

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Thetford Academy

Croxton Road, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1LH

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 April 2025

Outcome

The Thetford Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is Michael Fordham. This school is part of the Inspiration Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Gareth Stevens, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lord Theodore Agnew.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a happy school community that is at the heart of the town it serves. Pupils are very proud to be part of the school. They recognise the impact that it makes on their lives.

The school sets high expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils know what is expected of them in lessons and they respond well. In the sixth form, outcomes are improving. This is as a result of improvements to the curriculum and in teaching.

The school sets high expectations for behaviour. Pupils listen to their teachers carefully. Low-level disruption is very rare. Pupils treat each other and their teachers with respect. Pupils feel safe and supported. They know that staff will listen to them and act if they have any concerns.

Music and sport are at the heart of the exceptional programme of enrichment activities. Pupils participate in the wide range of clubs. These include Mandarin, gardening and a school orchestra. The school organises numerous educational visits to enhance the curriculum. Pupils take on leadership positions, such as sports captains. This helps them to develop important skills such as communication and teamwork, preparing them well for their futures.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has carefully designed a curriculum that supports the interests and aspirations of all pupils. Knowledge is sequenced in a way that increases pupils' understanding progressively over time. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They provide clear explanations. This helps pupils to understand new ideas securely. On occasion, the school does not give some pupils the opportunity to extend and deepen their learning. As a result, some pupils do not make the ambitious progress that leaders intend.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accurately. Teachers receive the information they require to understand and cater for pupils' specific needs. Lesson activities are adapted so that pupils with SEND can access the learning and progress well through the curriculum. A specialist unit at the school provides pupils with high-quality academic and pastoral support.

Pupils who need help to become fluent readers receive well-targeted and effective support. Consequently, their reading is improving. They can therefore access the learning in a range of subjects.

The school's approach to managing behaviour has created a calm learning environment. Effective pastoral care ensures pupils are supported and valued. As a result, the vast majority of pupils behave well. Staff deal promptly and effectively with any rare instances of bullying. Actions to reduce pupil absence have had some success. Attendance is improving. However, some pupils still do not attend frequently enough. These pupils do not achieve as well as they could. They do not always benefit from the school's strong pastoral support and wider personal development opportunities.

The school offers impressive opportunities for pupils' personal development. The school carefully tracks pupils' engagement with the varied opportunities that are provided. Activities and opportunities are created to ensure the most vulnerable pupils also take part. Assemblies and form-time discussions encourage pupils to consider the importance of respect for different cultures and viewpoints. Careers information and guidance is carefully planned throughout each stage. As a result, pupils have a clear understanding of their possible next steps. They feel well prepared for life beyond school.

The school has taken steps to raise expectations for the sixth form. Students feel well supported to make decisions about their next steps in their education or careers. They engage well with the wider life of the school. Consequently, the sixth form is improving. Many students now achieve well.

The trust has taken steps to ensure the school continues to improve. Leaders have established rigorous systems to check the quality of provision provided. They have a strong understanding of what the school does well. Trust and school leaders share a clear vision for the school's future. They are committed to providing the best possible education for all pupils.

Staff know that leaders consider their workload and well-being when making decisions

about the school. Staff value the training they receive from leaders and the trust. They are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or with SEND, are frequently absent. These pupils miss out on important learning and opportunities to benefit from the school's offer to support wider development. The school should consider what additional strategies and support pupils and their families need in order to ensure that all groups of pupils attend regularly.
- Sometimes, pupils do not access opportunities to deepen and extend their understanding of the knowledge they are learning. At times, pupils do not fully develop their understanding. The school should ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills they need to provide pupils with tasks and opportunities to deepen their understanding.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in May 2020.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136204
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10379968
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,360
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	92
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lord Theodore Agnew
CEO of the trust	Gareth Stevens
Principal	Michael Fordham
Website	www.thethetfordacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 March 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, which provides provision for up to 24 pupils with communication and interaction needs.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers, the assistant headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, the head of sixth form, middle leaders, support staff and class teachers across the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with the chair of trustees and three other trustees.
- Inspectors visited breaktimes, lunchtimes and assemblies. They met with groups of pupils and spoke to pupils around the school site.
- Inspectors conducted further meetings on safeguarding, personal development, and behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys. They also considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text messages.

Inspection team

Andrew Robinson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Nick Asker	Ofsted Inspector
Rob James	Ofsted Inspector

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