



Thornhill School, Business and Enterprise College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108860
LEA Sunderland
Inspection number 278064
Inspection dates 14 December 2005 to 15 December 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs Ann Wallis

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Thornholme Road
School category	Community		Sunderland
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Tyne and Wear, SR2 7NA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 5537735
Number on roll	1311	Fax number	0191 5537740
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Jim Clarke
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr John Hallworth

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	14 December 2005 - 15 December 2005	278064

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Thornhill is a mixed comprehensive school in an inner city area of Sunderland with 1311 pupils aged 11 to 16. It has had specialist status as a business and enterprise college for two years. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average. The percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language is above average, although only a few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges itself as providing a good education for all of its pupils and inspectors agree. The leadership provided by the headteacher and senior staff is good and they know the strengths and weaknesses of their school well. Thornhill School has improved since it was last inspected because of the effective measures put in place to raise standards. These have resulted in a significant improvement in GCSE results in 2005 and in all pupils making good progress as they move through the school. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that there is still more work to do to make sure that teaching and learning, although good overall, are of consistently high quality and that pupils are fully supported in reaching the challenging targets the school sets for them. The school has good capacity to improve further.

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils and the attention paid to their personal development and well-being are all good. Outstanding features of the school's work are its extensive links with the local community and its involvement in innovative and creative partnerships with primary schools and the local college. The school's own 'Arts included at Thornhill' is an outstanding creative arts programme that engages and challenges pupils, including those who find learning difficult. Pupils have benefited from the school's designation as a business and enterprise college and the curriculum now meets the needs of pupils well. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine and evaluate the current systems for tracking pupils' progress and support them in reaching their individual targets.
- Continue to improve teaching and learning so that they are of consistently high quality and give pupils increased opportunities to learn independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average and achievement is good. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average. There are fewer higher attaining pupils and more pupils with learning difficulties and with English as an additional language than is usual.

In the 2005 national tests in Year 9, standards were below average and lower than those of the previous year. However, these results represented satisfactory progress overall and good progress for higher attaining pupils compared to their prior attainment and potential. Targets were met in English and mathematics but not in science.

GCSE results improved significantly in 2005. Standards were average for pupils gaining results in the A*-C range and above average for the A*-G range. Very few pupils left school with no passes and those with learning difficulties achieved well. The school met its targets and exceeded the target for pupils achieving higher grades. Pupils performed best in science, religious education and business and communication systems. Results were weaker in engineering, languages and mathematics. The school is aware

that results in some subjects are not yet good enough but the measures it has already put in place to improve standards are now having a positive effect. The school's value-added data indicates that pupils' performance at GCSE was significantly higher than expected so pupils made good progress over five years. Compared to previous years the gap between boys' and girls' achievement has narrowed and no groups of pupils are underperforming.

Current standards and achievement in the school reflect the improved GCSE results of 2005. Progress accelerates as pupils move into Years 10 and 11 and is good overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Most pupils value the opportunities available to them, and like coming to school. Attendance overall is average. They have positive attitudes towards their work and behave well. They feel they are listened to and can make a contribution to change. Pupils say that they feel safe from bullying, knowing that they can talk to adults and to peer mentors who will help with any problems they have. Most pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They have access to a choice of healthy foods in school and are given opportunities to take regular exercise in physical education lessons and in a range of extra-curricular sporting activities. The school has developed an outstanding and extensive range of links with the community, and as a result pupils are active citizens and make an outstanding contribution to their community. Pupils make good progress with their understanding of work-related issues and have benefited from the school's specialist status as a business and enterprise college.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as exemplified by a powerful assembly which used rap music to extend pupils' understanding of world faiths.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, and some outstanding lessons were seen. The school is aware that the quality of teaching varies in some subjects and has put measures in place to resolve this. For example, good teachers have worked closely and effectively with other staff to improve teaching and therefore standards and progress, in religious education and geography.

