



SEND Inclusion Award (SENDIA)

Verification Report

School name:	Thorns Collegiate Academy
School address and postcode:	Stockwell Academy, Quarry Bank. DY5 2NU
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Head teacher:	Nikki Jones
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Award verifier:	Hannah Hall
Award adviser (if applicable):	N/A
Date of verification:	Thursday 15 th May 2025

Commentary on the evidence provided:

Thorns Collegiate Academy has demonstrated a strong, clear and inclusive vision for SEND provision.

The documentation provided, both on Award Place and in our meetings, and including the SEND policy and School Development Plan, demonstrates the school's commitment to meeting the needs of SEND Learners across all areas of school life.

The SENCo plays a key role in implementing this vision, with the active involvement of an incredible team within inclusion and the senior leadership team. The presentation at the start of the verification day showed clearly the journey the school has been on over three years, and the next steps they will take to further underpin their SEND strategy and commitment to Inclusion and achievement for all. The motto of "baby steps, but make them stick" underpins the implementation of strategy and systems at the school, and this was evident in the processes the SENCo has introduced at the school.

Strengths identified during verification:

There is excellent leadership and commitment to SEND at the school, and a commitment to Inclusion is embedded in the overall ethos at Thorns Collegiate Academy.

The leadership team work collaboratively- ensuring the trap of falling into leadership silos of 'behaviour', teaching & learning' and 'SEND' is avoided. As a result, every system, policy and strategy that is discussed, planned, and implemented is analysed through the lens of SEND & Inclusion.

It was inspiring to hear how passionately the teaching and support staff talked about the change groups they are part of and how these have informed effective and sustainable developments. Wellbeing, Pastoral and SEND work extremely effectively together, triaging individual cases to ensure the most effective provision and intervention

The Inclusion teams designated roles and specialisms means that there is expertise and capacity to support Learners, their families and the staff within school highly effectively.

The extended contracted hours means there is the capacity for support staff to receive training, communicate with families, prepare resources, support transition and liaise with teaching staff to ensure seamless and effective provision.

The space that has been created to provide specific interventions and group work is a beautiful environment. The nurture room, sensory space and SLC room have been thoughtfully planned and resourced.

It was great to have the opportunity to speak with some Learners accessing the base in their social times. They valued having the option to regulate and reset in a safe, calm space.

There is regular, proactive communication with families – through a variety of means and often suited to the individual parents needs and preferences.

Parents are actively involved in, and consulted with, regarding their child's provision and progress, both academically and socially and emotionally.

The school was inspected in 2024 with Ofsted observing "The school has done much to develop a culture that celebrates success, reinforces high standards and is truly inclusive"

Thorns have implemented a relational and restorative approach towards behaviour, moving away from punitive systems that were not right for the context and demographic of Learners and their families at the school. This includes restorative conversations as a an alternative to the traditional detention. The school provides Learners with the tools to be able to self-regulate, and the language to be able to self-advocate through these processes. This further demonstrates the schools commitment to social justice.

The graduated approach is embedded withing the school. All staff understand their responsibility towards meeting the needs of every Learner they teach, and where there is concern about progress or wellbeing there is a clear system of referral. Alongside clinics and CPD there is much opportunity to seek guidance and reflect on best practice both formally and informally.

Ofsted noted “The school identifies and supports pupils with special educational needs well. Up to date and accurate information is shared with teachers so they know how to best support each pupil. Teaching staff then work closely with support staff to make sure that pupils with SEND learn well”. As a result of SEND being highlighted as best practice following a cross trust peer review, other areas of the school have replicated their systems and approaches.

Impact:

Ofsted noted Parents and Carers have seen the impact of the support the school has put in place for their children, with one being quoted “The SEND support is brilliant and inclusion team are always quick to respond”

This sentiment was reflected in the meetings I had with families. They told me they received amazing support from Deb (SENCo) and team. They were effusive about the transition plans the school had put in place and the highly effective model of key workers meant they received regular and supportive communication from the school.

The Inclusion team walk alongside families and their children, with one parent telling me “Deb and the inclusion team have been incredible for me and my son – school wise and personally. When I met them, and working with them, I knew everything would be fine. This time last year I was a nervous wreck now I feel seen and heard”.

As a result of the many CPD opportunities, the information provided, and the joined up strategy from all senior leaders, staff are empowered and confident to meet the needs of Learners with SEND in their classrooms, and around the school.

Due to the shared responsibility, professional expectations and high priority given to SEND and Inclusion at Thorns, Learners feel safe, that they have a voice, and are fully included, embraced and celebrated in all aspects of school life.

Areas for development:

Continue to provide opportunities for families of children with SEND to engage in coffee mornings, workshops to develop their own knowledge and skills, and in reviewing policy and plans for SEND and inclusion where appropriate.

Research ways of increasing the use of assistive technology across the school and with families.



Further adaptations/enhancements to the physical environment of the school, for example, carrying out a sensory audit to review corridors, classrooms and social spaces to ensure further inclusivity and regulation.

Verifier recommendation:

Thorns Collegiate Academy has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to fostering an inclusive environment for Learners with SEND. The evidence provided strongly supports the school's adherence to best practices and highlights numerous strengths across all areas of SEND provision. Learners at Thorns thrive within this inclusive learning environment.

Thorns is well- deserving of the Optimus SEND and Inclusion Award and is highly recommended for accreditation.

Thank you so much for a thoroughly inspiring and uplifting day.

Head teacher comments:

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