

# Thistley Hough Academy

Thistley Hough, Penkhull, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 5JJ

## Inspection dates

13–14 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b> <b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good 2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- In 2014 achievement fell well below the government's minimum expectations.
- Rates of progress are improving this year for all students, but are not yet rapid enough for all year groups.
- Although gaps in achievement for disadvantaged students are narrowing in English and mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 4, they are closing more slowly at Key Stage 3.
- Teaching, particularly at Key Stage 3, is not yet good enough to ensure that all students are doing as well as they should, given their abilities.
- Recent actions taken to improve students' literacy skills have not yet had a significant impact.
- Significant turnover in staff over the past year has made it difficult for leaders to make the necessary improvements to teaching. Recent improvements have not yet had sufficient impact on raising achievement.
- A full leadership team has only very recently been established. This has meant that actions taken to improve achievement have only recently had an impact at Key Stage 3, so that there is too much focus on providing extra support to help students catch up at Key Stage 4.
- Although the academy's evaluation of its performance is accurate in many aspects, leaders have not taken enough account of national expectations when assessing their impact on improving outcomes for students.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students with English as an additional language make good progress.
- Behaviour is good and students enjoy coming to school.
- Leaders have taken appropriate action to establish systems and procedures to tackle underachievement.
- The governing body holds leaders to account, asks challenging questions and knows the academy well.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first inspection since the school became an academy in September 2013.
- Inspectors observed teaching in 26 lessons, of which eight were joint observations with academy leaders. A number of shorter visits were also made to a range of other lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of students, representatives from the local authority and the Multi Academy Trust, Staffordshire Police Prevent officers and members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was also held with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- A range of academy documentation was scrutinised, including: self-evaluation information; assessment and student progress records; policy documents, including those for safeguarding; and case studies for vulnerable students.
- Inspectors evaluated work from students in Year 7 to Year 11 in English and mathematics.
- Inspectors took account of the 13 responses on the Parent View online questionnaire and the academy's own information about parents' views. Inspectors also took account of the views of the 26 members of staff who responded to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Merryl Ford, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Woodhouse	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Royston Halford	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Thistley Hough Academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary academy. It is sponsored by the Creative Education Academies Trust. It converted to academy status in September 2013.
- About a third of students are disabled or have a special educational need, which is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by pupil premium funding is well above average. (The pupil premium is extra funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those students who are looked after.)
- For more than a third of students English is an additional language, which is more than double the national average. The largest minority ethnic group is of Pakistani origin.
- Some Key Stage 4 students attend alternative provision in the locality which is monitored by the local authority. Five students attend The Phoenix Centre, eight students attend Reaseheath College, one attends the Bridge Project, one attends Merit, one attends Groundworks, two attend Sporting Stars and one attends Equality Training.
- The school makes provision for newly arrived students with English as an additional language on behalf of the local authority.
- In 2014 the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Take rapid action to improve teaching, particularly in English at Key Stage 3, so that it is at least consistently good, and brings about more rapid improvement in students' achievement, by:
  - ensuring that the good practice in marking seen by inspectors in mathematics is shared and embedded across all subjects
  - improving teachers' use of questioning so that students are challenged to explain and develop their responses
  - ensuring that teachers' planning takes into account students' differing starting points in order to extend their existing knowledge and understanding, including how teaching assistants will be deployed to improve the progress that students make
  - regularly monitoring the quality of homework set to ensure that it supports consolidation and extension of learning.
- Improve leadership and management, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching, by:
  - ensuring that the culture of high expectations communicated by leaders is shared by all staff, so that teachers, particularly of Key Stage 3 classes, have high expectations of what students can achieve and plan and deliver lessons that encourage students to aim high and achieve well
  - ensuring that self-evaluation takes full account of how the academy's performance compares with all schools nationally
  - increasing the focus for improvement on Key Stage 3, so that gaps in achievement between groups of students are reduced more rapidly and high quality teaching at Key Stage 3 reduces the reliance on extra support activities to help students catch up at Key Stage 4
  - ensuring that the actions taken to improve levels of literacy are embedded throughout the academy so that the early signs of impact, evident during the inspection, are secured and extended.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management

