

Thomas Deacon Academy

Queen's Gardens, Peterborough, PE1 2UW

Inspection dates 8–9 July 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The highly focused and skilled Principal has been the driving force behind the academy's improvement since the last inspection.
- The establishment of an effective team approach to leadership has been successful. As a result, leadership and management are generally good, and the academy is well placed to improve further.
- Leaders and managers, including the governing body, have improved teaching and students' achievement in the last two years.
- Governors know the academy well. They are led incisively. They provide real challenge to academy leaders to secure further significant improvements.
- Teaching is good and teachers encourage students to respond comprehensively to their questioning and feedback in class.
- Teachers have good relationships with students, and high expectations for both their social and academic achievements.
- Students' behaviour is good. Students' efforts to learn and improve their work help them make quicker progress than in the past.
- Rigorously applied safeguarding procedures keep students safe. Students themselves say they feel safe and most parents agree that the academy looks after their children effectively.
- Pupils make good progress in the junior college. At the end of Year 3, standards are above national expectations in reading and mathematics.
- Students make good progress in GCSE English, mathematics, science, art, design and technology and modern foreign languages.
- Sixth form students achieve well in work-related courses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Provision in the sixth form requires improvement. Students have not achieved as well as they could in academic courses over the last two years.
- The quality of teachers' marking and feedback is not always of the same high standard. Students do not always, therefore, receive as much guidance as they could about how to improve their work.
- Progress in writing is not as good as it is in reading and mathematics because teachers do not always insist on the same high standards of writing in other subjects as they do in English.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 36 lessons, of which 27 were seen jointly with members of the school’s leadership team.
- Inspectors visited an assembly and a number of tutorial sessions. The inspection team also made short visits to lessons during a number of walks through the school to look at students’ attitudes to learning and behaviour.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students and talked informally to others during breaks and at lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, staff, and senior and subject leaders. Inspectors also spoke to members of the governing body who also represented the academy trust.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including the academy’s evaluation of its own performance, plans for improvement, policies and records of students’ behaviour and attendance. Inspectors also scrutinised safeguarding documents.
- The inspection team considered 52 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, and took into account the results of a survey completed by approximately three quarters of the student population. Inspectors also noted the 120 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Additional Inspector
Clive Allen	Additional Inspector
Charles Dickinson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Thomas Deacon Academy is a specialist mathematics and science college. It is much larger than the average-sized secondary school. The Thomas Deacon Junior College is attached to the main academy. Three Year 3 classes started at the junior college in September 2014. Additional year groups will be added until the academy caters for Years 3 to 13.
- Thomas Deacon consists of seven learning communities or colleges. These include: arts, communications, humanities, maths, science, sports, and technology colleges.
- The academy is sponsored by Perkins Engines and the Deacon's School Trust. The academy's board of directors, which is also its governing body, acts as its board of trustees.
- The majority of students at the academy are of White heritage, with almost half coming from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well above average. The largest minority heritage groups are of Asian or Asian British backgrounds; most are of Pakistani descent.
- The proportion of students who do not speak English as their first language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium, which is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after, is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend alternative provision off-site at the Motor Vehicle Centre (MVC).
- In the past, the academy has entered a large number of students early for GCSE examinations. This practice has stopped.
- In 2014, reported results for the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- There have been significant changes to both the leadership and teaching teams since the school became an academy. A new Principal and Vice Principal were appointed in September 2013. A new leader for the sixth form was appointed in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, and so continue to raise attainment, especially in writing and in the senior part of the academy, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - insist on the same high standards of accuracy in students' writing in all subjects
 - mark work more effectively to ensure students learn from their mistakes and correct any misunderstandings they have as soon as possible
 - feed back to students the next steps they need to take to improve their work and better their understanding.
- Ensure achievement and teaching in the sixth form improve so that they are at least good by:
 - extending the best practices seen in the work-related courses so that they are equally applied and are effective in all academic subjects
 - consistently monitoring students' progress and providing extra support when underachievement is identified.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Over the past two years, the Principal has provided highly focused leadership to drive the academy forward. A supportive and effective leadership team, a number of whom are new in post, has helped to improve the academy's effectiveness. Together, leaders have created a culture in which teaching and good learning behaviour can flourish. This is evident in the higher skills that students are developing.
- Subject leaders have a clear understanding of their roles. They have a good grasp of data and use it well to inform planning. Checks on teaching and learning are rigorous and, under the guidance of senior leaders, middle leaders have skilfully tackled weak teaching and accelerated students' progress.
- Clear and accurate self-evaluation and effective improvement planning show what the academy needs to do next and why. Governors are involved in checking how much progress the academy has made in putting its improvement plan into practice. Leaders are acutely aware that some students do not make as much progress in writing as they do in their other skills. Plans are in place to address this.
- Students experience an appropriate range of subjects at all key stages. They receive good information, advice and guidance to help them make the right choices to pursue GCSE and sixth form courses best suited to their interests, aspirations and abilities.
- The curriculum is broad, interesting and enhances students' enjoyment. They speak about enjoying a range of subjects, especially mathematics, science and design and technology. Good links are made between subjects. This is evident in the students' workbooks. It is also clearly reflected in the classroom displays and students presentations made as part of the science, design and technology and education in mathematics (STEM) projects.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Equal opportunities are provided for all and leaders do not tolerate discrimination. As a result, students are considerate towards each other, work well together and enjoy their time in the academy. They particularly enjoy the opportunities they have to share their successes with each other in assemblies.
- Students are prepared effectively for life in modern Britain. The academy's rules incorporate expectations based on respect and tolerance and promote British values. New students from minority ethnic backgrounds are welcomed and encouraged to share their experiences with others. Assembly themes based on major festivals extend students' spiritual and cultural understanding. Students take part in elections to the school council to help them to learn about democracy and emphasise their rights and responsibilities.
- Leaders have improved the use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Additional funds are used to check students' skills and needs at an early stage and to undertake regular reviews of their progress. As a result, leaders are ensuring that extra support and resources help close gaps in attainment between these and other students as quickly as possible.
- Additional sports funding is helping pupils to lead healthier lifestyles and to understand the value of good teamwork. Sporting resources have been improved and specialist coaches are shared within the academy to develop the pupils' skills. Pupils in the junior college enjoy a good range of sporting activities because it is able to draw on the expertise of the sports college within the academy.
- The Trust provides effective and valued support to the academy's development. In particular, the Chair is often available to offer guidance, as well as setting leaders a demanding pace for academy improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching is now consistently good and standards have risen at GCSE. The achievement gap between students eligible for the pupil premium and their peers is closing rapidly.
- The academy checks carefully that the small numbers of students attending off-site provision attend

