

Thirsk School & Sixth Form College

Address: Topcliffe Road, Sowerby, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, YO7 1RZ

Unique reference number (URN): 121666

Inspection report: 24 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils generally achieve well, as national exam results show. Generally, disadvantaged pupils achieve in line with the same group nationally. In a small number of subjects, some disadvantaged pupils achieve very well. Leaders are focused on raising aspirations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make positive progress from their different starting points. Many pupils at the end of key stage 4 continue to access education or employment.

Typically, pupils progress well in each year group. They gain new knowledge and skills. There remains a small number of subjects in which some pupils do not progress as well as they could. Where this is the case, leaders are taking appropriate actions.

Students in the sixth form generally achieve well from their starting points. Over the past 3 years, students have typically achieved in line with the national average by the end of key stage 5.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have improved pupils' attendance over time. While the attendance of some pupils remains lower than it should be, there are fewer pupils who are persistently absent or severely absent from school. The systems and processes that are triggered when a pupil is absent are structured. Leaders work effectively with families, local community groups and the local authority to help more pupils to be in school regularly. Leaders and staff recognise how missed lessons negatively affect pupils' learning. Leaders' approaches to supporting attendance are consistently reviewed and refined to ensure that they remain effective and meet pupils' changing needs.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is conducive to learning. Lessons are typically calm and pupils learn without disruption. Staff follow the behaviour policy consistently. Similarly, pupils understand the expectations around behaviour and strive to meet them. The impact of leaders' work around behaviour can also be seen in the reduction in the number of suspensions over the past 3 years. Bullying is an area where staff proactively encourage pupils to share and tell an adult. If any incidents arise, leaders deal with them in a timely manner. Understanding what bullying is and its effects is part of the school's taught curriculum.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of teaching across the school and the areas that need further development. They make timely changes to the curriculum that help to meet pupils' needs. Curriculum design has a clear focus on knowledge recall and building on what pupils already know. In some instances, leaders have worked with external partners to further develop the curriculum and how it is overseen.

Leaders have recently focused on approaches to learning. Lessons typically share a common approach to how new knowledge is introduced. However, in some subjects, there remains variability in this. Furthermore, some staff are not consistent in how they check on what pupils know and remember. At times, this limits the ability of some pupils to build their knowledge effectively over time.

Leaders ensure that those pupils who need support with their reading, writing or mathematics receive the help that allows them to make rapid progress.

Professional development supports teachers to maintain thorough subject knowledge. Staff from all subjects and year groups, including sixth form, have a drive to continually improve their practice. Where needed, teachers adjust learning for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This ensures that they access the same curriculum as their peers. Leaders ensure that staff understand the individual needs of pupils known to children's social care. This helps to ensure that any barriers to learning are effectively reduced.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Pupils have a passion for learning more. Pupils' starting points do not define the end point they can achieve. Leaders draw on expertise within and beyond the school to meet pupils' needs. The school's work with the local authority is a true partnership. This is especially helpful for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Support plans for pupils with SEND and other barriers to learning are clear. Staff make learning accessible for everyone. At times, some pupils access short-term support. This support helps pupils to manage being in school and supports them in fully accessing the learning in class.

The school works effectively with a variety of alternative education providers. The decision for pupils to attend these provisions is always in their best interests and with a view to returning to Thirsk School on a full-time basis as soon as possible.

The large site involves significant pupil movement. This gives staff a chance to talk to pupils informally and see how they are doing. Inspectors observed staff allowing pupils time and space to reset and regroup when necessary. Adults' relationships with pupils offer the support that keeps the day running smoothly for most.

The school directs extra funding, such as the pupil premium grant, to areas that enhance the experiences and learning of disadvantaged pupils. The impact can be seen in subjects such as humanities, where disadvantaged pupils achieve very well.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leadership and governance give clear direction and support to staff and pupils. Leaders use a broad range of information to assess how the school is doing and identify areas for improvement. This is done in a timely fashion and helps leaders and staff improve their practice for the benefit of pupils. Leaders ensure that improvements to the school are further supported through effective training.

Governors work closely with leaders and know the school's context well. They offer support and challenge. This helps leaders focus on priorities linked to the school's vision. Governors visit the school, review information and gather feedback from a range of sources. Safeguarding visits help governors ensure that pupils are safe and well supported. Governors improve their work by partnering with external agencies to review school performance.

Leaders prioritise inclusion and ensure pupils with barriers to learning receive appropriate support. Leaders share pertinent information with staff. This helps pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to get the right support. Leaders are mindful of staff wellbeing. They have established a range of approaches that reduce workload pressures. These are appreciated by staff.

Leaders and governors know the school's strengths. They also understand its priorities well. Where improvements are needed, leaders are taking effective steps. The work of governors and leaders creates a supportive environment where staff feel valued and pupils are able to succeed.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Personal development at Thirsk helps pupils grow in confidence, kindness and independence. Leaders ensure pupils learn how to stay safe, make positive choices and respect others. In personal, social and health education lessons, as well as assemblies, pupils explore key topics such as those related to mental health and wellbeing, safe relationships and online risks. They also learn how to ask for help when they need support. Staff listen to pupils and give support right away when needed. This helps pupils feel safe and cared for.