### require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because in the fifth term since the academy opened, leaders have not yet secured good teaching. Consequently, although now improving, the progress of students who left the academy in 2014 was well below the government's minimum expected standards.
- Not all staff have the necessary high expectations and aspiration to ensure that all students make rapid progress. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 3.
- The recent work to address poor literacy skills is in its infancy and has not yet had time to have significant impact.
- Pupil premium funding was not used well enough in the previous year to address the wide gaps between disadvantaged students and others. This year, improvements made to the academy's monitoring systems for students' progress are ensuring that funding is targeted more accurately. As a result, gaps are closing, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Self-evaluation is not always as rigorous as it should be. This is because leaders, in some of their overall judgements about the impact of leadership and management, do not take full account of weaknesses in teaching or in achievement over time and how this compares to national averages.
- The academy offers a broad and balanced curriculum (the subjects taught) but this does not yet encourage a thirst for knowledge and love of learning among students. This is because in many subjects teachers do not take account of where students are in their learning when planning and delivering their lessons, so that there is too often a lack of challenge. Consequently, students are not encouraged to strive to learn more.
- Leaders now monitor the progress of students rigorously. They know where there is underachievement and are increasingly taking targeted action to address the gaps in achievement for different groups, particularly in Year 11. However, their actions have not yet secured sufficiently rapid progress in all year groups.
- The development of a 'flight path' approach to monitoring students' progress is beginning to have an impact on raising students' aspirations. This is because, where teachers are using the new system well, students can see clearly whether they are on track to achieve their targets. Academy leaders believe this system of measuring progress will be appropriate when the present National Curriculum levels are removed.
- Significant staff turnover in the past and an incomplete leadership team have limited the ability of leaders to improve achievement and the quality of teaching. More stable staffing, a full leadership team, including very recent appointments to lead English and mathematics, are now beginning to have a positive impact. In addition, all middle leaders are now held accountable for the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility and for the achievement of students.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. Leaders are rigorous in ensuring that all staff are appropriately trained, including those new to the academy.
- Leaders at all levels have worked hard to ensure that systems and processes established to improve both behaviour and attendance have had a positive impact.
- The academy works well with local agencies to support its social, moral, spiritual and cultural development programme. As a result, students develop a good understanding of right and wrong and the vast majority of students can accept responsibility for their behaviour. They understand the importance of respecting the beliefs and values held by the many different faiths and cultural traditions within the academy, and are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- The academy's own records of parents' views show that the vast majority are happy with the provision made. A very small number of parents who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire did not feel that the academy was making good provision for their children.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted throughout the academy and any discrimination is tackled quickly.
- Leaders rigorously monitor the progress, attendance and behaviour of students who attend alternative provision. All providers are checked by the local authority to ensure health and safety compliance and to monitor the quality of teaching.
- Students report that they are well supported through the academy's careers advice and guidance programme. In 2014 all students progressed to further education, employment or training.
- The academy trust keeps in close contact with academy leaders. Regular meetings focus on improvements secured or progress made and priorities for further improvement. The trust has introduced external moderation of assessments of students' work at Key Stage 4 to ensure that judgements about rates of

progress are increasingly accurate.

#### ■ **The governance of the school:**

- Although relatively recently established, the governing body has a good understanding of the academy's strengths and its areas for further development. They are aware that the impact of actions taken so far is yet to be fully realised, but are confident that the ambitious vision they have for the academy will be achieved over time.
- Governors know how the pupil premium is spent and can discuss the impact it is having this year in narrowing the gaps in achievement for these students. Governors have a good understanding of systems for managing teachers' performance and know which teachers have moved up the pay scale and why. They are well informed about the quality of teaching in the academy. They have an independent understanding of the academy's performance information and challenge underperformance appropriately.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

#### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. Attitudes to learning are very positive in the vast majority of lessons and subjects. This is evident both in lessons and in students' books, which demonstrate the pride taken in their work.
- Behaviour around the school at lunch and break time is almost always good. The few instances of boisterous behaviour seen by inspectors were usually dealt with quickly by staff.
- Academy records show that behaviour has improved significantly over time. Leaders analyse patterns of behaviour regularly and actions are put in place rapidly. Consequently, although exclusions are still above the national average, they are reducing rapidly.
- Nearly all students show respect for each other, for staff and for their environment. Very little litter was seen around the building and no graffiti.

#### **Safety**

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Systems are robust and all staff know exactly what to do if issues arise.
- Rates of bullying are low and students feel that any incidents are dealt with rapidly and effectively. They say that they feel safe in the academy and at alternative provision placements, and that staff do not tolerate discriminatory language or behaviour.
- Students are taught about the different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They know how to keep themselves safe in a range of different situations, including on line, and can provide examples of how to do this. They say that staff listen to them if they have problems and they feel confident that action will be taken to address any problems.
- Attendance was well below the national average, but is now improving rapidly. This is because processes to follow up absence are rigorous and the academy works closely with the local authority to implement additional strategies to combat any seasonal rises. Coupled with the rewards system for good attendance and punctuality, this is having a significant impact so that attendance is now close to the national average.