regularly, that they make progress in their learning and that there are no concerns about their welfare or behaviour.

■ There are good links with parents who are happy with the academy and much of what it provides. They are kept well informed through newsletters and information disseminated through the school's website.

■ Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and are effective. The suitability of staff to work with students is carefully checked. Safeguarding policies and procedures are understood by all staff.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governance is effective. The incisively led governing body is well informed. Its members challenge and support school leaders effectively.
- Governors have a clear view of the quality of teaching as they routinely check the impact of teaching on the quality of learning. They have a good grasp of the academy's performance in comparison to national data. Governors recognise the negative impact early entry to examinations had on reported outcomes, but could describe the more positive picture that emerged from the best entry data for the academy.
- Governors confirm staff performance management is rigorous and robust. They ensure checks of teachers' performance help to improve teaching by rewarding good teaching and eradicating weak practice. As a result, governors fulfil an effective role in improving students' achievements.
- The governors have a firm grasp of the strategic direction of the school and manage financial resources effectively. They check to make sure that additional government funds improve the performance of disadvantaged students and have a good knowledge of how extra sports funding is used to positively impact on students' outcomes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Staff model best behaviours for good conduct and learning. The very positive relationships that exist between adults and students helps reinforce and maintain the high expectations everyone has of each other.
- Students, even the very youngest, are very aware of the needs of others. The importance of British values, including tolerance and respect, is successfully taught and consistently reinforced by all staff.
- Students move sensibly around the building between lessons and at break times. They are polite, sociable and follow the instructions of staff in the refectory or the social areas. Outside, students busy themselves in sports, games or other activities.
- The behaviour of students is often exemplary in celebration assemblies, where they listen respectfully to adults and spontaneously applaud each other's achievements. Competition between the different colleges contributes to raising and maintaining high standards. This was clearly seen as the arts college celebrated its successes this year.
- Students' attitudes to learning have remained good since the last inspection. Students' enthusiasm for sharing their ideas with each other gives a powerful impetus to their learning and progress.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because, on occasion, a very small number of students are distracted from completing their work. These young people do not disrupt the learning of others, but when they lose attention, their own progress is slowed.
- Students enjoy a number of responsibilities out of class, for example on the academy council or as college captains. The students' participation in elections to these positions also develops their understanding of what it means to live in a democratic society.
- Students' attendance is broadly average. Academy leaders have taken rigorous action to promote the importance of good attendance. Students and parents have welcomed the academy's effective use of both

