

The Thetford Academy

Croxton Road, Thetford, IP24 1LH

Inspection dates 4–5 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership and management are outstanding because leaders, managers and governors have tackled underachievement head on to make this a good academy where every individual is valued.
- The executive principal has quickly established a 'no excuses' culture in his drive to get the best out of teachers and students alike. This is an academy in which the quality of teaching and students' achievement continue to improve.
- Subject leaders have developed their role in driving improvement significantly.
- From well below-average starting points, students make good progress by the time they leave the academy.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well because teachers adapt their planning so that these students' specific learning needs are met effectively.
- Teaching has accelerated students' progress quickly because most teachers plan their lessons well and conduct regular assessments of students' performance.
- Students' behaviour is good and they feel safe in the academy. They are courteous towards their teachers and each other.
- Students' attendance has risen to just above the national average.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Students are provided with good-quality careers information and guidance.
- The academy offers a wide range of subjects and qualifications which cater well for students' particular needs and interests.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress and have raised their own aspirations about what they can achieve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching does not consistently provide enough challenge for the most-able students, and a very small proportion still requires improvement.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and others in the academy has not closed completely.
- Disadvantaged students attend less regularly than their peers.
- A very small minority of students do not always behave as well as the very large majority, particularly when taught by temporary teachers.
- Students in the sixth form do not have enough opportunities to take on leadership roles.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 46 lessons. They observed teaching and scrutinised students’ work. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors to jointly observe students’ learning. Inspectors also visited a large number of lessons more briefly, to observe the learning of disabled students and those who have special educational needs or to focus on students’ attitudes to learning.
- Meetings were held with the executive principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders and groups of students. Inspectors met with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. They also met with the Chief Executive Officer of the Inspiration Trust and held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Trust.
- Inspectors considered the views of 91 parents through the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of academy documentation, including records of students’ progress, records on the quality of teaching, self-evaluation information, records of behaviour and attendance, the academy development plan and minutes of meetings of the governing body. Inspectors also scrutinised the academy’s records of recruitment checks of staff.

Inspection team

John Daniell, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Asyia Kazmi	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Michael Miller	Additional Inspector
Cathryn Richards	Additional Inspector
Sally Lane	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The Thetford Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The Inspiration Trust became the new sponsor of the academy in July 2013.
- Most students are of White British heritage. There is an increasing proportion of students from Eastern Europe, the majority of whom originate from Poland and Lithuania. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average at 26%.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is higher than the national average at 36%. These students are eligible for pupil premium funding, which is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- At less than 6%, the proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well below the national average.
- No students in the academy attend offsite provision.
- The executive principal supports other schools within the Inspiration Trust in raising standards.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make achievement outstanding by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan lessons which consistently challenge the most-able students
 - close the gap in attainment and progress between disadvantaged students and others in the academy more rapidly
 - make the best use of wall displays in classrooms so that students can model their work on examples of best practice
 - deploy teaching assistants to best effect in their lessons in order to move learning on
 - set the highest expectations for behaviour when the very small minority of students become disengaged in their learning.
- Improve the attendance of disadvantaged students so that it matches that of others in the academy.
- Provide students in the sixth form with more opportunities to develop their leadership roles.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Expertly led by the executive principal, senior leaders have quickly identified the academy's weaknesses and put measures in place to tackle these swiftly. The academy has been transformed beyond recognition. Outstanding leadership has removed the academy's previous inadequacies and has created a strong culture where only the best is good enough.
- Staff, students and parents and carers are overwhelming supportive of the academy's leaders. Staff morale is high and students report that the academy is now a much better place to attend. One student told inspectors, 'The teachers make you feel comfortable and help you learn. They are devoted to us.'
- The number of senior leaders has been reduced to single figures after the amalgamation of the previously two schools onto one single site. It is now much clearer to staff and students who has responsibility for each aspect of the academy's improvement.
- The quality of subject leadership has strengthened. These leaders play a much greater part in leading their subject areas and they carry out their monitoring responsibilities robustly. Regular meetings between subject leaders and senior leaders ensure that they are held to account for the performance of their teams. Senior leaders provide an appropriate degree of support and challenge.
- Because of their consistent approach towards the raising of standards, leaders have secured huge improvements in the quality of students' attainment, the quality of teaching, students' attitudes towards learning and their conduct around the academy.
- Teaching is managed effectively. Senior and subject leaders know the strengths of their teams well so that appropriate support can be provided. Although not compulsory in an academy, teachers are judged against the national *Teachers' Standards* when observed by leaders. Leaders maintain detailed records for each teacher on how many of the standards are being met. Weak teaching has been tackled decisively so that most teaching over time is good. Inspectors agreed with senior leaders' views on the quality of teaching and its impact on students' progress over time.
- Staff training and professional development opportunities are plentiful and appropriate. Over one third of teachers at the academy have delivered in-house training to others.
- Leaders monitor the academy's performance regularly and rigorously. Information on students' progress, attendance and behaviour is shared with key members of staff. Consequently, they are very much aware of what still needs to be done. Inspectors agreed fully with senior leaders' evaluation of the academy's current performance.
- Students of all abilities and from all backgrounds are treated with respect. Equal opportunities enjoy a high profile in the academy. The academy's tracking systems ensure that every aspect of students' achievement is monitored regularly.
- Students are provided with good quality careers information and guidance. Transition arrangements for students joining the academy in Year 7, and for those progressing to Key Stage 4 or the sixth form, ensure that appropriate choices are made. The proportion of students not in education, employment or training when they leave the academy is low.
- The choice of subjects and qualifications is well suited to meet students' interests and learning needs. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students in Key Stage 3 have discrete lessons in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which help to raise their awareness of what it will be like to live and work in modern democratic Britain.
- The trust has made a major contribution to the academy's improvement by identifying strong leaders and removing those who were weak. It recognises the great strides made in strengthening leadership and now uses its most effective practitioners to support other schools in the Trust. The trust clearly recognises

