

Thorp Academy

Main Road, Ryton, Tyne and Wear NE40 3AH

Inspection dates

2–3 April 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a rapidly improving school. Leaders, including governors, provide strong leadership that is unashamedly focused on improving the life chances of every pupil.
- Most teachers know their pupils well. They plan engaging lessons that are well matched to pupils' needs. Current pupils are making good progress in all key stages across a range of subjects. However, a small minority of less-effective teaching exists in the school.
- Rates of attendance are improving and persistent absence is declining. However, while pupils' overall attendance is now broadly average, disadvantaged pupils attend less often and are persistently absent more often than other pupils nationally.
- The quality of provision in the sixth form is strong. Outcomes are improving and the vast majority of students progress to appropriate higher education, employment and training.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs. The vast majority of pupils develop a range of skills that serve them well when they leave school. However, plans to teach skills across the curriculum are not as clear as they could be.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent. Pupils engage in mature conversation with their peers and staff. A positive working atmosphere exists in and around school.
- The quality of governance has improved substantially since September 2017. Governors' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses are accurate. They effectively hold staff and leaders to account.
- Most parents and carers say that the quality of education provided by the school continues to improve. They are particularly pleased with the pastoral care and support that is available. However, a small minority of parents have concerns regarding home–school communication, pupil-progress reports and the organisation of parents' evenings.
- A strong reading culture exists within the school. Nevertheless, strategies to support the weakest readers are not well matched to the needs of some pupils.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is very good. Current pupils with SEND make strong progress across all key stages.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - refining the design and sequence of the curriculum so that the skills pupils learn are explicit and developed further within and across subjects
 - changing the perception of a small minority of parents who have concerns relating to school administration.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - eradicating the small minority of less-effective teaching that exists
 - developing staff expertise in teaching phonics, especially for pupils with lower starting points.
- Further improve rates of attendance and reduce persistent absence for all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- This is a rapidly improving school. In the last 18 months, the principal and executive principal have successfully managed to improve the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and effectiveness of leadership. Current pupils make significant gains in their learning and are well prepared for the next stages in their education, employment and training.
- Leaders at all levels have high expectations. In this way, they work well together as a team and provide incisive support to teachers. Staff morale is high and the vast majority of staff say that the school is well led and has improved since the last inspection.
- Leaders know the school well. This is because they evaluate their work and that of others frequently. Leaders draw on the substantial expertise of staff from elsewhere in the Northern Education Trust (the trust) to validate their judgements relating to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Consequently, senior and subject leaders can pinpoint the strengths and areas that require further development across the school. Leaders' improvement plans closely relate to their self-evaluation. The capacity for further improvement across the school is strong.
- Teachers say that the quality of training they receive has improved. Training is precisely matched to aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that are less effective or applied inconsistently by some teachers. Leaders provide additional support to those who need it and they hold challenging conversations with staff when improvements are slow to materialise. Pupils say that the quality of teaching is much stronger now than it was last year.
- Subject leadership is highly effective. A multi-layered approach to leadership, between school subject leaders and subject directors from the trust, ensures that teachers are challenged to improve but, equally, supported and praised for the effective work that they do. A collegiate working atmosphere exists in the school, one in which leaders encourage staff to be the best they can be.
- Leadership of pupils with SEND is strong. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has a detailed understanding of pupils' needs, including pupils who access support in the specialist resource provision base (ARMS). The SENCo ensures that all staff are provided with a range of comprehensive documents that outline each pupil's additional needs. Furthermore, staff frequently access specialist training that enables them to support the learning of pupils with SEND effectively.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is impressive. The well-established 'pledge' system encourages pupils to help in the community, take part in a school production and attend a residential visit or national sporting, cultural or academic event. This, and the 'Life' curriculum, ensures that pupils learn in many ways and have a well-developed understanding of what it means to be British in the world today.
- Teachers who are newly qualified or have entered the profession recently receive effective support. Leaders ensure that teachers at the start of their careers are

allocated a subject mentor and that they access a wide range of training opportunities. New and recently qualified teachers say that they appreciate leaders' support with behaviour management and the many opportunities to observe more-experienced staff in the classroom.

- Over time, leaders' use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils has not been effective. Historically, disadvantaged pupils' progress across key stages 3 and 4 has been well below the national average. Leaders, including governors, recognised that a large proportion of pupils were being let down and took decisive action to address this. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was undertaken and the recommendations implemented swiftly. Plans are now focused on improving disadvantaged pupils' attendance, behaviour and literacy. The school's own information demonstrates that, while still early days, current disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are improving across the school.
- The curriculum is planned and sequenced to develop pupils' knowledge for future learning. Frequent opportunities exist for pupils to improve their powers of recall. The curriculum ensures that pupils are well prepared to sit GCSE or A-level examinations in Years 11 and 13. However, leaders acknowledge that the skills they want pupils to learn before they leave school are less explicit within the curriculum. Consequently, while pupils develop and refine skills in isolation in some subjects, they do not sufficiently develop or apply their skills consistently across a wide range of subjects.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online inspection questionnaire, Parent View, are pleased with the work of the school. However, some parents have concerns with home-school communication, disorganised parents' evenings or a lack of information regarding their child's progress.

Governance of the school

- A new scheme of delegation was introduced in September 2017. Since then, governance has improved substantially.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Scrutiny of the minutes from governing body meetings demonstrates that governors frequently ask searching questions of leaders, covering a wide range of issues. Consequently, governors have a good understanding of pupils' progress and the ways in which leaders are developing new strategies.
- Governors take their legal responsibilities seriously. For example, governors ensure that pupils and staff are kept safe by regularly reviewing safeguarding policies.
- Governors conduct regular audits to check the skills of members of the governing body. They attend face-to-face training when an audit identifies a skills deficit, or they complete online training to refresh their understanding. For example, governors recently attended training to improve their understanding of the document that all schools receive summarising attainment and progress in examinations at key stages 4 and 5. Governors say that they are now far more confident when asking leaders a question linked to pupils' examination results.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff attend regular safeguarding training that relates to the school's child protection and staff behaviour policies. Inspection evidence demonstrates that these policies are well understood by staff.
- Scrutiny of safeguarding files confirms that safeguarding leaders know their role well. Referrals to the local authority and other agencies are swift when leaders have a concern about a pupil. Leaders ensure that external agencies complete investigations and that vulnerable pupils receive the support they require.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. They know whom to speak to if they are concerned and understand the process for referring a friend. Pupils say that staff listen to them and take their concerns seriously.
- Pupils demonstrate an appropriate awareness of how to stay safe online. They say that the recent ban on mobile phones is applied consistently by staff and that this has helped to reduce the instances of cyber bullying during and after school hours.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved markedly, particularly this academic year. Typically, most teachers have high expectations, know their pupils well and plan learning activities that engage and enthuse pupils.
- Most teachers use pupils' prior assessment information effectively when they plan lessons. By doing so, the activities pupils are asked to complete are usually well matched to their learning needs. Pupils' outcomes are improving this year as teaching improves and staff focus more on improving the progress pupils make rather than how well they attain.
- Teachers have established effective routines in the classroom that ensure pupils swiftly move from one activity to the next, maximising the amount of time pupils learn in each lesson.
- Many pupils across the school, including key stage 5, say that they value the consistent approach to teaching and learning. For example, pupils welcome the opportunity to discuss and share ideas in classrooms by sitting in groups of four. Likewise, pupils say that learning points are made clear to them when the teachers model effective answers or written work at the front of the classroom.
- Teaching assistants are effectively deployed to support pupils' learning. As a result of high-quality training and strong working relationships with teachers, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to lessons. Pupils with SEND receive excellent support in lessons because the teaching assistants have a thorough understanding of their needs. Teaching assistants ensure that learning resources and questions are appropriately adapted so that pupils with SEND can keep in touch with their learning.
- Teachers increasingly adapt lessons so that disadvantaged pupils receive one-to-one support or supplementary learning activities, particularly in English and mathematics. Additionally, teachers often encourage disadvantaged pupils to volunteer to read an

answer aloud or improve their written work further. This is contributing to disadvantaged pupils making more progress than they have done previously.

