

# Thistley Hough Academy

**Address:** Thistley Hough, Penkull, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 5JJ

**Unique reference number (URN):** 139068

## Inspection report: 2 June 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 achieve well at Thistley Hough Academy across almost all subjects. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment is significantly above their peers nationally, with these pupils attaining very well, particularly in English and mathematics. This positive achievement in core subjects contributes positively to disadvantaged pupils' achievement across the curriculum and their ambitious next steps to sixth forms, colleges and training across the city.

Sometimes, pupils join the school not ready for secondary education or not having undertaken a key stage 2 assessment. The school identifies these pupils and ensures that they get the support they need in literacy and numeracy. As a result, generally, these pupils achieve well from their starting points.

Typically, pupils are well prepared for their next steps. After attending Thistley Hough, the vast majority of pupils go on to positive destinations, colleges and apprenticeships.

### Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders' strategic work to improve the curriculum and teaching is having a positive impact on the school, particularly at key stage 4. The curriculum is ambitious. It is sequenced so that pupils build their knowledge securely over time.

Typically, teachers teach well. They give pupils work which helps them to practise their skills and embed their knowledge. Sometimes, particularly in key stage 3, teachers do not identify which parts of a subject pupils have not learned well. When this happens, pupils do not make the progress that they are capable of. The school has a development priority to make checking for pupils' understanding at key stage 3 even more consistent.

Teachers support pupils effectively to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. When pupils arrive in school not having secured the foundations in literacy and numeracy they need, the school identifies this and supports them effectively.

Pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from teaching which meets their needs.

### Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school accurately identifies when pupils have additional needs. It works collaboratively with parents and other partners so that pupils are seen and understood. Leaders pinpoint the specific barriers to pupils' success. They make sure that teachers have the information they need so that, generally, they support vulnerable pupils effectively in lessons.

Leaders' strategy to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils is effective. They evaluate the impact of the spending of funding for disadvantaged pupils and adapt their plans when they need to. As a result, disadvantaged pupils consistently achieve well. They thrive in school and afterwards, going on to positive and ambitious destinations.

The school has a deep understanding of the needs of pupils who are looked after. They work effectively with other partners to meet these pupils' needs. Leaders also identify where pupils have multiple needs which could become barriers to their success. Leaders from different teams meet regularly and review their support for these pupils. This means that pupils with heightened vulnerabilities are supported to attend well, feel a sense of belonging in school and achieve well.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Expected standard** 

Leaders at all levels have an accurate and detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. School and trust leaders and trustees are passionate about the particular community the school serves. They make decisions in the best interests of pupils. They have identified that pupils' behaviour needs to improve further. Leaders are swiftly and effectively addressing this. Their approach includes effective training for all staff in building even better relationships with pupils. Staff typically value this and other professional development opportunities.

Those responsible for governance have made sure that the strategy to utilise the extra funding for disadvantaged pupils has a very positive impact on these pupils' outcomes.

Staff feel that leaders always have pupils' best interests at heart. They enjoy the collaborative culture in the school, and feel that when they raise questions around workload, leaders listen and take effective action.

Parents are positive about the school, saying that many staff inspire their children to do well and that the school is a caring place where pupils' needs are well met.

## **Personal development and wellbeing**

**Expected standard** 

The school places a lot of emphasis on pupils' personal development and wellbeing. It has designed a curriculum and a range of experiences which directly address the school's values of respect, resilience and responsibility. This curriculum is appropriate because it reflects the particular needs of the community and promotes high aspiration. Leaders review its contents and sequencing regularly to better meet pupils' needs. They dedicate significant time to it. As a result, pupils' knowledge about life in modern Britain, building strong and respectful relationships, active citizenship and how to keep themselves safe and healthy is developing over time. Leaders have made sure that staff are well trained to teach the curriculum.

The school offers a wide range of enrichment activities, clubs and experiences. These include a well-designed leadership programme for pupils to develop their citizenship knowledge and skills. Leaders monitor the extent to which groups of pupils, particularly vulnerable pupils, take part in enrichment activities. They take effective action to widen access where this is needed. Pupils who are vulnerable feel a sense of belonging in school because leaders work specifically to make certain they take part in wider school life.

Leaders have ensured that the careers programme is fully integrated into the curriculum. They make sure that careers provision meets the needs of the local employment market and give pupils a wide range of aspirational experiences. Pupils feel particularly well prepared

for their next steps, and the school's work has a particularly positive impact on pupils' sustained destinations.

