

Thomas Deacon Academy

Queen's Gardens, Peterborough, PE1 2UW

Inspection dates 10–11 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students do not make as much progress as they should, particularly in English. Standards and progress have improved in mathematics, but there is further to go before achievement is good.
- The sixth form requires improvement.
- Not enough students attain higher grades in Year 11, 12 and 13 national examinations.
- Teachers do not always set students work that sustains their interest and challenges them. The work for more-able students is not always demanding enough.
- Marking is not always regular or helpful in giving students sufficient guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- The use of skilled and expert questions by teachers to extend students' learning and check their understanding is not yet a routine feature across the academy.
- The academy leaders' work in developing teaching and learning has not had sufficient impact in making sure that students make good progress, and that students' work is properly and regularly marked and assessed.
- There are weaknesses in the oversight and monitoring of the English department.
- Not all teachers give students the opportunity to use and apply their literacy and numeracy skills across different subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal, other senior leaders and the board of directors have assessed the academy's effectiveness accurately.
- They have a good understanding of what needs to improve, and are directing their efforts more effectively at enhancing students' progress through improving the quality of teaching.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good. They feel safe and generally behave well in lessons and around the academy's extensive site.
- Students' personal development as future citizens is good, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Most adults and students enjoy good working relationships and show respect for one other.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place during the penultimate week of the academy’s academic year. Students in Years 11 and 13 had left by the end of the previous week, having completed their examinations. Consequently, the academy had started its new timetable for the 2013/14 academic year; the inspection took place during the first week of this new timetable.
- Inspectors observed 42 lessons, including 10 which were seen jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team. Forty-two teachers, and in some cases their teaching assistants, were seen working with the students.
- Meetings were held with groups of students selected at random by the lead inspector. Many informal opportunities were taken to talk with students. Inspectors heard a sample of students from Key Stage 3 reading.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of the academy’s documentation, including performance data, development plans, policies, reports evaluating the academy’s work, various monitoring files, safeguarding and curriculum materials, documents relating to the work of the board of directors (the governing body) and information provided for families.
- Discussions were held with the academy’s Principal, its directors of learning, the leaders of the academy’s ‘colleges’, and other members of the senior leadership team. In addition, conversations were held with class teachers, teaching assistants, administrative staff and staff from the achievement support department, including a local police officer based at the school as part of the local police authority’s ‘Safer Schools’ initiative.
- Discussions and consultations took place with members of the academy’s board of directors and a telephone conversation was held with the academy’s main consultant improvement adviser.
- The inspectors took into consideration the 82 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and letters and emails sent to the lead inspector. The 266 responses to the questionnaire for school staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Michael Miller, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rosemary Litawski	Additional Inspector
Alan Brewerton	Additional Inspector
Kerin Jones	Additional Inspector
Caroline Parady	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is significantly larger than the average secondary school.
- It has been an academy since September 2007; it is sponsored by Perkins Engines and the Deacon's School Trust. The academy's board of directors, which is also its governing body, acts as its board of trustees.
- The academy is undergoing major changes in its senior and middle leadership structure due to a number of retirements, and resignations of staff who are leaving for new posts. A new Principal and Vice-Principal have been appointed. They have been working closely with the board and existing leaders since Easter 2013; they will take up their new posts from September 2013.
- The academy is a specialist mathematics and science college. It operates a six-term academic year. Due to its exceptionally large size, the academy is divided into six main 'colleges' (faculties), each with its own leadership, organisation, structure and staffing.
- The majority of students come from White heritage backgrounds, with just under half from White British backgrounds.
- The largest minority heritage groups are of Asian or Asian British backgrounds; about a quarter of the students are of Pakistani descent. A few students come from mixed heritage backgrounds, and a very few from other ethnic groups.
- The large majority of students speak English as their first language; about a third speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is above average. This is additional government funding for particular groups, including those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- At the time of the inspection, no students were being educated away from the school site. No alternative provision was being offered for students except by the academy's own staff within its achievement support and learning resource facilities.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is well below average; most such students have moderate learning difficulties.
- The proportion supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.
- In 2012 the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make more teaching consistently good or outstanding across the academy, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers set students work that is matched closely to their different abilities, and the work given to more-able students is sufficiently demanding
 - lessons proceed at a challenging pace so that students' interest in what they are learning is maintained throughout
 - teachers use questions more precisely during lessons, not only to challenge all students to think more deeply about their learning but also to check on students' understanding
 - all marking gives students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.

- Improve students' achievement in English by:
 - implementing urgently the board of directors' plans to appoint a specialist member of staff to lead and oversee the work of the English department
 - checking systematically that students' work is more regularly and accurately assessed
 - providing more consistently challenging work for more-able students so that more reach high grades and levels of attainment by Years 11 and 13
 - ensuring that the new literacy coordinator works closely with all the academy's colleges and teachers to give students regular planned opportunities to use and apply their literacy skills across all subjects
 - evaluating, at the end of each of the academy's terms, the impact of the contributions of all teachers to ensuring students make good progress in developing their literacy skills.