existing talent and nurtures it well to share good practice across all of its schools. Subject and other leaders are being effectively developed to become senior leaders.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Members of the governing body have an excellent understanding of what it takes to be good or outstanding and they articulate clearly their impact on the academy's improvement. They share the executive principal's vision to be an outstanding academy within three years. The Chair of the Governing Body gains a deep insight into the academy's strengths and weaknesses through attending fortnightly senior leadership team meetings.
- Governors know how the pupil premium funding is spent and what impact it is having on narrowing the gap between disadvantaged students and others in the academy.
- Governors ensure that the performance management systems only reward those members of staff who meet their challenging targets.
- Scrutiny of minutes of governing body meetings shows that they present a high degree of challenge to the academy's senior leaders, particularly with regard to the achievement of students and the quality of teaching.
- Governors play a full part in promoting the academy's values and ethos of tolerance, respect and equality of opportunity among all stakeholders, including leaders, staff, students and parents.
- Governors ensure that the academy's procedures for the safeguarding of children meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. This view is shared by most of the parents and carers who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire.
- Students move around the academy purposefully and are polite to each other and members of staff. They show respect towards visitors by greeting them and holding doors open for them. There is very little litter and students arrive at lessons with the correct equipment.
- Senior leaders have produced a list of non-negotiable guidelines, which includes students' use of mobile phones during the day. Consequently, it is quite clear what students may and may not do. In the academy, everyone is considered a 'leader of behaviour' and there is a greater focus on collective responsibility for ensuring that standards are met.
- Students show largely positive attitudes towards their learning. This is because the teaching is engaging. On rare occasions, where teaching fails to engage students' interest, a very small minority can become inattentive and distract the learning of others.
- Teachers are consistent in their use of the academy's rewards and sanctions systems, and students respond well to their teachers' requests. Occasionally, a few students do not respond as well to requests from temporary teachers.
- The proportion of students who have been excluded for a fixed period of time has reduced significantly. Students who are excluded are successfully reintegrated into the academy with an 'ABC' (acceptable behaviour contract). The proportion of students who are withdrawn from lessons has also reduced.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Staff are clear about their role in keeping students safe. They receive regular training and updates relating to the safeguarding of children.
- Students demonstrate a sound awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe. Students are very much aware of the dangers of using the internet and the risks associated with social networking sites. An overwhelming majority of parents and carers believe the academy looks after its students well.

- Incidences of bullying are rare. The use of anti-bullying ambassadors has contributed towards this. Any homophobic or racist language is dealt with immediately by members of staff.
- Students who are vulnerable feel well looked after. The academy makes good use of internal and external resources to ensure these students achieve well. One student spoke positively about the academy's Community Foundation Centre, which she felt provided her with 'clarity and structure'.
- Attendance has risen to just above the national average, although disadvantaged students attend less regularly than others in the academy. Persistent absence has fallen sharply. There are good systems for tracking students' attendance, and form tutors play a key role in promoting the importance of regular attendance and its link to achieving well.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time has improved significantly since the previous inspection. This has secured accelerated progress across the academy because teachers have raised their expectations of what students can achieve. Relationships between students and teachers are positive.
- Most teachers' planning targets the particular learning needs and capabilities of different groups of students. There are occasions when this is inconsistently applied, particularly with most-able students, but this is improving. Teachers are skilful at breaking down the content of lessons in order to make the work more accessible to students. This is a particular strength in mathematics teaching.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. Teachers make effective use of questioning to deepen students' knowledge and understanding. They identify key words at the start of the lessons, and students are clear about what they are expected to have learnt by the end.
- Teachers' questioning is skilfully targeted to ensure that misconceptions are addressed. Teachers now take more risks during lessons and are able to reshape their teaching if it becomes clear that not all students have understood what they are being taught.
- Teachers have become increasingly successful at supporting students' literacy and numeracy development. Inspectors' scrutiny of students' books showed an increasing use by teachers of extended writing tasks. Students' mathematical skills are being developed through a range of subjects and activities. Students are encouraged to read. They enjoy reading, and more students are borrowing books from the academy's library than previously.
- Teachers provide students with regular opportunities to assess their own progress and that of their peers. Teachers' marking is informative, regular and makes clear to students what they must do to improve their work. Students regularly respond to their teachers' comments to demonstrate that they have rectified any misconceptions.
- Students are provided with regular opportunities to work together in pairs or larger groups. There are clear links in teaching to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers identify aspects of their lessons which relate to these themes. For example, a Year 10 science group held an interesting debate on the rights and wrong of tobacco advertising. Form tutors also make good use of time to debate topical issues. In one Year 11 session, students were presented with facts on recycling waste products and were challenged to link these to four themes.
- Good links exist between many teachers and teaching assistants, enabling focused and supportive work to take place. However, some teachers do not work as proactively with teaching assistants to enable identified students to get the most out of their support.
- While most teaching is planned well so that it engages students in their learning, a small proportion requires improvement because it does not fully engage all students in the class. This can lead to a few

