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Mr Andrew Jordan and Mrs Karen Hailes  
Executive Principal and Principal  
Thorp Academy  
Main Road  
Ryton  
Tyne and Wear  
NE40 3AH

Dear Mr Jordan and Mrs Hailes

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thorp Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 19 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to develop the quality of teaching and learning around challenge, understanding of key concepts and checking pupils' understanding, so that all pupils make good or better progress, particularly in mathematics and science
- further develop literacy and numeracy across the curriculum so that pupils consistently apply skills learned in English and mathematics across other curriculum subjects
- ensure that governors continue to attend appropriate training to develop their skills so that they can offer strong challenge and support to school leaders.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive principal, principal, chief executive officer of the trust, senior leaders and middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. A joint learning walk was carried out with the principal and vice principal for teaching and learning. Pupils were spoken with informally during lessons and at breaktime. A number of policies and documents were reviewed as well as information relating to safeguarding.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the trust appointed a new executive principal and a new principal in January 2017. An additional vice principal was also appointed. In September 2017 a new chief executive officer was appointed to the trust. Additional subject directors and senior subject directors have been appointed by the trust and are providing support and challenge to middle leaders in English, mathematics and humanities. A new scheme of delegation is being implemented in January 2018 and, alongside this, an academy council will take over from the current interim governing body. The current chair of the governing body will remain on the academy council and a new chair of the academy council has been selected.

## **Main findings**

Action plans to improve the school are appropriate and detail the steps leaders are taking to improve the school. The plans address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, alongside additional actions that leaders are taking to make rapid improvements. Evidence gathered during this inspection indicates that leaders are implementing and evaluating their actions effectively.

Leaders are improving the quality of education at the school. Since January 2017, the executive principal and principal began to make changes and, following the appointment of the new chief executive officer to the trust in September 2017, the pace of improvement has quickened. There are much greater levels of accountability through regular meetings between teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and trust staff, which focus on pupils' progress.

Leaders have overhauled the curriculum and schemes of learning to ensure that pupils aim high and acquire the necessary skills to be successful in the subjects they study. Alongside this, tracking systems have been much improved and an assessment calendar is now in place across the trust. A specific tracker has been developed for vulnerable pupils and leaders discuss this regularly. There is now a much greater awareness of who the vulnerable pupils are in the school and because of this there is a greater focus on the progress they are making. Teachers identify

underperformance swiftly and appropriate support, whether this is academic or pastoral, is available.

Leaders of teaching and learning are implementing a wide range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching. For example, following training on questioning, teachers now ask more questions that make pupils think hard and deepen their learning. New strategies for teaching are clear in lessons such as the consistent setting of objectives, applause moments and opportunities for collaborative learning. Pupils say they like the new strategies and are able to say how they contribute to their learning and progress. Leaders acknowledge that there is further work to do to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Sixth-form leaders work with the vice principal for teaching and learning to ensure that the same high standards and expectations at key stage 3 and key stage 4 embed into key stage 5. The same checks on students' progress and the quality of teaching take place. Where leaders recognise underperformance, for example for some students in mathematics, strategies, such as using supervised study periods to focus on mathematics, help pupils catch up. Outcomes for post-16 students in both academic and vocational subjects improved in 2017 compared to 2016.

Middle leaders in mathematics, English and humanities work with trust subject directors to strengthen their approach to managing and improving their faculties. Middle leaders in science are able to work with other leaders from across the trust. Middle leaders agree that through this, and the greater levels of accountability, their leadership skills and their focus on strengthening teaching and learning are improving.

Middle leaders say that, 'The school is more academically ambitious now.' This focus ensures that teachers are better meeting the needs of all pupils. Overall, the majority of work set takes into account the ability of pupils and provides appropriate challenge and teachers assess progress. Leaders agree that there is work to do to ensure that this is consistent across the curriculum, particularly in mathematics and science.

The new chair of the academy council is well aware of the progress that the school needs to continue to make in order to become a good school. The trust is providing a wide range of training so that the academy council further develops its skills in holding leaders to account and providing support so that the rapid improvements continue and are sustainable.

Leaders ensure that they keep staff up to date with safeguarding training and procedures in the school. Training is regular and there are weekly updates to remind staff of the importance of this core responsibility. Systems for reporting concerns are clear and staff are aware of what to do if an issue arises. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on adults who work with pupils in the school and record safeguarding information meticulously. Leaders ensure that pupils who

attend alternative provision are safe, attend well and make progress by regular communication and checks with leaders of this provision.

### **External support**

Following the previous inspection, external reviews of governance and the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils have taken place. The findings recognised the changes that leaders had already begun to make and offered additional suggestions, which leaders are acting upon to improve governance, the quality of education and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gateshead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Redshaw  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**