- Teachers' use of questioning is informative and probing in many lessons. This was evident in Year 8 in science, where pupils made rapid gains in their understanding of monoclonal cells and antibodies due to the teacher's highly effective questioning. For example, the teacher frequently asked questions such as 'Can you expand on that answer?' By doing so, pupils gained a deeper understanding of cell division, well beyond the teacher's original objectives of the lesson.
- Pupils' literacy development is improving. This is because teachers regularly model effective subject-specific language and insist that pupils use it in their writing. For example, in geography, pupils are asked to 'think and write like a geographer'. Pupils' writing includes increasingly more complex terms. However, some pupils are less confident when using unfamiliar words. Furthermore, the weakest readers are not always supported effectively so that they can clearly understand teachers' detailed written or oral instructions.
- A small minority of teachers do not consistently adhere to the school's assessment policy, plan lessons that meet the needs of pupils or ensure that pupils make at least good progress over time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The vast majority of pupils are motivated to do well. They apply themselves to their work and are supportive of the learning of their friends. During the inspection, pupils were observed working well independently and in groups. The workbooks of most pupils are neatly presented, organised and demonstrate that they commit to improving their work over time.
- Pupils learn about 'Life' each day during tutorial time. During this time, pupils develop a range of skills and increase their awareness of current affairs, cultural diversity and health issues that are relevant to their age.
- Over 100 pupils are actively involved in the school's 'Elite Sports Programme'. Following a successful application process, pupils receive additional coaching to develop their technique, strength and conditioning. Staff also offer support with funding applications so that pupils can pursue a career in sport during and after their time at school.
- Pupils with SEND who access the specialist resource base spend most of their time in lessons with their peers. This, and the effective support from teaching assistants, ensures that the personal development of pupils with complex learning needs is strong.
- The small numbers of pupils who receive alternative education provision make good progress in both their academic and personal development. Leaders ensure that they check pupils' attendance and well-being routinely. Regular communication between the school and staff at the alternative education providers ensures that school staff can provide additional support or resources if a pupil falls behind, particularly in English and mathematics. Similarly, additional pastoral support is available to pupils who are

educated off site, should they need it.

- Careers education is a strength. A coherent and varied careers curriculum ensures that pupils learn how different subjects can help them gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of careers. However, a small minority of pupils say that they would like to be able to choose their options later, giving them more time to consider their chosen career path.
- While most pupils are confident and display positive attitudes to their learning, this is not yet leading to sustained and consistently strong outcomes.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils and staff say that the standard of pupils' behaviour has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Leaders have successfully introduced a new behaviour policy and ensured that most staff follow it consistently. Staff promote positive behaviour frequently. While sanctions and consequences act as a suitable deterrent, incidents of positive praise from staff to pupils far outweigh the other. Pupils act maturely as they walk around the large school building and are praised for doing so by staff in the corridors.
- The proportion of pupils who are excluded permanently and for a fixed term has reduced dramatically over the past 12 months. Indeed, the school's own information highlights that fixed-term exclusions this year have fallen by 86% when compared to the same period last year.
- Pupils' attendance over time has been poor. Leaders have worked hard to address this by appointing additional attendance leaders and refining school systems to improve the way persistent absentees and their families are supported and/or sanctioned. While attendance and persistent absence this year are now in line with last year's national average, disadvantaged pupils' attendance continues to be a concern. Rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils have not improved as much as those of other pupil groups this year. Furthermore, disadvantaged pupils are more than twice as likely to be persistently absent from school as other pupils nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Improved attendance, behaviour and teaching are leading to current pupils in key stages 3 and 4 making good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- However, between 2016 and 2018, the progress made by Year 11 pupils was no better than average. Outcomes in English and humanities were particularly weak. Nevertheless, during the same period, the proportion of pupils attaining a grade 4 or higher in English and mathematics improved. In 2018, 71% of Year 11 pupils achieved a grade 4 or higher in English and mathematics; this was above the national average.
- While there is still much work to do to ensure that current disadvantaged pupils' published outcomes are similar to those of other pupils nationally, most notably in English, inspection evidence demonstrates that these pupils are making much stronger progress than they have done in the past.
- Additional funding to support pupils who enter the school with below-average

attainment in reading is directed towards a range of strategies to support pupils' comprehension. Most pupils catch up with their peers before they enter Year 8. However, a minority of pupils continue to receive additional support for some time. This is because reading strategies do not focus on developing the weakest readers' phonic knowledge and ability to read fluently. Consequently, these pupils make limited progress in their reading because they are unable to understand the meaning of text, as they cannot read it accurately.

