

Thurston Community College

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

Inspection dates

22–23 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal, through her determination and vision, has ensured that high standards have been maintained as the school has expanded to admit pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- Governors are professional and knowledgeable. They have a clear understanding of the school's priorities and they hold school leaders to account for their performance.
- School leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They focus on the right priorities for development, and rigorously monitor the success of their improvement plans.
- Leaders' actions have secured high-quality teaching, learning and assessment in almost all areas of the school's provision.
- Most groups of pupils, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged, now make strong progress from their starting points.
- The curriculum, including careers guidance, is of a high quality. Pupils are well supported and achieve appropriate post-16 and post-18 education, training or employment opportunities.
- Most parents speak highly of the school and would recommend it to other parents.
- The sixth-form provision is good. Students receive high-quality teaching and support, and are making good progress in most subjects.
- Pupils feel safe and are kept safe. Leaders have placed a high priority on addressing their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils are polite and respectful. A small number of pupils do not behave as well as their peers at breaktimes and during lunchtime.
- Overall attendance is above average. However, disadvantaged pupils do not attend as regularly as they should.
- In modern foreign languages, and occasionally in mathematics, pupils do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- On occasion, some teaching does not give clear enough guidance to pupils about how they can improve their learning. For example, the least able pupils are not being consistently well supported to develop their literacy and numeracy skills quickly.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop teaching and learning in modern foreign languages, and occasionally in mathematics, so that pupils can catch up where there are previous gaps in their learning.
- Enable pupils to make even more rapid progress, by:
 - providing the least able pupils with consistently high-quality support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills
 - ensuring that all teachers provide pupils with guidance in line with the school's assessment policy.
- Embed strategies to reduce rates of absence and persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and to improve the behaviour of a small number of pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal epitomises the school's ethos of, 'Inspire; Empower; Achieve'. In recent years, Thurston Community College has made the transition from being an upper school to admitting pupils in Years 7 and 8, under the local authority's reorganisation programme. The principal and other leaders have worked well with the other schools in the Thurston Partnership to ensure that pupils achieve good outcomes.
- The school's leadership has forged positive relationships with the local community, most notably in a recent campaign to retain bus transport for pupils. Most parents are very positive about the school and would recommend it to other parents.
- Leaders seek external quality assurance through the local authority, and make good use of annual surveys of parents, pupils and staff. As a result, their self-evaluation is based on thorough internal and external analysis and accurately identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plans are rooted in this accurate self-evaluation, and set out clearly what actions leaders need to take. Leaders regularly monitor the impact of what they do and amend their plans when necessary.
- Leaders are rigorous in how they hold staff to account for the achievement of pupils and this is supported by effective subject leadership. Subject leaders ensure that stronger teaching strategies are shared among staff, while weaker teaching is identified and supported to improve quickly. Against a backdrop of some difficult staffing turbulence, this group of middle leaders has ensured that teaching has improved.
- Newly qualified and trainee teachers are passionate advocates of the school and its pupils. School leaders support them well and subject leaders develop their teaching skills through regular mentoring and effective support.
- Staff morale is high and most staff are positive about the leadership and management of the school. This is because leaders have provided them with high-quality training and supported their development well at all levels. As a result, some learning support assistants have successfully retrained and qualified as teachers at the school.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' personal development, and helps to develop pupils' skills across a wide range of courses. This prepares them well for the next steps in their education, training or employment.
- Senior leaders regularly review the curriculum to ensure that it meets pupils' needs. They have worked closely with local primary schools to raise pupils' attainment in mathematics and modern foreign languages in preparation for the transition to secondary school.
- Leaders have ensured that the additional pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well. Some of this funding has been used to create an, 'inclusive learning room', where all disadvantaged pupils have access to a mentor. Most of these pupils also receive additional support in English and mathematics, and are consequently making steady progress.

- Leaders make effective use of the additional funding they receive for pupils who arrive at the school in Year 7 needing to catch up in English and mathematics. These pupils spend some of their lessons working in small groups with specialist teachers to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. They are now making good progress.
- Leaders in the sixth form have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in that provision. They understand the 16 to 19 study programmes well and have ensured that high standards and high expectations are now the norm.
- Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, although they are developing ways to ensure that more pupils engage with these opportunities routinely.