rewards and sanctions to secure even high levels of attendance and better behaviour.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe in the academy and most parents agree that it keeps their children very safe.
- Students know how to keep themselves safe both in and out of the academy. They have a sensible attitude towards risk taking. Events are routinely held to emphasise the importance of internet safety to help students stay safe when using mobile phones and computers.
- Students talk knowledgeably about bullying. They are well informed about the different forms of bullying and are confident that should this happen at the academy, it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively. Academy records confirm this.
- There have been no permanent exclusions this year and the number of fixed term exclusions has reduced. Logs show a positive reduction in incidents of unacceptable behaviour. This reflects the high expectations of the academy.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good across the academy and there are some lessons where teaching enables students to make outstanding progress. Teachers have benefitted from effective, continuous monitoring and support by senior staff in order to develop teaching skills to a high level. This is why the achievement of students has risen since the last inspection.
- Despite a period of staff change over the past 18 months, the quality of teaching has improved. The better teaching over time is evident in students' books. Students' progress has been particularly speeded up by teachers' raised expectations of what they should be achieving.
- Students' learning is enhanced when they are encouraged to take care and pride in their work. Rapid progress is often seen where students have closely followed a teacher's guidance on the importance of presenting their work neatly and accurately to avoid making careless mistakes.
- Work in students' books, the academy's data and information on checks carried out on teaching, indicate that the quality of teaching over time has improved and is now good. Opportunities to share best practice between teachers exist within the academy, but some staff would welcome more.
- Good relationships exist between adults and students and between the students themselves. These help create a good learning environment where it is acceptable for students to work on their own or cooperate with others in groups or in pairs. As a result, students consolidate their understanding of their ideas.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. They plan work that systematically builds on students' previous learning. They use questions effectively to check students' understanding and explore this further to deepen their thinking. Teachers provide imaginative and enjoyable challenges in many subjects leading to good achievement.
- Students make most rapid progress when teachers mark work often and thoroughly. Books reviewed weekly enable students to know their strengths, what needs to be improved, their next targets and the action they should take. Requests for corrections by teachers are always completed by students. This practice is not consistent in all years or subjects.
- Mathematics is taught well. There is an emphasis on number skills and problem solving in the junior college. This is developed further in later years.
- Reading is taught to a good standard. Year 3 pupils use phonic (letters and sounds) skills confidently to work out unfamiliar words. Guided reading sessions help pupils improve their reading and comprehension.

Sixth form students support younger pupils to develop their reading. Students make good use of the library and are encouraged to read at home or in school to become proficient readers.