students becoming distracted.

- While many classrooms promote a positive learning environment, some are too bland and do not display any work students have produced in order to celebrate their achievements and showcase good practice.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Achievement is good because students enter the academy with below-average attainment and make good progress by the end of Key Stage 4. In 2014, provisional unvalidated data show that the proportion of students who achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was 49%, a marked improvement on the previous year. Students' progress has accelerated greatly compared to the previous year.
- Levels of attainment in the vast majority of subjects was sustained or increased in 2014. This is due to teachers' higher expectations, sharper planning so that the particular needs of students are met, and improved attitudes towards learning. Attainment in English rose significantly in 2014.
- Initiatives targeted at students eligible for additional support through pupil premium funding have ensured that gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and others in the academy continue to narrow. As a consequence, GCSE results in 2014 show that disadvantaged students attained around half a grade lower than other students in the academy in English and mathematics. When compared to students nationally, the attainment gap was around a grade in mathematics and half a grade in English.
- Disadvantaged students' progress compares favourably to national figures. Successful strategies have included the employment of additional staffing to target the specific learning needs of these students, running Saturday and holiday revision classes, and the purchase of additional books and learning materials.
- The Year 7 'catch up' premium is used effectively to improve students' weak literacy and reading skills. Inspectors' review of case studies for these students showed that the extra support funded by the 'catch up' premium is making a significant difference.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well in the academy. This is because teachers plan well for these students' so that they can access the work and make the progress they should.
- Students who speak English as an additional language and from minority ethnic groups make good gains in their learning over time. This is due to a wide range of effective strategies which include liaising well with parents and carers, the use of electronic and translation devices, and effective use of dictionaries.
- The academy's most-able students, although progressing well compared to national figures, do not make the same rate of progress in the academy as students who have previous low or middle attainment.
- Inspectors observed some examples of good and outstanding learning taking place across all year groups, during their visits to lessons and through their scrutiny of students' books and data. The academy's reliable data show that students in Key Stage 3 are also making good progress.
- The academy does not operate a policy of early examination entry and no students are currently educated offsite.

The sixth form provision is good

- Achievement in the sixth form is good. From their low starting points, students make good progress. Students attain particularly well in art, chemistry and photography at AS level; and in art, English and business studies at A2 level. Students following vocational courses also made gains in their learning in 2014. High performing subjects at the end of Key Stage 5 include travel and tourism, performing arts and information and communications technology. Success rates for students retaking GCSE English and mathematics in the sixth form are also improving.
- Students are proud of the sixth form and speak positively about the quality of the provision. They feel valued as individuals and well cared for. One student told inspectors. 'You never feel alone here.'
- Students are being provided with more opportunities to strengthen their leadership roles, but this remains at an early stage of development. However, inspectors saw some students working well in lessons with groups of students to help them understand the work better.
- Teaching is equally effective in the sixth form as it is in the rest of the academy. Students are provided with an appropriate amount of time to deepen their understanding through private study which forms part of their weekly timetable.
- Inspectors saw good learning taking place in sixth form lessons and work which was marked in detail. This enables students to rectify their errors and carry out further research.
- Strong leadership and management of the sixth form have brought about significant improvements over time. The appointment of a senior leader to oversee the sixth form has secured better quality teaching, improved outcomes and higher attendance.
- The curriculum has been adapted to cater for all students, and systems for tracking students' progress have become embedded and allow earlier support and intervention where a student is identified as falling behind. Students are provided with good-quality support and guidance. This enables them to make informed choices when deciding on whether to enter the world of work or continue into higher education. Many now aspire to study at university, including at Oxford and Cambridge.

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	136204
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	450389

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1149
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	127
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sam Berwick
Principal	Adrian Ball (executive principal)
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2013
Telephone number	01842 754875
Fax number	01842 765036
Email address	ball.a@thetfordacademy.com

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