

Thorpe St Andrew School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121180
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	327423
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1751
Sixth form	395
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr Ian Clayton
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Laundry Lane Thorpe St Andrew Norwich Norfolk NR7 0XS
Telephone number	01603497711
Fax number	01603497712

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Thorpe St Andrew School is a large 11 - 19 comprehensive school with a large sixth form. The school operates on a split-site as a specialist sports and technology college. It holds the Healthy Schools award. It serves an area of Norwich and the rural community to the east of the city where the level of deprivation is lower than that found nationally. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The majority of students are White British, very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need is well below average. The school operates 'the bridge', to re-introduce students excluded from school back into learning. Attainment on entry is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thorpe St Andrew school is a good school with some outstanding features, most notably the exceptional care, guidance and support it provides for all its students, which helps to create a very positive ethos. Inspectors found that students feel safe, valued and enjoy school life. They are very supportive of each other and show great consideration when moving around a large, split-site school. The behaviour of the majority of students is outstanding. Parents are largely supportive but would like better communication with the school.

This year, the school achieved its best ever GCSE results. In Year 11, 77% of students attained five good GCSEs and significantly, 63% of them achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, giving them the skills needed to secure their future economic well-being. Highly effective leadership by the principal has focused all staff on raising achievement and addressing the issues raised in the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved, students are working with greater independence in some subjects and the proportion of students achieving an A* to C grade in GCSE science at the end of Key Stage 4 has risen from 54% last year to 70% this year. Good provision in the sixth form enables students over 16 to achieve well.

Decisive action has been taken by senior leaders to raise the quality of teaching and learning, which is now good. Teachers and teaching assistants have received intensive training and shared good practice to increase their own effectiveness. Observations of lessons by inspectors confirmed the school's own view that the proportion of good or better lessons has increased, but also noted that a minority of teachers have been slower to adopt new ideas and some inconsistencies remain in a few subjects. Students' personal development and well-being is good. Two hours of physical education each week and regular participation in after-school sport ensures that they lead healthy lives. Students say that instances of bullying are few, and when they do occur they are dealt with promptly by staff. Exclusions are very low and racist incidents rare, significant strengths in a school of this size. The majority of students attend regularly, but despite the efforts of the school's work with parents the proportion of authorised absences is above the national average due to the number of families taking holidays during term-time.

The school offers a good curriculum with a number of outstanding elements. In Year 7, students are given an excellent foundation for secondary school learning. More-able students in Year 9 can follow fast-track routes to complete some GCSEs at the end of Year 10, giving them greater flexibility and time to allocate to their other studies in Year 11. Students speak enthusiastically about the widening range of options available in Key Stage 4. An extensive range of after-school activities and educational visits enables students to discover new interests and study for additional qualifications. Daily tutorial time is not always used effectively to promote students' personal development, particularly their social, moral, spiritual and cultural education which is satisfactory.

All students receive outstanding care, guidance and support because well-qualified, experienced teachers and support staff are totally committed to improving the lives of those in their care. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and students' health and safety are carefully managed. Parents commented favourably on the exceptional arrangements for the induction of Year 7 students, one saying that, 'the taster days provided beforehand made my son feel much more confident before starting school and after his first day he came home buzzing'. Relations

between students and adults are excellent; this contributes directly to students' enjoyment and achievement in school. Procedures to monitor how well students are achieving are firmly established. Teachers have a clear picture of how well students are progressing and can gauge whether early intervention is needed to support those at risk of under-achieving. Very effective partnerships with other schools and external agencies ensure that students select suitable routes of study and that they and their families receive timely and appropriate support when needed. The support for a small proportion of vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, is outstanding. Several parents praised the inclusive work of 'the bridge' in ensuring their children are fully integrated into school life.

Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders and managers know their school well and are committed to seeking further improvement. This year's results have exceeded the challenging targets the school set for itself. The principal, with the full support of governors continues to distribute leadership responsibilities in order to build capacity and promote innovation. Middle leaders have readily accepted these responsibilities, which is generating good capacity to improve further. The school's work is rigorously monitored and this information is used to inform plans for further improvement. Governors provide good support and challenge for senior leaders and have ensured that specialist status has been used to improve resources, extend partnerships within the local community and improve results in Key stage 4. Value for money is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good with some outstanding features. Students enter Year 12 with different abilities and aspirations. Based on their starting points, the majority make good progress and attain average standards in advanced level courses and above average standards in vocational courses. An outstanding curriculum that meets the needs of all students, coupled with excellent advice and careers guidance ensures that they are well prepared for their future economic well-being. Over 90% of students who join in Year 12 go on to complete their studies in Year 13 and a large proportion of them go on to higher education. They are good role models for younger students and the majority of them contribute to the local community through sports leadership and mentoring younger students. Teaching and learning are good. Most teachers encourage students to learn independently but a minority of lessons are too teacher-led, and sometimes lack challenge. The outstanding care, guidance and support students receive in earlier key stages is maintained in the sixth form. Their progress and attendance are rigorously monitored and support is targeted to ensure they achieve well. They know their target grades and value highly the easy access to teachers when they require help with their studies. The sixth form is well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- continue to increase the amount of good or better lessons by building on and ensuring that the improvements already made to teaching and learning become firmly embedded across all subjects
- Continue to work with parents to improve attendance by reducing the number of authorised absences
- Make best use of the time available during daily tutorials to promote students' personal development and well-being.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in Key Stage 3. Over the past five years, standards have been consistently well above the national average. Provisional results in national tests at the end of Year 9 this year indicate that this trend has been maintained. Progress made by students in Key Stage 4 has accelerated steadily since the last inspection and is now good. Better quality teaching and learning and improved monitoring by teachers and managers have led to higher standards. This year almost every Year 11 student achieved 5 or more GCSE passes. All students achieve well, including the small proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities who benefit greatly from the good quality support and encouragement they receive. The school sets challenging targets for itself and meets most of them. Whole school specialist targets for the proportion achieving five A* to C GCSE grades were exceeded this year. Senior leaders recognise that results in GCSE physical education and aspects of design technology have, in the past, fallen short of the agreed targets. Positive action to consolidate recent improvements and raise achievement in these areas is underway.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The vast majority of students attend regularly and behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They know how to keep themselves safe, they eat healthily and enjoy the many enrichment activities the sports college has to offer. A large proportion of students engage with pupils in local primary schools as community sports leaders and mentors. The school senate meets regularly to organise charity fund-raising events, but students feel its work should be advertised more widely within school and would like a suggestions box as a means of communicating their views. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. Through its specialisms in sport and technology, it has established good links with the local community and encouraged a wide range of groups onto the school site. The provision of a base on the school site for the local police has proved effective for students and local residents alike. Representatives of the local churches and other community organisations are welcomed into school to talk to with students. Students' knowledge and understanding of global communities is enhanced through European, Chinese and South African school links and reinforced by exchange visits, presentations and performances in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were good or better, and no inadequate teaching was seen. Rigorous monitoring of lessons by senior managers has helped to raise teachers' expectations and improve overall lesson quality. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan activities that engage and motivate students to work hard. Teaching assistants provide good support in lessons, particularly for vulnerable students, because they know them well. Most teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) regularly and effectively but inspectors saw few opportunities for students to use computers. In the best lessons, teachers match their resources and activities to the needs of individuals so that students of all abilities make good progress. The use of day-to-day assessment has improved significantly, but a small

minority of teachers do not yet use techniques that encourage students to think for themselves and contribute to discussions. A few do not provide good quality feedback in their marking. The quality of basic presentation of students' work varies considerably across subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good curriculum meets all statutory requirements and features an extensive range of GCSE and vocational courses. Specialist status has helped to extend the range of courses on offer and promote partnerships with other schools and colleges so the needs and interests of most students can be met. Students of all abilities speak enthusiastically about the range of options available, including those taught at local colleges that help to prepare them for the world of work. The school is a lead school in the 'Leading in Learning' project; it is a hub for community sports coaching and has a Technology Excellence Centre on site to provide opportunities in engineering. Additional support for students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills ensures that they are well prepared for their economic well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students of all ages receive outstanding care, guidance and support, which aids their progress and ensures that they enjoy their time at school. There are effective systems for supporting positive behaviour and attitudes, such as through the 'Go Green' initiative and the 'Thorpe Way', which help to motivate and reward students to work hard and achieve their very best. The school provides staff with good quality professional development so that they can respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable students. Managers and teachers make good use of an extensive range of performance data to set students challenging targets and monitor how well they are doing. Students receive good guidance in helping them make the right choices at each stage of their school careers and a significant proportion of Year 11 students elect to continue their studies in the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led by an experienced principal who has a clear vision for the school. He knows its strengths and weaknesses and is willing to take decisive action to raise achievement and improve standards. His vision for the school is shared by all staff and governors. There is an enhanced degree of accountability of all middle leaders and they are developing an increasing understanding of their role in making further improvements. The school has refined its use of data and now has a comprehensive system of analysing how well all students are doing. Managers use this information with increasing effectiveness to raise achievement in their subject areas and coordinate support for students so that they achieve their potential.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

19 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Thorpe St Andrew School, Laundry Lane, Norwich NR7 0XS

Earlier this week I visited your school with four other inspectors and we found it to be a good school with some outstanding features. Your input was vital in helping us to make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me and my colleagues to join you in lessons, talk with you and look at some of your work. We also spent time with some of your teachers, met with the chair of governors and read many parental questionnaires

You told inspectors that school is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be. We were particularly impressed with the quality of the care, guidance and support provided for you and the commitment of teachers to ensure that you all achieve well and enjoy your time at school. The team of inspectors found your behaviour to be outstanding during lessons, at lunchtimes and when you were moving between buildings. We noted the impressive results obtained in this year's GCSE examinations. To encourage the school to maintain these results and to help you to achieve your very best, we have asked the principal to make three further improvements:

- continue to increase the amount of good or better lessons by building on and ensuring that the improvements already made to teaching and learning become firmly embedded across all subjects
- continue to work with your parents to improve attendance by reducing the number of authorised absences
- make best use of the time available during daily tutorials to promote your personal development and well-being.

Your school is led well by the principal and his team of staff. You can help to make Thorpe St Andrew an even better school than it already is by aiming for 100% attendance and by sharing your views on what other improvements can be made with your school senate.

Best wishes for the future.

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector