

Thorp Academy

Main Road, Ryton, Tyne and Wear NE40 3AH

Inspection dates

30 November–1 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The overall progress pupils make has not been good as it has been below average since Thorp became an academy in September 2014.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across and within departments. This is particularly noticeable in mathematics and science.
- Expectations of what pupils can achieve are variable. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not achieve well.
- Assessment of pupils' learning is not used well enough to check pupils' understanding and deepen their learning.
- Senior leaders and middle leaders have not been diligent in checking pupils' work over time, including the work of those in off-site provision.
- Leaders have not checked students' progress well enough in the sixth form. This resulted in broadly average progress in academic courses.
- Senior leaders have not checked effectively that all staff understand fully the reporting of safeguarding matters. Governors have not made sure that they fulfil all their statutory duties.
- Leaders, managers and governors have not ensured that outcomes and the quality of teaching are consistently good.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive principal has the support of staff in his efforts to improve the school. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are improving.
- Attainment in English is well-above average and pupils are making good progress.
- Parents are confident in the work of the school and most would recommend the school to others.
- Pupils, and students in the sixth form, have positive attitudes to learning and are polite and courteous. They are proud of their school.
- There is a very wide range of additional activities that pupils and students enjoy. These contribute well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their health and well-being.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, to enable all groups of pupils to achieve well, by:
 - taking action to improve teaching in mathematics and science
 - using assessment information consistently well to ensure that the work that is set challenges pupils, including the most able, to make good progress
 - skilfully questioning pupils to assess their understanding and to provide additional support and challenge to ensure good progress
 - making sure that staff have consistently high expectations of all groups of pupils
 - strengthening spelling and number skills across a wide range of subjects, particularly for the least able pupils.
- Improve academic outcomes, teaching and the quality of leadership and management in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring teachers and leaders check students' progress carefully and take appropriate action to ensure it is consistently good
 - making sure leaders, including middle leaders, check the quality of teaching to ensure it is consistently good across subjects.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers, including governors, by ensuring:
 - all subject leaders are highly skilled in checking and improving teaching and progress
 - teaching meets the needs of all groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to help them make good progress
 - senior leaders track carefully the progress of pupils at off-site provision to ensure good outcomes
 - senior leaders check effectively that all staff are clear about all safeguarding procedures
 - governors hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of additional government funding
 - governors fulfil all their statutory duties to ensure the overall effectiveness of the school is at least good.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not ensured that all groups of pupils achieve as well as they should and that the quality of teaching is consistently good across the school.
- Senior leaders and middle leaders have not been thorough in checking the quality of teaching and the work that pupils are producing. Although there is good and effective practice in the school, inconsistent leadership has led to variable teaching and pupil outcomes that require improvement.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have not made good progress. Leaders have not checked the progress of these pupils effectively over time. Consequently, the school's use of additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils has not been effective over time.
- Changes made in senior leadership and middle leadership show signs of improvement. Parents are much more confident in the work of the school. Pupils recognise that the school is improving. However, inconsistencies remain and leadership has yet to smooth these out to ensure good progress for pupils.
- The executive principal has made sure that the staff are clear about the school's priorities and are supportive of improvement. Appropriate actions are identified in the school plans and there are signs of improvement. However, planning is overly elaborate and measures for success are not sharply focused on teaching and progress.
- Systems to manage teacher performance are thorough and provide support and challenge for teachers to improve pupils' outcomes. Specific training needs are identified and the school has a wide-ranging programme for professional development. The impact of this work has yet to come to fruition in strong progress for pupils.
- Newly qualified teachers have a good range of support, including coaching and mentoring in school, and are supported well.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of courses and is broad and balanced. There are opportunities for the most able to be challenged, for example through choice of separate science courses. Other ability groups also have additional support. However, the impact of the curriculum on outcomes is not good, as teaching and leadership have not ensured good progress.
- There are a large number of activities, including sports, the arts and residential visits, that support pupils' good personal development and strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders and managers do not meticulously check the impact of Year 7 catch-up funding (government funding for those entering secondary school with below-average standards in English and mathematics). They do not ensure that pupils make strong progress.
- The multi-academy trust has provided expertise to help strengthen the checking of teaching and learning across the academy and is providing middle leadership training. The trust has assisted in reviewing some key areas of the school, although its work in this respect is not of a consistently high standard. The trust has, however, provided

effective support to help the school develop leadership's capacity for improvement and to appoint a substantive principal from January 2017. The trust is clear that it has further work to do to support the school.

