

# Thomas Deacon Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135263
<b>Local Authority</b>	NA
<b>Inspection number</b>	348700
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 July 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Elaine Taylor HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	2100
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	388
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Richard Barnes
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dr Alan McMurdo (Principal)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Queen's Gardens Peterborough PE1 2UW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01733 426050
<b>Fax number</b>	01733 426061
<b>Email address</b>	info@thomasdeaconacademy.com

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Thirty-three lessons were observed and in addition inspectors made short visits to a range of lessons accompanied by senior leaders in three 'learning walks'; meetings were held with parents, groups of pupils, governors, and key staff and a telephone conversation was held with the school improvement partner. Inspectors observed the academy's work, and looked at key policies, minutes of meetings, development plans, self-evaluation documents and analyses of data on students' progress. They also analysed questionnaires to staff, students and 246 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress students are making in all subjects but particularly in mathematics
- the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the effectiveness of tutor time in supporting all aspects of students' personal development
- the effectiveness of the academy's leaders in improving teaching and ensuring consistency between subjects.

## Information about the school

The academy opened in September 2007 as an amalgamation of three predecessor schools in the centre and east of Peterborough. It is the biggest single academy in the country and a greater proportion of the students are from minority ethnic groups or have English as an additional language than the average in all schools. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average and the proportion that have special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly less than average. The academy has achieved the Healthy Schools status and is a specialist college of science and mathematics and a training school. The academy is sponsored by Perkins Diesel and the Deacon's School Trust.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Housed in impressive and thoughtfully designed buildings, Thomas Deacon Academy provides a good education for its students both in terms of their academic success and the personal qualities the academy fosters. Leaders have successfully managed the amalgamation of the predecessor schools into a happy and increasingly successful learning community. The quality of the leadership is seen in the improving outcomes, accurate self-evaluation and a very positive reputation locally, that is leading to large numbers of students wishing to join.

All groups of students make good progress and although standards are average, they are rising steadily. The academy's leaders accurately evaluate all aspects of the work and set increasingly challenging targets as they move towards their ambition to reach world-class performance by 2016. Detailed information is gathered and analysed on the progress being made by different groups of students and by individuals. All leaders analyse these data and evaluate the work in their areas. The results of this analysis inform detailed development plans that are then fed into the whole-academy planning process. The effectiveness of these systems can be seen in rising standards, good and still improving attendance and increasingly effective provision.

Teaching is good and, together with a good curriculum that provides an extensive range of courses to meet individual needs, is ensuring students make good progress in their learning. Lessons are planned thoroughly, but in lessons where progress is slower, activities are not matched with enough precision to the varying needs of the students. In these lessons students are insufficiently challenged by the tasks and teachers allow them to remain passive. The specialist subjects make a significant contribution to the provision by supporting cross-curricular approaches, for example, history courses focus, among other topics, on the history of medicine. External speakers from the world of science and mathematics visit to inspire students. Good care and guidance support students so they feel very safe and develop personal qualities to help them in their working lives. As a result, the numbers that are not in education or employment with training when they leave the academy is significantly lower than the average for the local area.

The governing body of the academy benefits from a wide range of skills, some from business, through close ties with the sponsors, and some from an educational background. This blend allows governors to challenge and support well and, as a result, financial stability has improved as have educational outcomes. They have ensured that all statutory requirements are met and in particular that systems to ensure the safety of all members of the academy are of the highest quality.

Parents are kept informed of their children's progress in a satisfactory manner, but many feel they would appreciate more opportunities to support their children and receive higher quality information on their progress. Leaders in the academy are aware of this and are

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exploring a range of options to increase engagement with parents including through more effective use of the academy's website.