Governance

- The governing body has a secure and precise understanding of the quality of the school's provision, and of those areas that require further development. Governors receive regular, detailed reports from senior leaders. They use these to provide rigorous challenge and appropriate support to the principal and her senior leaders. Governors are tenacious in holding school leaders to account.
- Members of the governing body have an excellent set of skills and experience and are highly effective in carrying out their duties. They have ensured that the spending of the pupil premium and other funding is strategically planned.
- Governors use the assessment information provided by school leaders to establish a good understanding of the progress being made by all groups of pupils. They deepen their evaluation of the school's effectiveness through regular visits and meetings with pupils and staff.
- Governors fully understand their responsibility in relation to safeguarding pupils. The governor who has responsibility for safeguarding regularly undertakes visits to check on the school's procedures for keeping pupils safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders have ensured that there is a strong safeguarding culture in the school. Staff understand their responsibilities in relation to keeping pupils safe. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and understand the procedures to follow if they have concerns.
- Leaders ensure that they meticulously log and review any concerns about pupils. They maintain comprehensive records of the work that they undertake to support pupils, and work well with representatives from external agencies. They are tenacious in following up the referrals they make.
- All of the pupils that inspectors met said that they feel safe in the school and know who to speak to if they have any worries. Pupils say that they are confident that teachers would help to resolve any concerns that they had, quickly and effectively.
- Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that their children feel safe at school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most teachers are aware of pupils' starting points and use this information to plan learning that effectively meets pupils' needs. Teachers know their pupils well and establish positive relationships with them.
- Planning is a strength, particularly in English, mathematics and science, where teachers build logical sequences of lessons over time and focus on consolidating pupils' understanding. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and use their strong subject knowledge to plan lessons that challenge pupils' learning.
- The support and planning for those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. Most pupils, from their various starting points, are given tailored guidance about how to improve. Learning support assistants help pupils to overcome any misunderstandings so that they can participate and understand the lesson fully.
- Teachers use a good range and depth of questioning to explore pupils' answers and extend their thinking. Teachers are confident and skilled to develop pupils' initial responses further through increasingly complex and probing questioning. This was seen in most subjects throughout the inspection, including in mathematics, English, science, food technology, religious studies, French and physical education.
- Most teachers set homework regularly and use it well to enhance what pupils have learned in their lessons.
- Teachers check carefully with each other and with teachers in other schools that they are assessing pupils' progress accurately. This means that leaders are confident that the assessment information they receive and provide to governors is accurate.
- Most teachers use the school's assessment policy to give pupils clear guidance about how to develop their knowledge and skills in subjects. On a few occasions when teachers do not follow the school policy well, inspectors observed pupils making slower progress or repeating their mistakes. Most notably, some teaching does not promote high standards of literacy and numeracy for the least able pupils or help these pupils to improve the accuracy of their work.
- Teaching and learning in modern foreign languages, and very occasionally in mathematics, does not pitch learning at the right level. This means that some pupils struggle to complete work while others find it too easy. Consequently, pupils do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders are fully committed to ensuring that Thurston is an inclusive community school. The house system is a well-established part of school life and pupils participate and contribute fully in a wide variety of inter-house competitions.
- The school's 'inclusive learning team' provides first-class assistance for pupils who require additional support with learning, and works hard to engage with their families.

The school's own dedicated clinical psychologist provides prompt intervention for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health concerns.

- Leaders liaise regularly with the leaders of alternative provision and effectively monitor the attendance, welfare and progress of pupils who are educated elsewhere, to ensure that these pupils are successful and kept safe.
- Pupils take pride in their work. Their achievements, including the 'Thurston excellence award', are routinely celebrated. Pupils' work is clearly displayed and well maintained throughout the school.
- Pupils have a voice in the school community through their weekly college and house council meetings. Leaders also seek pupils' views through their annual surveys and take these views seriously, making some changes in response to pupils' requests and concerns.
- The support for those children who are looked after is particularly creditworthy. Pupils' personal education plans are detailed and ensure that pupils get a real 'voice' in their future. Specialist staff, including a clinical psychologist, ensure that pupils receive highly effective support for their social and emotional needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy school and say that they feel well supported. They say bullying is very rare and know that they can report their concerns anonymously via the red button on the school's website. Concerns of this kind are dealt with rapidly and effectively by staff.
- Most pupils, parents and staff consider that behaviour at the school is good.
- Lessons are purposeful and pupils work together, demonstrating a commitment to their learning. They usually support one another when they are tackling something new or tricky. Where a few pupils very occasionally disrupt learning, staff work hard to embed their high expectations with those pupils. Leaders make effective use of special support group meetings to monitor those pupils who need more support to improve their attendance or behaviour.
- A small number of pupils do not behave well outside the structured environment of the classroom during their free time at break and lunch. Leaders and governors have identified this as a vital area for continued improvement.
- Punctuality, both at the beginning of the day and throughout it, is good. The overall attendance of pupils is above average. Leaders have identified a recent increase in the persistent absence of some disadvantaged pupils and have robust systems in place to address this.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils typically enter the school with attainment that is well below average. From this low starting point, pupils in Year 11 in 2017 attained standards in English and mathematics at grade 4 or above that were in line with the national average for all pupils. In particular, pupils' progress in English and science was very strong.