- Writing is seen by leaders as the area children need most support. Writing skills are promoted best in the junior college where pupils are encouraged to write at length with increasing accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, when working in subjects in the senior colleges, students' writing is not consistently of the same high quality or of the same high standards they are meant to be doing.
- Teaching assistants contribute well to students' learning, particularly the learning of students who are disadvantaged, disabled or have special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English. They are calm, supportive and work successfully to ensure students understand what they are meant to be doing. This is helping many make consistently good progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- In the past, the academy entered almost half of students early for GCSE examinations and this had a negative impact on reported results. Far fewer are now entered early and only when the academy is absolutely convinced it is in the best interest of the student. This is resulting in an improvement in the standards achieved.
- Reported examination results for 2014 indicate 39 per cent of students secured five good GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics based on their first entries. However, when students' best results were taken into account, this figure rose significantly to 53.4 per cent of students securing this key measure. From their below average starting points, students made good progress to secure outcomes similar to the national average. Students made good progress in art, modern foreign languages, science and the technologies.
- Students' literacy, numeracy and communication skills are regularly reinforced across other subject areas. However, reading is better supported and developed than students' writing skills.
- Year 3 pupils are effective learners. They are enthusiastic readers, supported by a well-stocked library. The comprehensive promotion of speaking and listening skills, careful curriculum planning and good progress in reading and mathematics ensures pupils are ready for the next stage in their education. The junior college knows writing is less well developed and is taking action to accelerate progress in this area of learning.
- From below average starting points, students make similar progress in English and mathematics to that seen nationally. The academy makes good provision across both Key Stages 3 and 4 for those students entering the academy with low attainment in English and mathematics. Consequently, most make at least expected progress, with many making accelerated progress, which helps them to catch up with other students.
- In 2014, at the end of Year 11, disadvantaged students attained nearly two thirds of a grade below their peers in English, and almost one grade below in mathematics compared to other students in the school. When compared to other students nationally, disadvantaged students in the academy were one full grade behind in English and one and a third of a grade behind in mathematics.
- Analysis of the 2014 best examination results shows that gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and their peers in the school closed, having previously been wide. The school's efforts to ensure disadvantaged students receive the additional support they need have established a clear trend of improvement. School data and students work for this academic year show that these gaps are closing rapidly.
- Most students of minority ethnic heritage and those for whom English is an additional language are making good progress and are now attaining as well as their peers in the academy.
- The achievement of students who attend alternative provision is well monitored by the school. All students

study English and mathematics in addition to their bespoke courses. Good support is provided to secure positive outcomes in their examinations.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Teachers use the available data to target and support them effectively. Teaching assistants work well with students in class and in small groups, ensuring that students think for themselves.
- Few students enter the school with high levels of attainment in English and mathematics at the start of Year 7. Those that do usually make similar progress to high-attaining students nationally.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Current tracking data provided by the academy shows it has improved, but overall standards of attainment remain below the national average.
- In the past, results have been varied. Too many students studying academic qualifications left attaining results below the national average. In contrast, students following work-related courses made rapid progress in their studies and attained good outcomes.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form have been restructured since the last inspection. The revised structure enables leaders to focus on improving outcomes for students. The new leader of the sixth form has introduced rigorous systems to track students' progress with greater accuracy. New procedures enable teachers to quickly identify where individuals are falling behind and provide extra guidance and support in a timely manner. This is having a positive effect on attainment, but it is too early to see the full impact on overall achievement.
- Leaders in the sixth form understand its strengths and weaknesses and have focused effectively on improving the quality of teaching. However, this improvement has not yet had time to have a full impact on outcomes and, so, the leadership and management of the sixth form requires improvement.
- Recent changes to the sixth form curriculum have seen subject choice more strongly linked to better meet both the interests and abilities of students. This has led to a strengthening of academic courses strengthened and consolidation of the good experiences in the work-related courses.
- The information and guidance now offered to students entering the sixth form is comprehensive and effective. Students follow courses that suit their abilities and ambitions. They are well prepared for employment or higher education. Increasing numbers go on to study at the Russell group of universities.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning in the sixth form match those in the rest of the school and are good. Students feel safe, secure and well cared for. They enjoy good working relationships with all staff. They express confidence in their teachers and welcome the good support they now receive.
- Students contribute well to the life of the academy and to the learning of others. Many coach and support younger students to help improve their literacy skills. Sixth form students are good role models for other students in the academy.

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	135263
Local authority	Peterborough
Inspection number	462050

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2025
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	325
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Barnes
Principal	Julie Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2013
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