An ethos of innovation and exploring creative solutions to problems has secured improvements across a range of measures. Staff are highly motivated and good use is made of information and communication technology to facilitate the sharing of ideas and strengthen communication. There is strong evidence that the pattern of improvements is continuing and demonstrates that the academy has good capacity to improve further.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- In order to raise attainment further, improve the quality and consistency of teaching by:
  - ensuring all teachers carefully plan and deliver activities that will accurately meet the individual needs of the students
  - extending the range of strategies that teachers use in their lessons to increase students' active involvement.
- Strengthen the engagement with parents by:
  - improving the quality of the communications they receive on their children's progress
  - extending the range of opportunities for them to receive the information.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**2**

Since the academy opened, students' progress has improved and in 2009 achievement was amongst the top 16% of schools nationally. However, the pattern of examination success at GCSE and in a range of vocational qualifications varies. In 2009, the proportion of students who gained five higher grade GCSE passes was significantly above the national average, whereas when English and mathematics are included, the proportion was significantly below. This is an improvement of 8% on the previous year and there is strong evidence to suggest that the improvement is set to continue, with results in 2010 at this key indicator expected to be closer to the national average. Progress in mathematics has improved significantly.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in a range of subjects and the proportion of students securing 5A\*-G including English and mathematics continues to rise.

The quality of learning and progress was good or better in two-thirds of the lessons observed. Students' progress was often enhanced by their positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour both in lessons and around the academy is good. Exclusions have fallen significantly and the number of students incurring this sanction more than once has also declined, showing the effectiveness of the systems to promote good behaviour. Students show they understand how to stay healthy by their choices from the healthy food on offer in the canteen and from the high proportion who take part in one or more of the extensive sporting and artistic opportunities on offer. Students make a positive contribution to the school and the wider community in a number of ways. They participate in the student

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council and in similar groups across the city and a number of students sit on the advisory board of governance.

Attendance is above average and rising. Students learn how to work together in teams, and sessions on topics such as how to manage their money support their future work-place skills and attitudes. Links with the sponsors give them a clear indication of the world of work, in particular with regard to careers in engineering. Improving outcomes in mathematics are strengthening this aspect of their development.

Students demonstrate good social development through their considerate behaviour. They say that bullying is not an issue. Different cultural and racial groups mix together happily and a range of opportunities is provided to support their spiritual development such as events that allow them to demonstrate their faith through music.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

**How effective is the provision?**

Good teaching is evident across all subject areas, but where it is most effective teachers and support staff use assessment well to plan lessons and offer appropriate challenge. Students often benefit from opportunities to reflect on their own learning and share ideas, which improves their ability to listen and respect other points of view. In an outstanding Year 9 mathematics lesson, very good use was made of new technology to engage students in a rapidly developed revision task. Similarly, in a science lesson where students

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were revising electromagnetic waves, the relentless pace, well-chosen resources and incisive questioning clarified misconceptions and provoked the students' curiosity; this in turn generated debate. Teachers generally make good use of the wealth of assessment information and tasks to build on previous learning. However, the work provided in some lessons is not tailored closely enough to the needs of all students. This in turn slows learning and limits opportunities for students to explore further or extend their knowledge and understanding. Where tasks were allocated too much time or students were allowed to set the pace of their own learning, engagement declined.

Students enjoy the extensive range of courses on offer including extra-curricular clubs and enrichment opportunities. There are some innovative aspects such as the system for Year 7 students to have a totally different learning experience every other Friday. An example of this was seen during the inspection, when students were gaining first-hand tasters of the courses they might study in Years 9 to 11 in readiness for making their choices next year. A weaker aspect of the curriculum is the variability in the quality of the tutor time. A considerable amount of time is devoted to this and helpful and imaginative resources are available, but the delivery varies between tutor groups.

The college system ensures strong personal support and there are good systems to guide students on their next steps. The most vulnerable students are supported well. A wide range of partnerships supports all aspects of this work.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

Aspirational targets are set and used well. Leaders demonstrate strong determination in tackling rigorously areas of weaker performance. The academy uses a wide-reaching system of key performance indicators to measure success and there is rigorous monitoring of progress towards these targets. Detailed and informative reports to the governing board ensure there is a common understanding of the strengths and areas for development. The principal has important links with a number of agencies at national level that recognise the exemplary aspects of leadership and allow comparisons in a national pool. As a result, self-evaluation is very accurate.

The systems for planning and providing staff development opportunities provide not only good value for money, but also opportunities for the development of staff, who contribute to the training. Training school status makes a good contribution to staff development.