Pupils know whom to go to if they have any issues with their wellbeing. Leaders have reflected on the school's culture of care for pupils and have improved this significantly. As a result, those who need help get it, and pupils feel positive about the increased understanding staff have and the care the school has for their wellbeing.

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## Needs attention ●

### Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention ●

Leaders understand the patterns and trends in pupils' attendance and behaviour well. They analyse data and take appropriate actions in response. Typically, pupils attend school well. When pupils have specific barriers to their attendance, the school gives them appropriate support to help them. Sometimes, pupils struggle with punctuality. Leaders' work to improve pupils with this is effective and so pupils' punctuality is beginning to improve.

Leaders' work to reduce bullying has been effective, and pupils say that bullying is dealt with well in school. The majority of pupils behave well and follow the school's expectations of respect for one another and personal responsibility. Leaders do not allow pupils' misbehaviour to disrupt lessons. The school suspends a significant minority of pupils more than once when their behaviour falls short of the school's expectations. Additionally, a significant number of pupils spend time in the school's isolation room each day. Leaders' strategic plans to reduce suspensions and internal exclusions are appropriate and are beginning to support better behaviour, but it is too soon to see the impact of this.

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

Thistley Hough is a school that has improved significantly. As a result, pupils typically enjoy coming to school. Pupils attend well and have positive relationships with school staff. They particularly benefit from the school's leadership development programme, which prepares them effectively for community leadership in the future.

The majority of pupils at Thistley Hough Academy work hard and achieve in line with their peers nationally. Disadvantaged pupils achieve very well. This means that all pupils, including those with different vulnerabilities, are prepared well for their next steps. Many get the qualifications they need to go on to a range of exciting and interesting destinations, studying challenging qualifications or work-based learning.

Many pupils demonstrate the school's values of respect, resilience and responsibility. They have a positive attitude towards their peers, staff and their learning. However, pupils' behaviour does not yet meet the school's high expectations. Too many pupils are suspended or miss their lessons because of their behaviour.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school. If they have any problems, including bullying, they are confident that adults in school will help them effectively. Teams of leaders work effectively together to make sure that pupils are known well and have the support they need to enjoy school, belong and achieve well.

Pupils who face a range of difficulties find that the school supports them very well. The school helps to break down the barriers to their success. As a result, they attend better, enjoy school more and begin to thrive.

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## **Next steps**

- Leaders should continue to improve teachers' expertise in checking pupils' understanding in key stage 3 so that pupils' knowledge gaps are more swiftly filled.
  - Leaders should continue to improve pupils' punctuality so that lateness further reduces.
  - Leaders should continue to improve pupils' behaviour so that fewer are suspended or miss lessons due to internal exclusion.
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## **About this inspection**

This school is part of Creative Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Nicole McCartney, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Abbie Churton.

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 pupils, trustees, members of the trust's central and executive teams, leaders and staff during the inspection.

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.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Principal: Michelle Lawrence

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**Lead inspector:**

Dan Owen, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspectors:**

Martin Spoor, Ofsted Inspector

Jacqueline Newsome, Ofsted Inspector

David Hermitt, Ofsted Inspector

Peter Bassett, 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 2 June 2026

**School and pupil context****Total pupils**

**1,095**

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**

**1,050**

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: 1,154

## **Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)**

**38.90%**

Above 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**

**2.28%**

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**

**15.62%**

Close to average

### **What does this mean?**

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

National average: 13.4%

## **Location deprivation**

**Close to 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 (final)	51.5%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	42.6%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.9%	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 (final)	47.9	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44.5	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)	0.23	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.19	-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 (final)	32.9%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	23.4%	25.2%	Close to average

### 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 (final)	41.1	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	37.6	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	38.6	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)	-0.07	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	-0.15	-0.57	Above

## 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 (final)	32.9%	53.1%	-20.3 pp
2023/24 (final)	25.0%	53.1%	-28.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	23.4%	52.4%	-29.0 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 (final)	41.1	50.4	-9.3
2023/24 (final)	37.6	50.0	-12.4
2022/23 (final)	38.6	50.3	-11.7

## 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)	-0.07	0.16	-0.23
2022/23 (final)	-0.15	0.17	-0.32

## 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 (revised)	90%	92%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	90%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	82%	94%	Below

## 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 (3 term)	8.5%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.6%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	8.9%	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 (3 term)	24.5%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	23.3%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	27.5%	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.

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