjects.

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	144990
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10323097
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	578
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Fleetwood
CEO of the trust	Michael McCarthy
Headteacher	Sue Hamilton
Website	www.thornhillschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 March 2022 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is part of the Consilium Academies Trust.
- The school experiences a high mobility of pupils. A large proportion of pupils move into, and leave, the school during the school year.
- The school has a high proportion of pupils whose first language is not English.
- The school currently uses three registered and one unregistered alternative provision.
- 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

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders, staff and pupils. They met with the chief executive officer and trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: science, modern foreign languages, history, art and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors visited lessons and considered how the needs of disadvantaged and pupils with SEND are addressed. They observed pupils at various times of the school day.
- Inspectors met with the leader responsible for reading to discuss the support for pupils at the early stages of reading.
- Inspectors spoke to representatives of the alternative provisions used by the school.
- 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.
- Inspectors scrutinised records relating to attendance and records of pupils who have joined or left the school roll.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Chris Fletcher, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Toni Spoons	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqui Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Julie McGrane	Ofsted Inspector

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