Thorough data evaluation and analysis inform self-evaluation, which identifies accurately areas for improvement and there are many examples where the ensuing actions are highly

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effective. The impact of the wide range of actions to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination is seen in the harmonious co-existence of the different ethnic groups and the good progress they all make. Additional opportunities provided by academy funding allow the exploration of examples of good practice, even extending to overseas, in order to inspire creative solutions to issues. The governing body are very knowledgeable and challenge and support exceptionally well. They have ensured that safeguarding procedures are of the highest quality. They monitor the work of the academy each term against challenging key indicators of performance, whilst at the same time, actively promoting the welfare of staff and students. The blend of business expertise with educational knowledge is ensuring the quality of the provision is improving while budgetary issues are successfully resolved. The academy makes a strong contribution to the cohesion of the local community through the work of the leader of community strategy. The numerous links with partners across the world are well-established and this aspect of the academy's work features in development and business planning.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Students in the sixth form make good progress relative to their starting points in all courses offered and achieve the challenging targets set for them. The majority go on to higher education and the number not in education or employment with training is significantly lower than the local average. Attendance is good and sixth form students make a significant contribution to the life of the academy by acting as role models for younger students and by taking on roles of responsibility. Teaching is good and leaders in the sixth form regularly review the feedback students give on the quality of teaching through their regular learning conversations with subject leaders. The academy is continuing to evaluate and develop the curriculum and although the International Baccalaureate will not be offered next year, aspects of the methodology are being



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maintained. For example, all students will be required to undertake an extended project. The core programme is well-supported by enrichment activities and students are expected to engage in extra-curricular sessions on Wednesday afternoons. There is a range of business and enterprise partnerships that contribute to the students' development of workplace skills and recent travel visits have included Germany, Turkey, Ukraine and Spain. The academy effectively guides and supports students within a coherent programme that is led by the post-16 manager and the director of learning for 15-19 year-olds. Students also evaluate their own performance and record their achievements in an innovative web-based programme called Didbook. Leaders in the sixth form systematically monitor and evaluate the provision and outcomes and as a result their actions to tackle weaknesses have been effective. The quality of teaching is improving and attainment is rising. The retention rates are good and students have confidence in the good provision and equality of opportunity they enjoy. Significantly more applications are received than there are places available.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are strongly supportive of the academy and in particular the care and support their children received to settle in. They feel their children's progress is good and that the academy is well managed. Their main concerns are regarding communication with the academy and the help they receive to support their children's learning. A small minority said they were unhappy with levels of homework, saying there was insufficient or that the amount was uneven across subjects. One or two responses referred to disruptive behaviour, but inspectors observed that on the very few occasions where it did occur it was dealt with well and staff confirm that they feel supported well to deal with disruption.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thomas Deacon Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 246 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 2100 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	78	32	145	59	18	7	5	2
The school keeps my child safe	98	40	135	55	11	4	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	82	33	124	50	27	11	11	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	78	32	136	55	18	7	8	3
The teaching is good at this school	74	30	144	59	16	7	5	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	63	26	129	52	37	15	9	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	53	22	152	62	32	13	5	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	77	31	135	55	20	8	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	73	30	140	57	21	9	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	79	32	131	53	20	8	9	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	58	24	130	53	33	13	10	4
The school is led and managed effectively	68	28	151	61	15	6	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	96	39	123	50	15	6	6	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



12 July 2010

Dear Students

**Inspection of Thomas Deacon Academy, Peterborough, PE1 2UW**

I write to give you the findings of our recent visit and to thank you on behalf of myself and the other inspectors for your contribution to making the experience so pleasant and productive.

You receive a good education at the academy because teaching is good and the wide range of subjects you can study allows you to select options that meet your needs and aspirations. We know you are well cared for and you all said how safe you feel. Your behaviour is good and you support each other well. We congratulate you on your good attendance and your good understanding of how to lead healthy lives. The leaders in the academy are all monitoring the work done and making sure any changes have a positive impact on your success. You can all continue to help this work by sharing your ideas for improvement. Many of you make a good contribution to charity work and by working on projects that involve you with the local community.

The work you are given in your lessons is generally well matched to your needs. However, sometimes there is insufficient challenge involved and some of you are allowed to be passive in parts of the lesson, for example, in whole class discussions. We have asked your teachers to tackle this point and you can help by taking more responsibility for your own learning. Your parents want to support your learning and we have asked the academy's leaders to improve the communication with them so they can do this more easily.

It is good to note that most of you are making good choices about your future by continuing to study or enter employment where you can carry on training. The sixth form is a good example of the rewards of hard work and aspiration.

We all wish you the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor

Her Majesty's Inspector

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