In the best lessons pupils are motivated by interesting and enthusiastic teaching and encouraged to think for themselves. Praise is used well to encourage pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties. This was put to good effect in a Year 9 English lesson so that pupils made better progress than might be expected with a challenging comprehension task. The inspiring teaching in the innovative programme Arts Included at Thornhill challenges and engages pupils who might otherwise be difficult to motivate.

In lessons that are less successful, work does not always match the pupils' needs, and activities are pitched at too low a level. As a result, pupils make less progress and at times behaviour becomes challenging. Sometimes teachers do more work than the pupils because independent learning is not sufficiently encouraged.

In some subjects pupils' progress is tracked well. Pupils and teachers work together to set targets and informative marking helps pupils to gain a good knowledge of their learning and how to improve. However, this good practice is not yet used widely enough to improve standards in general.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. Good improvement since the last inspection has resulted in balanced programmes, including vocational learning, and supported improved standards. The curriculum meets the needs of individuals and groups, particularly through individual programmes for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Provision for personal, social and health education is now good; pupils report that they are fully supported in their personal development. The introduction of a business and communications GCSE course has ensured that the school's specialist status has had a substantial impact on achievement and supported pupils' skills essential to their future economic well-being. The range of activities to support how well pupils stay safe and healthy has enabled the school to achieve Healthy Schools' and Sportsmark's awards. The curriculum takes good account of how pupils develop. The school's partnership with primary schools and post-16 institutions has produced excellent arrangements that support all pupils. Pupils enjoy the many enrichment activities and wide range of extra-curricular choices, which are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This aspect of the school's work is good overall with some outstanding features. Child protection procedures are secure and fully in place, and carefully attended to. There are good procedures for assessing risks both around the school and when pupils take part in educational visits. The procedures for identifying the needs of both looked-after and vulnerable children are impressive. Decisions on how best to support these pupils by keeping them engaged in learning are agreed collaboratively with partner primary schools. Transition arrangements for all pupils at age 11 and age 16 are outstanding. Work-related learning is well developed and the school makes effective use of the Connexions service to advise pupils on career choices. Systems to track pupils' progress and identify where they need extra support in their learning are improving and the school has recognised the need for further training on using data to plan and support future learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school is good overall. The headteacher focuses strongly on raising standards and on ensuring that the school provides a safe, healthy and stimulating environment. Strong support is provided by both the senior management team and by middle managers. The headteacher's style of management is very open and his effective delegation ensures that all staff are fully involved in and contribute to the development of the school. The school has a good capacity to further improve.

Senior members of staff have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Development planning is thorough. Realistic but challenging targets are set at both whole school and departmental levels. The head and senior team conduct a stringent analysis of test and examination results and have taken effective action to deal with underachievement. For example an improvement to the range of courses offered in Years 10 and 11 has allowed some pupils to see greater relevance in what they are learning. This has led to a significant improvement in GCSE results in 2005.

Arrangements for monitoring the quality of learning and teaching and for sharing good practice continue to evolve and make a positive contribution to the development of consistent high quality across the curriculum. Where weaker departments are identified they receive high quality support. The tracking of pupils' progress, and in particular the linking of the outcomes to a programme of individual support for pupils who fail to reach their targets remains an area for further development.

Governors are committed and well informed, particularly about the school's impact within the local community. Financial management is good and effective prioritisation ensures the school provides good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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14 December 2005

Dear Pupils

Thank you for the welcome you gave to inspectors and for the valuable contribution you made to the inspection. We were impressed with your positive attitudes and the sensible way you voice your opinions. I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know what we have said about your school in our report.

Below is a summary of what we found:

Based on how well you were doing when you left primary school and on your potential, your school makes sure that you achieve well by the time you reach the end of Year 11.

Teaching in most of your lessons is good and sometimes it is outstanding.

Many of you say that you enjoy school and feel that it is a safe place to be

Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are good

Teachers help your personal development well and give you good care, guidance and support

This is what we have asked the school to do now:

Continue to help you achieve well by tracking your progress and supporting you in reaching your targets.

Continue to improve your lessons and give you more opportunities to think for yourselves.

You have every reason to be proud of your school and we hope that you will continue to work hard and attend school regularly.

Yours sincerely

A Wallis

(Lead inspector)