

Thornaby Academy

Baysdale Road, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 9DB

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Improvements in students' achievements in mathematics lag behind those in English. There is too much variation in the progress students make in different subject areas.
- The progress made by different groups of students, especially the most able, disabled students and those with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, is improving but it is still slower than their peers.
- Teachers' comments on students' work are sometimes too hard for less able students to understand. Some teachers' questioning skills do not extend students' thinking.
- Students do not always follow-up teachers' written comments and so continue to make the same mistakes. They do not routinely think things through for themselves.
- Students' writing skills are underdeveloped.
- The number of students who are persistently absent remains too high.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are bringing about rapid improvements in students' achievements, behaviour and attendance.
- Teaching is improving strongly because leaders provide detailed and exacting coaching.
- Students have strong relationships with adults and with each other. Their conduct around the academy and in classrooms is mature and sociable. Students feel very safe.
- Leaders have resolved significant staffing issues and the academy is well placed to sustain improvements.
- Leaders and governors make robust and regular checks on the quality of the academy's work and use their findings to plan carefully for improvements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 parts of lessons and checked students' work in books. Three lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also made a series of short visits to lessons.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, staff, members of the governing body and representatives of the academy's sponsors.
- The inspectors spoke to students in lessons, at break and during lunchtimes. They also spoke formally to two groups of students.
- One inspector heard students read.
- The inspection team observed the academy's work and looked at a range of documentation, including the academy's plans for the future and ongoing reviews of those plans. They also looked at behaviour logs, records of racist incidents and the academy's safeguarding arrangements.
- Two inspectors toured the academy with students.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for inspectors to consider. Inspectors took into account parents' views collected by the academy as part of its self-evaluation.
- Inspectors took account of 20 responses to the staff inspection survey.

Inspection team

Joan Hewitt, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Kennedy	Additional Inspector
Graeme Clarke	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- The academy is much smaller than the average secondary school.
- The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national figures.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those whose parents are in the armed services) is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students registered as disabled or with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average, as is the proportion of students supported at school action plus. The proportion of students supported through school action is also above the national average.
- The academy has alternative provision arrangements with Aspire and the Bishopton Centre. There are 11 students currently attending these provisions.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increasing the amount of good or better teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers use questions more effectively to challenge students and extend their thinking
 - making sure all teachers give students time to follow up the written comments on their work
 - refining teachers' marking so that less able students have a precise understanding of what they need to do to improve their work
 - ensuring teachers consistently challenge the most able students
 - making sure teachers give students plenty of opportunities to think things through for themselves.
- Continue to accelerate students' achievement, especially in mathematics, by:
 - ironing out the remaining inconsistencies in the progress made by different groups of students in all subjects
 - improving students' writing and presentation skills.
- Continue to reduce the number of students who are persistently absent.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' achievement is improving. The number of students who gained five good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics rose sharply last year but remained below the national average. The results in mathematics were disappointing last year and lower than the academy had predicted. However, after intensive work, teachers' checks on the quality of students' work is now more accurate. The academy's internal data show the results for the current Year 11 are likely to be much closer to the national average.
- Progress in English is improving and is becoming a strength in the academy. Students' achievement in mathematics has not improved at the same rate as in English. This is partly because the academy found it difficult to recruit appropriate staff after the last inspection. However, staffing is now stable and current progress in mathematics is picking up speed quickly.
- The most able students do not make as much progress as others because, in recent years, the academy has had too narrow a focus on helping students achieve C grades at GCSE. This included entering students early for mathematics. This has resulted in most able students not being stretched enough. Leaders have changed this approach and students across all abilities are now making better progress. Consequently, this gap is now closing steadily and students' progress in Key Stage 3 is gathering momentum.
- The progress made by disabled students and those with special educational needs lags behind others, especially in mathematics. However, this too is improving quickly. Specialist staff provide expert advice and, as a result, teachers are becoming more skilled in providing well judged support.
- Students for whom the pupil premium provides additional funding are catching up rapidly with other groups of students. They were about half a grade behind in English and mathematics last year.
- Students' reading skills are improving. Lively displays and comfortable areas in the library promote their love of books. Students use sensible strategies to tackle unfamiliar words confidently. The Year 7 'catch-up' funding has been used well to fund small group work and, as a result, students have improved their literacy skills and mathematics skills.
- Students' writing and speaking skills have not improved as quickly. Students' handwriting and presentation is untidy and this leads to a lack of precision which slows their progress especially in mathematics and science. Students have more opportunities to write extended pieces but this is not consistent in all subjects.
- Leaders take a keen interest in how well students who attend alternative provisions are doing. They visit them regularly and have good plans to help around half of them to return to the academy to continue their studies. The progress made by these students in English and mathematics is variable.
- Students' attitudes to learning have greatly improved. They enjoy most of their lessons and work together well. However, they often lack the confidence to think things through for themselves and seek the teachers' help too quickly.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and there is a growing proportion of good and better teaching. Students say teaching has improved a lot over the last year or so and they have more opportunities to work together and complete practical tasks. However, despite this strong improvement since the last inspection, teaching is not consistently strong across the academy and the quality varies within subject areas too. Consequently, students' progress echoes this variation.
- More teachers are becoming skilled in offering the most able students a good level of challenge but this is not consistent. There are still times when able students are satisfied with work that is

not their best or complete work that is too easy.