Governance of the school

- Over time, governors have not held leaders to account sufficiently well to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress. They have not fulfilled all their statutory duties. Inspectors found that governors have not made sure the safeguarding policy has been reviewed annually. They have not ensured that the school's website contains all the information set out in its funding agreement with the Department for Education.
- Governors have worked closely with the principal to identify what needs to be improved. They have sanctioned external reviews to find out more about how the school is performing. Findings from these reviews have yet to impact fully on pupils' outcomes. Governors know how teacher performance informs pay progression.
- Governors are well aware of how school funding is used. They have spent considerable time working with the principal to restructure staffing and balance the school's budget because of pupil numbers reducing. This has had an adverse effect on how well they have checked the impact of the Year 7 catch-up premium and funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Governors are keen to ensure they fulfil their duties and that they have educational expertise in the governing body. During the inspection, they held an extraordinary meeting to ratify the new child protection policy and placed the new version on the school's website.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils are safe and protected from harm. The school works effectively with external agencies and parents to protect the most vulnerable pupils. The single central register records all the necessary detail to ensure that staff have been checked appropriately to work with children.
- Safeguarding training is provided for staff and they understand the signs they would look for in order to keep pupils safe and identify any issues relating to safeguarding. They are clear that they would report incidents to the safeguarding leader or a member of the safeguarding team. However, not all staff are clear about the recommended procedures for reporting allegations concerning colleagues, particularly if they involved the principal. Leaders have not checked effectively that all staff understand these reporting procedures fully.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good across the school. Teaching is variable across departments and within departments and requires improvement.
- Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to make sure that pupils are challenged well by the work that is set for them. There are times when the work is too

hard and slows pupils' progress and other times when it is too easy, particularly for the most able. There are good examples, particularly in English, when work is pitched appropriately and pupils make good progress.

- Questioning is not used effectively to measure how much pupils have learned and to deepen their knowledge and understanding. As a result, there are times when pupils are not given the support they need, or additional challenge, to make good progress. Inspectors noted examples of strong questioning where pupils were encouraged to think deeply and use high-quality vocabulary in their answers, but this was not consistent across subjects.
- An analysis of current pupils' work showed that teachers' expectations are not consistently high across subjects and within subjects. Although the presentation of pupils' work is generally good, pupils' knowledge and understanding of what is being studied are uneven and not consistently good.
- There are times when pupils' misconceptions have not been tackled. Consequently, learning slows, particularly in mathematics and occasionally in science. Spelling and number skills are not reinforced across a wide range of subjects and this hinders the quality of pupils' work, especially for the least able.
- Leaders have introduced a set of common expectations to support teachers in their efforts to strengthen progress and challenge for pupils. This, along with professional development, is supporting improvements to the quality of teaching.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and have good attitudes to learning. They take pride in their work, are keen to do their best and cooperate well with adults.
- Pupils in the main school and the sixth form were particularly keen to tell inspectors how much they enjoyed the wide range of additional opportunities that are on offer for them outside the subjects they study. They said they enjoyed school and are safe in school.
- Pupils show respect to each other and the adults they work with. They are enthusiastic about the work they do with charities. As they get older, pupils increasingly take on leadership roles that interest them and they make a positive contribution to the school.
- The school's tutorial programme and school assemblies give pupils a good understanding of what is required to be a good citizen in modern Britain. Pupils said they appreciate the work the school is doing to care for their physical and emotional well-being.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe. They are clear about how to stay safe when using the internet and what to do should they experience any problems. Pupils and parents say bullying occurs, but they have confidence that the school deals with it effectively. Records show it has reduced and is, overall, infrequent.
- Careers education and guidance is given throughout the school and this, with the

recent appointment of additional adults to mentor pupils, is helping to strengthen pupils' aspirations. The school uses effective independent careers advice to support pupils with their career choices. The most recent information indicates that almost all pupils and students leaving the school continue in education, training or employment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well both inside and outside the classroom. They told inspectors that behaviour has improved because leaders have established a clear code of conduct that pupils follow. They said teachers have a consistent approach to the occasional instances of misbehaviour and this has helped learning improve.
- Pupils are smart in their uniform and are proud of their school. They take care of the environment and are keen to say how much better the school is because of its new building. Pupils are punctual to school and to their lessons throughout the day.
- Overall attendance has improved over time and is now average. The proportion of pupils regularly absent from school has reduced, as the school has focused its efforts well in this area. The numbers of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who are regularly absent are reducing. However, further work is required to improve attendance further.
- School records show that exclusions from school are reducing, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Overall numbers of exclusions are average.
- There are strong procedures in place to ensure those pupils at alternative provision are safe and behave appropriately.
- Parents were clear that their children are safe in school and the large majority believe behaviour is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over time, variations in the quality of teaching have not helped pupils to make good progress across a range of subjects.
- For the past two years, the overall progress made by those pupils leaving school at the end of Year 11 has been below average. For disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs, it was well below average in 2016.
- The school has not checked the progress of pupils at off-site provision well enough and, as a result, these pupils have underachieved because they have not taken steps to strengthen achievement. Leaders are still not checking the work of these pupils meticulously.
- Currently, pupils' work shows that the attainment gaps for disadvantaged pupils are not closing quickly. Further work has yet to be done to strengthen progress so that these pupils achieve as well as others. Stronger gains in progress and attainment are seen in English than in mathematics and science. Information shows that disadvantaged pupils make their strongest progress in non-GCSE subjects and when

they attend well. The most able disadvantaged pupils have not achieved as well as they should have over time, including those at off-site provision.