- Strengthen and accelerate students' achievement in mathematics by:
 - using the evaluations from the academy's review of mathematics teaching and learning to strengthen the teaching of the subject across the mathematics college
 - extending the opportunities for students to use and apply their numeracy skills across a wider range of subjects, and through situations which relate directly to their everyday lives
 - implementing fully the academy's initiatives to ensure that all teachers take responsibility for developing students' numeracy skills.

- Ensure that leaders' monitoring of teaching focuses more specifically on the quality of students' learning and their progress, the marking of their work and the ways students' learning is assessed, including through the use of questioning during lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of students gaining five or more grade A* to C passes, including English and mathematics, fell significantly. In 2012, students underachieved in English and did not make sufficient progress in either English or mathematics. As a result, the school failed to reach the minimum expectations set nationally.
- Students' overall points scores (the measure by which all students are assessed nationally at the end of each stage of their education) indicate that by Years 11 and 13, students attain lower standards overall in traditional GCSE and A-level examinations than when their successes in work-related and other courses are taken into account. However, the alternative courses often meet students' individual needs and aspirations well.
- In the sixth form, there has been a slight downward trend in performance since the previous inspection, but this is not as marked as in the main school. Most students make the progress they should, given their individual starting points.
- Failure to meet the government's floor standards came as a major shock to the academy. Remedial action was taken, and as a result of students retaking the English examination the success rate rose above the minimum expectation, but only by three per cent.
- During the current academic year, some students who were originally entered for both English language and literature examinations have dropped the literature studies in order to concentrate on gaining higher grades in their English language examination. This appears a successful interim strategy and is helping to improve the students' achievement in English.
- In mathematics, standards are broadly average by Year 11, as they were for most students when they joined the academy in Year 7. The proportion of students making better than expected progress remains below other schools nationally. Attainment and progress in the subject are improving, and the subject is now the most successful in enabling students to gain higher grades. The early entry of Year 10 students in mathematics has not been routine practice, except for specifically talented individuals; here, success rates at the highest grades are good.
- Examination results and school data show students' attainment has improved overall during the current academic year. This is a result of an ongoing review of its work. The academy is on track for the majority of students to improve their achievement in English and mathematics, but the extent of this has still to be tested through their final examination results.
- Current data, and students' work, indicate the school has been more effective in supporting its less-able students, particularly those who find learning difficult. This is improving their learning and increasing their chances of gaining at least a C grade in their Year 11 GCSEs. The academy's focus on this has resulted in some more-able students not making consistently the progress expected of them across all subjects. The proportion of students gaining higher grades in Year 11, 12 and 13 examinations is below average and requires improvement.
- Data show that while students for whom the school received additional government funding (the pupil premium) make progress at around two-thirds the rate of other students, this gap is closing. It is doing so faster in mathematics than English. However, eligible students still typically attain the equivalent of between half a grade and a grade lower in examinations than other students.

- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly similar to that of other students in mathematics, but better overall in English. In most examinations they attained around half a grade lower than similar students nationally. However, in 2012, they had particular success in science, achieving around a grade and a half better than similar students nationally. As such, their achievement was well above expectations.
- Students who speak English as an additional language gain similar grades overall to other students in the Year 11 GCSE examinations. In the sixth form, students from Asian or Asian British backgrounds tend to outperform other heritage groups, including White British students. The academy is starting to monitor this situation more closely to improve achievement of all groups of students by the end of both Years 12 and 13.
- The academy's work in providing additional support for its students is starting to have an impact right from Year 7, including through the national 'catch-up' programme for literacy and numeracy. Year 7 students who did not make the progress expected of them by the end of primary school are now starting to achieve at more expected levels.
- School data point to the increasing impact of the achievement support unit, for the majority of students it works with. This department supports the work of sport and the six colleges by assisting students and their families in the pursuit of learning and social development. Data also show greater impact where families attend the academy's consultation meetings and work more actively, on a regular basis, with learning support staff.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- A crucial aspect for improvement lies in ensuring a greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the academy. While a little over half the teaching seen during the inspection was good or better, too much teaching required improvement.
- Sometimes, teachers simply talk too much at the students, thus limiting the time for active learning; the attention of some students wanders and they become distracted. The pace of learning slows because lessons are not always planned to be sufficiently challenging, and learning becomes rather pedestrian, particularly for more-able students.
- Teachers' use of questioning to check students' understanding of their work is often good, but this is another inconsistent feature of the teaching. Not all teachers use questioning to involve fully and challenge students to reflect on their work, or to explain their thinking.
- In some respects, this is a school with contrasts. In science, for example, some of the marking seen was very poor, and provided no help for the students. Conversely, the marking of Year 12 art work is exemplary; it opens a genuine dialogue between the students and their teacher which leads to the development of their work and creative ideas. Such an approach also makes an invaluable contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, not only in the ways students reflect on their own and others' work but also in inspiring them and deepening their understanding of the cultural impact of art.
- Prior to the current academic year, the English department's assessments of its students' attainment and progress were not sufficiently accurate. Students' achievement has not been monitored effectively because there is no subject specialist overseeing the work of the department within the communications college. Assessments in English have improved, but remain less reliable overall than in mathematics. The board of directors is taking action to resolve this matter, in order to ensure students are not discriminated against and there is

equality of opportunity across all colleges.