- Teachers' marking has also improved. Teachers put in a lot of time and effort to make sure they stick to the academy's policy. Students' work is marked regularly and helpful comments point out how they can improve their work. On the whole, most teachers check that students follow up on these comments but this does not happen all the time, especially if a student has been absent. Sometimes, comments are too difficult for less able students to understand.
- Where teachers have very high expectations, students respond with energy and enthusiasm in thinking things through for themselves. For example, Year 7 students made good progress in understanding glacial movement because the teacher used skilful questions to make them think hard. She encouraged them to use books and displays so that they found out the answers for themselves. This good practice is not a common feature across the academy.
- Teachers are providing students with regular opportunities to think about different cultures and social issues. Reading is promoted well and teachers make good use of 'the word of the week' to help students use a wider and imaginative vocabulary.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because many students ask teachers for help too quickly and do not try to work things out for themselves. Consequently, they have not developed a love of learning and lack confidence when they come across difficult problems.
- Students are proud of the new building and look after it very well. They keep it clean and tidy and there is very little litter. Midday staff say students are polite and friendly. Students look smart and take a pride in their appearance, shirts are tucked in and ties worn properly. Breaks and lunchtimes are relaxed affairs during which students spend time chatting with their friends and with staff. Some choose to read in the comfortable and well stocked learning resource centre.
- Older students remark on how much behaviour has changed over the past few years. Indeed, they are firmly of the opinion that the academy is, 'like a different school'. Major disruption to lessons is now a rare occurrence and students say behaviour in class is generally calm and positive. However, they also report that this is not always the case and, in a few classes, students chat too much and this slows their learning.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are respectful of different views, religions and cultures. They have a good understanding of different types of bullying, including homophobia. They can explain how to deal with any unpleasantness if it occurs. They have a great deal of faith in staff to deal with problems swiftly.
- Attendance has improved so that it is now close to the national average. There are still some groups, such as disabled students, those with special educational needs and those who are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, who do not attend as well as other groups but this is evening out steadily. Exclusions are reducing quickly and securely. There are fewer students who are persistently absent but numbers remain stubbornly above the national average.
- Academy staff work very well with different agencies. There are compelling examples of where students have been supported to overcome significant and complex difficulties, resulting in better attendance, behaviour and progress.

The leadership and management

are good

- The Principal has led the academy through demanding and difficult times. Her steadfast determination to improve the academy has inspired students and staff alike to aspire to be the very best they can.
- She is capably supported by senior leaders who have an eye for detail and give unstintingly of their time. It is this unswerving dedication that has steered the academy in bringing about clear improvements in all aspects of academy life but especially in students' achievement and

behaviour.

- Leaders have tackled difficult staffing issues with vigour. They have eradicated inadequate teaching. Recruiting teachers of the right quality has not been easy and the academy was without a subject leader in mathematics for some time. Leaders and governors resisted the temptation to settle for second best and students are now reaping the benefit of some well judged appointments.
- Middle and senior leaders set high expectations and use systematic coaching to improve teaching. Consequently, there is a significant and growing proportion of good and better teaching. While there is still a way to go before it is consistently good, improvements are secure and students are making better progress throughout the academy.
- Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is strong and supported by work in many subjects. They have plenty of chances to go on trips and there are frequent visitors to the academy. Teachers' improved approach to behaviour management has resulted in warm relationships. However, students have a tendency to rely on their teachers' help too readily and this sometimes results in a lack of confidence.
- At the time of the last inspection, the gaps between the progress made by different groups of students were wide. The academy's improved tracking and swift action to get students back on track has resulted in these gaps closing quickly so that disadvantaged students are getting a fair chance to succeed. The academy's actions to secure equal opportunities and tackle discrimination are sound.
- Leaders know the academy well, although their evaluations are slightly generous. They have identified the right priorities and plans to bring about improvements are considered, effective and timely. Plans show exactly what improvements leaders anticipate they will see at various points in time. This clarity leaves staff in no doubt about what is expected of them.
- The academy offers an appropriate range of subjects for students to follow and the increasing emphasis on students' literacy skills is helping them to improve their reading skills, although writing skills are less well developed. Parents are positive about the progress students are making. The new building is being used well to enhance the local community. The academy is a busy place and a hub for all kinds of community learning and leisure.
- The sponsors provide strong and effective support for the academy. They are well aware of the strengths of the academy and offer robust challenge. For example, they make arrangements for external checks on how well the academy is doing. They have also ensured the academy is outward looking. One example of this is that the Principal contributes to the local authority's work with students at risk of leaving school without taking up further education, employment or training.
- Significant success has been achieved in the last year or so and continues to gather pace. This success and the transformation of culture is testament to academy's strong capacity for further improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are skilled and effective. They have a detailed knowledge of the strengths of the academy and equally the challenges that remain. They visit the academy regularly and keep a close check on how the quality of teaching is improving.
 - There are appropriate systems in place to check on the performance of teachers and this is currently being reviewed and strengthened. Governors are robust in ensuring teachers are rewarded fairly for doing a good job but equally fair in challenging underperformance.
 - Governors have ensured the pupil premium funding is used wisely and their checks have demonstrated clear improvements in the achievement of those students for whom it is intended. However, their attendance is not as strong as other groups and they are excluded more often than others.
 - Governors have made sure safeguarding requirements are not only met but that best practice is established.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136121
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	425677

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Academy sponsor led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynn Parker
Headteacher	Maryssa O'Connor
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2012
Telephone number	01642 763244
Fax number	01642 761318
Email address	m.oconnor@thornabyacademy.org.uk

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