- In 2016, the progress of pupils at the end of Year 11 who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was weak, as their needs had not been met well. Leaders have recognised that these pupils make too little progress across the school and in the additional provision. Extra training for support staff and teachers has been provided to begin to meet the needs of these pupils better. There are signs of improved progress but more has yet to be done to secure good progress over time.
- The most able pupils make effective progress and would benefit from greater challenge. The school has recognised this and has taken steps in the past year to strengthen the attainment of the most able pupils. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest GCSE grades improved in 2016 and increased to average across most subjects.
- The most able pupils can choose three separate sciences and are encouraged to do so to provide additional challenge. The school is focusing well on raising aspirations for all pupils. Inspectors saw the most able pupils and others working well with university students to ensure they have the right skills to move to further and higher education.
- The progress of pupils eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding has not been checked well enough by the school. There are indications that pupils are not making strong progress in English and especially in mathematics. These pupils are not catching up quickly enough.
- There are signs of improved progress across the school, although inconsistencies still remain. Inspectors checked current pupils' work and found that outcomes are variable, especially in mathematics and science, with some variability in other subjects. Good work was seen in English, religious studies, art and French. In history and geography, where pupils have underachieved in the past, there are signs of improvement led by a new head of faculty.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils attaining GCSE grade C, or above, in both English and mathematics was broadly average from broadly average starting points.
- The school promotes reading well. The library has a good range of interesting books that many pupils borrow. Pupils are fluent readers. The school uses computer systems to check pupils' understanding of what they are reading and support reading skills for the least able.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Students' progress in academic courses requires improvement. It has been broadly average over time and not good. The progress made by students in Year 12 slipped in 2016 and has not prepared students well to move into the final year of their A-level courses.
- Teachers and leaders, including middle leaders, have not checked students' progress in academic subjects effectively. Therefore, additional support, help and challenge have not been put in place quickly enough to help students catch up and do well.
- The quality of teaching is variable in the sixth form. It is best in vocational courses,

with students having made better progress in these courses than in their academic subjects. Where teaching is good, students make good progress and it makes a strong contribution to their learning. In other cases, work set does not match the needs and abilities of students to challenge them well enough.

- Since September, the head of sixth form has visited other schools to investigate best practice in tracking the performance of students to improve progress. The school has started to strengthen its procedures to establish an effective system, but the outcomes of this work are not yet clear.
- School information indicates there is less inconsistency in teaching than previously and outcomes in academic subjects should improve from those in 2016, which were below expected. However, the information indicates that overall progress will remain broadly average.
- Students receive independent careers advice and guidance to support their choice of courses and match their career aspirations. Visitors from universities, business and commerce speak to students about the necessary skills and qualifications needed to gain employment. Students say good support is given in applying to university or for employment.
- Progress is strong for those students who resit GCSE English and/or mathematics. The school provides sufficient time for these subjects. Good teaching, with strong commitment from students, helps most students attain at least GCSE grade C.
- The curriculum offers a wide range of subjects and strong enrichment activities for students. Students engage very well in work experience and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Many take on roles of responsibility and contribute strongly to the life of the school. They work as sports leaders and support the learning of younger students.
- Sixth form students are passionate about the promotion of equality and diversity. They speak knowledgeably about equality and support for others and lead an 'inclusive club' after school for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Students are clear that they have been taught well about how to stay safe. A well-organised tutorial programme promotes diversity, strong cultural awareness and British values.

School details

Unique reference number	141185
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10020788

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,013
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Purvis
Principal	Jonathan Morris
Telephone number	01914 132113
Website	http://www.thorpacademy.org
Email address	enquiries@thorpacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- At the start of the inspection, the school did not meet requirements on the publication of information about the Year 7 catch-up premium outlined in its funding agreement. It amended this during the inspection.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the school's curriculum, the effect of expenditure on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, the special educational needs report and the register of interest of governors.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.

- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is average.
- Almost all pupils are White British. Nearly all the pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school has an additionally resourced provision to support those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who have moderate learning difficulties.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11. Also, the school meets the minimum interim standards for sixth forms.
- The school uses two local alternative providers as off-site provision for a small number of pupils. They are In-Learning and Delta.
- The school was re-named 'Thorp Academy' on 1 September 2014, when it was sponsored by the Northern Education Trust. When its predecessor school, The Charles Thorp Comprehensive, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged inadequate and as having serious weaknesses.
- There have been significant changes in leadership since the opening of the academy. The current executive principal took up post on 1 September 2015 in an interim capacity for four terms. A new, substantive principal has been appointed to start in January 2017.
- There have been significant changes to staffing and middle leadership since the opening of the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of teaching and learning in parts of lessons, with four sessions jointly observed with leaders.
- Throughout the two days of the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils, both individually and in groups, about learning and safety.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading. They reviewed pupils' work in lessons and analysed samples of work in pupils' books.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and four other governors. He met with the director of secondary academies from the multi-academy trust and the achievement partner.
- An inspector spoke with pupils and staff at the off-site alternative provider, Delta.
- Inspectors also held meetings with senior leaders and other staff.
- Inspectors looked at the school's review of its own performance, its development and improvement plan, a number of key school policies and the minutes of governing body meetings. They considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors analysed 111 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View).
- There were 20 staff questionnaires and 49 pupil questionnaires considered by inspectors.

Inspection team

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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