### **The quality of teaching** requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, over time, it is not ensuring that most students make the progress they should, particularly at Key Stage 3. This is because not enough account is taken of students' starting points when teachers plan learning activities.
- Where teaching is not yet good, the pace of learning is often slow because the most able are not sufficiently challenged and the less able do not always get the support they need. Consequently, progress over time has not been rapid enough.
- Questioning is not used effectively enough by all teachers to provide stretch and challenge. In some cases only a very few students are involved in whole-class discussion activities, so that teachers do not know how well all students have understood the intended learning.
- There is variation in the quality of marking across subjects. The vast majority of teachers are applying the academy's marking policy, and good practice is evident in mathematics. However, not all teachers are ensuring that advice given helps students to understand what they need to do to improve and this is

particularly the case in English at Key Stage 3.

- In some subjects, there is insufficient support for developing writing skills, particularly for the less able.
- Teaching assistants take good care of the students they support. However, they are not always utilised effectively to improve students' progress. Inspectors noted that few lesson plans seen indicated how teaching assistants were to be deployed or the impact they were expected to have.
- Some homework set is useful and engaging but, too often, inspectors noted that either there was no homework set or it consisted of worksheets that simply repeated the learning that had taken place in the lesson, without consolidating or extending it.
- Inspectors saw good teaching in a number of subjects, including mathematics, science and art, history and religious education. These lessons were characterised by high expectations. Students' books showed that work was matched well to their abilities, offered challenge and actively encouraged them to seek out new knowledge and understanding for themselves.
- For example, in an English lesson with less-able students, there was consistent challenge throughout, a rapid pace and very effective use of questioning that kept students thoroughly engaged and making good progress.
- All teachers assess students' progress regularly in line with the academy's assessment policy.
- The teaching of reading is now explicit for those students who are below the standards expected for their age. All students are being encouraged to develop a love of reading through the daily reading sessions recently introduced. However, across the curriculum, not all teachers focus sufficiently on improving students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Some teachers are now checking with students whether the strategies they use in lessons are helping them with their learning. Students say that this is very useful, because they can explain what helps them the most and these teachers respond to their comments.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because until very recently students have not made sufficient progress, particularly in mathematics and English. In 2014 the rates of progress made by too many students in Year 11 were significantly below national minimum expectations for all students. Although when the re-sits for GCSE entries are taken into account, the academy did meet minimum standards, achievement remains well below national averages.
- The most-able students, those who attain at least a Level 5 at Key Stage 2, do not make the progress that they should. For instance, in 2014 only 63% of students who entered the academy at Level 5, made expected progress in mathematics and only 19% did better than expected. In English only 48% of the most able made expected progress and 11% did better than expected.
- In 2014 the progress of disadvantaged students, from the majority of starting points, was consistently less than that of other students in the school. In English at Key Stage 4, disadvantaged students attained, on average, over a grade below other students in the school and more than two grades below students nationally. In mathematics, they were a grade behind other students, and more than a grade and three quarters behind other students nationally.
- This year, the academy's monitoring shows that the gaps between disadvantaged and other students in the school are narrowing, although in Key Stage 3, and particularly in Year 8 they remain too wide. Academy leaders are aware of this and have put appropriate actions in place to reduce the gaps more rapidly.
- The curriculum and support provided for disabled students and those who have special educational needs are now improving, following a review of provision. Although students with a statement of special educational needs made similar progress to that of all students nationally in 2014, other students with special educational needs did significantly less well than national averages.
- Progress has improved this year, particularly in Key Stage 4. The academy's records show that current Year 11 students, who have been in the academy longer, are now making progress that is much closer to current national averages. Records for Year 10 students show a similar picture.
- Students with English as an additional language make good progress. This includes those who attend the academy temporarily as part of the provision for new arrivals to the city, which the academy provides on behalf of the local authority. The achievement of students of Pakistani heritage is broadly in line with other similar students nationally.
- Students who attend alternative provision complete their courses successfully, because they are supported well and monitored rigorously.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139068
<b>Local authority</b>	Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	452695

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. This inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	665
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gill Howland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Holly Hartley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected as an academy
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 883500
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