

Inspection of a good school: Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School

Silverton Lane, Rothbury, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 7RJ

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 July 2022

Outcome

Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are friendly, confident and immensely proud of their school. Relationships between pupils and teachers are respectful and caring. Pupils say they feel safe in and around the school.

A culture of learning, care and celebration permeates the school. Leaders are ambitious for everyone to do well. Classrooms are brimming with praise and encouragement. Pupils listen carefully in class, work hard and talk knowledgeably about their learning. Incidents of poor behaviour and disruption to learning are rare.

Pupils understand the difference between 'falling out' and bullying. They are adamant that bullying is rare and that if it does happen, staff take it very seriously, investigate and sort things out.

Pupils take on a range of responsibilities from 'House Captains' to 'Buddies'. Pupils enjoy reading every day and appreciate having a wide range of books in the library. Pupils have a lot of fun taking part in the wealth of clubs running at lunchtimes.

Leaders have enhanced the curriculum with many trips and visits into the local area and further afield. For example, Year 5 pupils were delighted with their recent stay at Kingswood Activity Centre. Older pupils enjoyed learning about both careers and geography on a field trip to a local quarry.

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

The curriculum is ambitious and interesting. Subject leaders have identified the important knowledge that pupils need to know. Curriculum plans are well sequenced and in a logical order. Important knowledge and vocabulary develop securely over time. In a geography

lesson, pupils expertly used subject specific vocabulary. They discussed the impact of physical and human processes on cliff protection.

Leaders are proactive in seeking out ways to further develop and enrich the curriculum. They work closely with other leaders locally, and with national subject associations, to ensure that curriculum plans prepare pupils well for their next stage of learning.

Teachers revisit previous learning every lesson. This helps pupils to remember important knowledge over time. Teachers regularly assess pupils' knowledge to identify any gaps as a result of the pandemic. They ensure that these are addressed before moving on. Teachers explain new concepts clearly. Effective questioning is used to assess pupils' understanding and deepen their thinking.

Leaders promote a love of reading across the school. All pupils read every day. They read a wide range of high-quality texts. Staff check that the texts match pupils' reading ability. Pupils enjoy taking part in reading competitions. They talk knowledgeably about the books they have read and why they have enjoyed them.

Skilled staff carefully assess pupils' reading fluency and identify any gaps in their phonic knowledge. Pupils at an early stage of reading receive regular phonics lessons. Some pupils receive help to improve their reading fluency. They gain confidence quickly through working in small groups. Importantly, the books pupils read are carefully matched to their phonic knowledge. Consequently, this helps them to catch-up quickly and develop a genuine love of reading.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) study the full curriculum. The special education needs co-ordinator (SENCo) has created carefully considered plans that detail the individual support they require. However, teachers' use of these plans is inconsistent. Some teachers do not use these to support them in making appropriate modifications to the curriculum. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not learn and remember important knowledge as well as they could.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves healthy, both physically and mentally. They talked confidently with inspectors about the importance of tolerance, liberty and democracy. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven throughout the curriculum. Recently, when visiting Vindolanda as part of the history curriculum, pupils were deeply moved as they considered this ancient fort and its people. A vibrant careers programme helps pupils to begin to understand opportunities for the future.

Governors and trustees visit the school regularly and know the school well. Staff well-being is a priority for them. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of care and vigilance at the school. Leaders complete appropriate recruitment checks on the suitability of adults who work at the school. Staff value the regular training and updates they receive from leaders. Leaders act quickly to support vulnerable pupils. Records are carefully maintained and the school works well with external agencies to help pupils and their families.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when using mobile technology. For example, Year 6 enjoyed learning about hazards and how to keep safe on a recent visit to a multi-agency, interactive safety centre in Newcastle.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not consistently use the bespoke learning plans in place for pupils with SEND to inform their curriculum offer. In some cases, appropriate modifications to the curriculum are not made. As a result, pupils with SEND do not always learn or remember important knowledge. Leaders should ensure that staff are confident in how to use these individual plans and make appropriate adaptations. This will ensure that the curriculum is accessible to 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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School to be good in April 2011.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

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.

School details

Unique reference number	145639
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10227783
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Colin Pearson
Headteacher	Mr Liam Murtagh
Website	www.drthomlinson.the3rivers.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- In April 2018, Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School joined the Three Rivers Learning Trust.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school is a Church of England school. Its most recent section 48 inspection took place in May 2016.
- Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School converted to become an academy school in April 2018. When its predecessor school, Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer, the deputy headteacher, a trustee, the chair of the local governing body, two governors and other members of staff.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and geography. 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 also listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lesson visits and at breaktimes. Pupils shared their views on behaviour in discussions.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents and records relating to safeguarding, checked the school's single central record and met with the designated lead for safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View which included free-text comments. They also considered the responses to the Ofsted staff survey and the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Janice Gorch, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Bernard Clark

Ofsted Inspector

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