Pupils show respect for people from varying backgrounds. They learn about different cultures, faiths and identities through trips, clubs and activities. For example, pupils visit museums and galleries, which helps their schoolwork. Pupils join sports clubs and music groups to build teamwork and friendships. Many pupils enjoy activities. They like rugby, cricket, jazz group, badminton and the allotment club. More pupils have joined clubs over time. This is especially true for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff have worked well to support and encourage a greater uptake of clubs from these pupils.

Leaders help all pupils understand the world of work. Pupils in Year 10 and students in the sixth form take part in work experience with local employers. Teachers include careers guidance in lessons. Pupils meet guest speakers and attend careers fairs. Pupils also learn to care for others. For example, one pupil led fundraising to support young people in Zimbabwe. Pupils understand fairness and the importance of helping others. Pupils learn about respect, democracy and fairness. This helps them become responsible members of society. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or work.

The sixth form at Thirsk helps students prepare well for their next steps. Leaders provide a suitable range of courses, including A levels and vocational subjects. Leaders provide a bridge programme for students who need extra support. This helps them move to the right course based on their interests and starting points. This is a very beneficial route for some students, leading to positive outcomes.

Students gain from useful careers and pathways guidance. This includes guest speakers. The careers programme helps sixth-form students. It shows them the options they have at the end of their respective courses.

Leaders provide many opportunities for students to develop wider skills. Students take part in leadership activities. They also carry out charity work. Enrichment events include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Students in the fundraising project support local and global causes. Students join clubs, go on trips and take part in performances. This includes drama and music productions. These experiences help students develop teamwork, communication skills and resilience. Leaders keep a close eye on students' progress and offer extra support when needed. This includes targeted help in subjects such as mathematics and chemistry. Students receive regular feedback to help them improve their work. Typically, students achieve well.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

'Be more Thirsk' is the inspiring mantra that welcomes everyone into the school.

Staff instil ambition and high aspirations in the pupils. The pupils are confident, polite and eager to share their views. They discuss many topics, from current affairs to scientific debates. Care and compassion underpin the high aspirations staff have for the pupils. Staff and the pastoral team ensure that pupils get the help they need when they need it. Pupils' attendance has improved and is typically in line with national averages. Leaders recognise the need to continue to build on this.

Pupils in all year groups add value to the school. They make the school welcoming and embrace diversity. Behaviour in school, both in lessons and during social times, is generally calm. When pupils do not meet staff's expectations, a kind word from an adult often helps them fix their mistakes. Pupils know bullying is harmful. When staff become aware of bullying, they take swift action to address it. This helps pupils to feel safe.

The school offers a broad curriculum for all. Students can study new subjects when they move into the sixth form. Subject-specialist staff make learning engaging. Students value staff's commitment to the subjects and their love for teaching. This helps students get ready for their next steps in learning. Many of them move on to higher education. National test results are generally positive, although there is variation in a few subjects.

The school helps pupils make a difference to society. They take on leadership roles in the school and local community. There is a sense of community and mutual support. Older

students support pupils in earlier years through mentoring. This creates a bond across year groups and enjoyment in passing the mantra on to new pupils.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure a consistent approach to curriculum and teaching so that across all subjects, pupils gain detailed knowledge and achieve well.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers effectively use assessment information to identify and address any gaps in pupils' key knowledge.
 - Leaders should continue to build on the recent improvements around attendance to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors is Nick Horn.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, a selection of governors and a representative of the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses 3 alternative provisions, one of which is unregistered.

Headteacher: Miss Emma Lambden

Lead inspector:

Richard Jones, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Christine Durand, Ofsted Inspector

Angela White, Ofsted Inspector

Lucy Gowland Toner-Gowland, Ofsted Inspector

Dan Brinton, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 24 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,014

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,255

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

22.95%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.25%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

17.55%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	38.8%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.9%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	27.7%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	43.5	46.0	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43.6	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	42.0	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.07	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.04	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	19.4%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	12.5%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	4.2%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	31.6	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	30.5	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30.8	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.88	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.37	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	19.4%	53.1%	-33.7 pp
2023/24 (final)	12.5%	53.1%	-40.6 pp
2022/23 (final)	4.2%	52.4%	-48.3 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	31.6	50.4	-18.8
2023/24 (final)	30.5	50.0	-19.5
2022/23 (final)	30.8	50.3	-19.5

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.88	0.16	-1.04
2022/23 (final)	-0.37	0.17	-0.53

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	94%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	94%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	93%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	30.35	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	32.85	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	31.72	34.16	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	9.0%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	10.3%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.0%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	23.8%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	29.2%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	24.0%	26.5%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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