- A mathematics college review has raised teachers' awareness of their responsibilities for ensuring the development of students' numeracy skills across all subjects. There is a drive to identify opportunities for students to use and apply their numeracy skills within each subject, and through situations which relate directly to the use of mathematics in their everyday lives.
- The inadequate achievement in English in 2012 has focused the academy on the fact that every teacher should be a teacher of English, and all share responsibility if students' literacy skills are underdeveloped. A new appointment to coordinate literacy development has now been made to focus the drive to promote literacy and communications skills in all subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' attitudes to learning are good. Working relationships are mainly positive. Where teaching is most effective, students are engaged fully and work together productively. Even when students may be left as more passive learners, most are keen to get down to active work, and do so without fuss when given the opportunity.
- Outstanding attitudes to learning were seen in a Year 7 drama class starting their new Year 8 timetable. Here, all students were engaged thoroughly in listening to and watching avidly each other's mime performances in order to develop and improve their own work. There were high levels of reflection upon the acting, and productive criticisms leading to improvement.
- Excellent engagement of students was also seen in a Year 8 physical education lesson, where there were high levels of collaborative work as students developed their coaching skills. This showed how well students are prepared to take on responsibility.
- Behaviour in and around the college is good. Discussions with students show they know how to keep each other safe, both individually and collectively. They understand well the implications for the academy, as a community, of any bullying or racist attitudes. When they arise, staff and students deal with them effectively.
- The academy community takes pride in its rich multicultural mix. This enables students to understand the importance of listening to and appreciating each other's differing points of view and approaches to life. Students say that no-one is made to feel different, whatever their background. These are important factors in the good development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their emergence as responsible young citizens. Most students enjoy school, and attendance is above average.
- The work of the achievement support staff has had a major impact in reducing exclusion rates, which are below average. Students who have been excluded say they feel the processes were fair overall and that they received good support through the process. The police officer attached to the school is qualified in anger management, and this benefits students well.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership, management and governance require improvement because the academy's work to improve teaching and learning has not had sufficient impact in ensuring that students make good enough progress, particularly in English. In addition, the academy has yet to appoint a subject specialist to coordinate and lead the work of the English department.

- Although the observations of lessons leaders carried out with inspectors showed that they have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning, monitoring of teaching has not focused sufficiently effectively on the progress students make or on the regular marking of students' work to ensure it is suitably helpful.
 - Leaders have not ensured that teaching is consistent across subjects and colleges in the ways it supports and promotes students' literacy and numeracy skills. There are inconsistencies across the academy and its colleges; for example in the expectations teachers have of students in applying high enough standards in their writing and the presentation of their work. Teachers do not always insist in their marking on proper punctuation, accurate spelling or careful enough handwriting.
 - Leaders at all levels have shown they can make a difference, and the recent improvements in both English and mathematics show a start has been made in reversing the academy's decline. There are examples of good individual leadership at both college and senior levels. However, some approaches to monitoring, evaluation and accountability, which were set up when the academy was established, have proved unwieldy and do not now currently serve the academy well enough. Discussions with the directors show that with the appointment of a new Principal, all aspects of leadership, management and organisation are under review.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The board of directors is well informed about the academy's performance. Its members carry out regular visits and are provided with an informative range of data. This enables them to compare and contrast the academy's performance with other schools nationally. They challenge leaders effectively as well as providing balanced support.
 - Discussions with directors and documentation from the board show that there are systematic checks on the effectiveness of teaching. Teachers' performance management targets are linked properly to school improvement priorities. Records for the past three years show that teachers are only promoted if their students are shown to be making good enough progress, and that they are applying fully the national teaching standards. As a result of the academy's recent performance, there have been relatively few promotions since the last inspection.
 - The board knows how the pupil premium funding is allocated and produces a statement explaining this. It is being used to provide individual work, counselling and achievement support for eligible students. Reports and analyses are provided to account for the impact of this spending; progress is monitored regularly.
 - Together with the Principal and other staff, the board ensures that procedures and policies for safeguarding students meet current national requirements.

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	135263
Local authority	Peterborough
Inspection number	412695

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
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	2092
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	422
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Barnes
Headteacher	Alan McMurdo
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2010
Telephone number	01733 426060
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