- Pupils currently in the school in both key stages 3 and 4 are making good progress from their various starting points across many subjects, including in English, science and mathematics. This is reflected in the standard of pupils' work seen in lessons and the use of commercial tests to support teachers' assessment.
- Children who are looked after achieve well. This is because teachers and other staff identify in detail the individual needs of these pupils, and monitor their progress carefully.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress in both key stages 3 and 4. This is particularly the case in English and mathematics, and is improving in other subjects.
- Pupils who receive their education in off-site provision attend well and take part in courses which are suitable to their needs. Some pupils also access vocational college courses in motor vehicle maintenance, hair and beauty or construction as part of their key stage 4 qualifications. Leaders monitor their attendance, behaviour and learning well. These pupils are all making good progress.
- Leaders promote a culture of reading for pleasure and the well-stocked school library was busy at breaktime during the inspection, with pupils given the responsibility of acting as librarians. Pupils in Year 7 demonstrated good comprehension of the texts they were reading and resilience in trying to decode some tricky words. They said that they now read more than they did before, and that their reading has improved considerably.
- The proportion of pupils who move on to employment, education or training is very high. Pupils are complimentary about the quality of the careers advice and guidance they receive and just under half of them choose to continue their studies in the school's sixth form.
- The most able pupils are making strong progress in a range of subjects at key stages 3 and 4, especially in English. Most go on to highly academic courses in the school's sixth form. They are given significant support throughout key stage 4 to ensure that they are aspiring to key stage 5 courses that meet their interests and their ability. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum to offer better opportunities for these pupils to successfully study the separate sciences.
- Although improving, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 in 2017 did not make consistently good progress from their starting points, including the most able pupils. Leaders have further sharpened their support for disadvantaged pupils, and made more effective use of the additional funding that they receive. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are now making progress that is far more rapid.
- Pupils' progress in modern foreign languages was well below the national average in 2017. Although standards are still not high enough at key stage 4, they are improving, and pupils have started to catch up where there were gaps in their learning.
- In 2017, the progress made by less able pupils was below the national average. This group of pupils does not always make strong progress because some teachers are not always skilled enough in planning lessons that take pupils' prior learning into account.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the sixth form is strong. The curriculum offer is broad and meets the needs of the students here. While A-level provision is well embedded, leaders are successfully establishing curriculum pathways for students who would benefit from new applied courses. Leaders have developed excellent accommodation and supervision to ensure that students make the most of their individual study time. A small number of students undertake work experience which is carefully matched to their aspirations and needs.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers know their subject content and examination syllabuses well. They plan effectively to meet the needs of the full range of students in their classes, and provide them with highly individualised support. Students demonstrate high levels of independence in their learning and maintain their folders and books to a high standard.
- Leaders have recognised that students have not been making sufficient progress in some subjects, including mathematics, the sciences and art. They have implemented a range of strategies to address this which have been successful in improving the quality of teaching and have enabled students to make more rapid progress.
- Leaders use robust systems to monitor students' achievement. The raising standards leaders and academic tutors intervene quickly and effectively where students are underperforming or struggling to make progress. The school's own assessment information indicates that students overall are now making good progress. Those students who resit English and mathematics access high-quality teaching and support, and make strong progress.
- Students say the sixth form is a good place to grow, learn and excel, and one in which they feel well supported and safe. Attendance is very high and punctuality to lessons is an expectation which students meet consistently.
- Leaders place a high priority on community service and most students in Year 12 have undertaken some form of volunteering, which has included supporting pupils in younger years. They also play an active part in the management of the sixth form through the, 'Students' Union'. Together, teachers and students have built a positive and tolerant learning community where, as one student said, 'The mentality of accepting everyone for who they are is universal.'
- All students have an individual careers plan. They receive excellent careers information, advice and guidance and feel well supported to move to either education, employment or training. Recently, a leading astrophysicist talked about opportunities for women in science, technology and mathematics. Leaders have also published a list of books that students should read before going to university.
- The proportion of students completing sixth-form courses is above average and about eight out of 10 students attend university after leaving sixth form. A growing number are applying to the top universities in this country and abroad.
- The pastoral programme is strong and students learn about the importance of democracy and the right to vote. It does not, however, fully address the issue of radicalisation or promote the diversity of cultures in modern Britain.

School details

Unique reference number	124802
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10049025

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,737
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Dunn
Principal	Helen Wilson
Telephone number	01359 230 885
Website	www.thurstoncollege.org
Email address	admin@thurstoncollege.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	1–2 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school.
- At the previous inspection, Thurston Community College was an upper school with pupils in Years 9 to 13. It now also admits pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is lower than the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, is lower than the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend registered alternative provision with P.L.O.T Community Interest Company, and Thrive.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 61 lessons across a wide range of subjects and in all key stages. Some lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed tutor time and two assemblies and looked at pupils' work in lessons across all year groups.
- The lead inspector met with the principal, the two vice principals, newly qualified and trainee teachers, members of the local governing body, and a local authority adviser.
- Inspectors held meetings with the school's leaders who have responsibility for safeguarding, teaching, behaviour, attendance, sixth form and additional funding. An inspector held telephone conversations with alternative providers.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They listened to pupils reading and spoke formally with pupils from key stage 3 and key stage 4 as well as students in the sixth form. Over the two days, inspectors spoke informally with pupils about their learning and their safety.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's development plan, minutes of meetings of the local governing body, information about the attainment and progress of all pupils, records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, and information on the school's website. They also checked the school's single central register.
- Inspectors evaluated 355 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 132 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Peter Whear, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Pete Sewell	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Copping	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Bell	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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