- Current pupils with SEND make strong progress from their different starting points. Leaders have established effective links with primary schools. This means that the needs of many pupils with SEND are already known to the school prior to pupils starting in Year 7. Arrangements are made in advance to support pupils with complex learning needs, which ensures that these pupils receive high-quality support from day one.
- Leaders have been successful in their aim to 'open doors' for pupils when they leave school at the end of Year 11. Due to above-average attainment and effective careers advice, all Year 11 pupils progressed to education, employment or training in 2018.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leaders are ambitious for students in the sixth form. They have high expectations of students in terms of their application to their learning, the progress they make and students' standards of presentation and conduct.
- The curriculum in the sixth form is wide and varied. Leaders ensure that students are able to study courses that meet their needs, interests and aspirations. Students receive meaningful and tailored careers advice and guidance, which contributes to an above-average proportion progressing to higher education, universities and employment.
- Most teachers in the sixth form demonstrate strong subject knowledge and an understanding of examination requirements. Most teachers effectively use this and their understanding of students' prior assessment information to plan learning activities that successfully develop students' knowledge, skills and understanding. A small minority of teaching is less effective. Leaders have identified subjects where this is the case and are providing effective support to improve matters.
- The improving quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school, including in key stage 5, is leading to an increasing proportion of students continuing their education into sixth form and completing their courses. Retention rates are high.
- Students' progress across key stage 5 was below average in 2016 and 2018. Students' progress is improving this year, particularly in the academic subjects. Students make particularly strong progress in English literature and language, computing and chemistry. Progress is less strong in design and technology, photography and health and social care.
- All students engage in meaningful work experience in a wide range of settings. Students say that this has helped to improve their self-confidence and work-related skills. Students also take part in many charitable and voluntary projects that link to their personal interests, such as working in sports leadership or local primary schools.
- Safeguarding arrangements in the sixth form are effective. Staff make use of the well-

considered arrangements elsewhere in the school to ensure that students have a trusted adult that they can speak to if they have a concern. Students say that they feel safe and that staff are proactive when it comes to supporting issues such as workload, anxiety and living healthy lifestyles.

- Students learn a range of skills and explore wider issues linked to personal development and preparation for their next steps during assemblies and time with their tutors.

School details

Unique reference number	141185
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10087577

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	978
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	138
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Julie Kelly
Principal	Karen Hailes Andrew Jordan (Executive Principal)
Telephone number	0191 413 2113
Website	www.thoracademy.org/
Email address	enquiries@thoracademy.org
Date of previous inspection	30 November – 1 December 2016

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils attending the school are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average.
- The school has a specialist resource provision base (ARMS) for 23 pupils with complex learning needs. Currently, 11 pupils with SEND are supported in this way. These pupils attend lessons in the specialist resource base and in classes with their peers.

- The school is a member of the Northern Education Trust (NET). Ultimate responsibility for the school rests with the board of trustees of NET. Some of the work of the board is delegated to the academy council, the governors of the academy. The governors ensure the trust's vision, values, policies and priorities are implemented, hold the school to account and develop local community and employer links.
- An executive principal works in the school on a part-time basis.
- Currently, the school uses part-time and full-time alternative education provision at Thomas Hepburn Academy, TLG Newcastle and River Tyne Academy, Gateshead, for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 45 lessons across the school. Many of the observations of lessons were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, teachers and members of the local academy council, including the chair of the governing body, and the lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The lead inspector talked on the telephone with one parent.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and with a group of subject leaders in mathematics, science, history, geography and English. In addition, an inspector scrutinised a large sample of workbooks belonging to some disadvantaged pupils in key stages 3 and 4. An inspector also scrutinised a wide range of work belonging to several sixth-form students.
- An inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative from two alternative education providers used by the school.
- Inspectors held informal and formal discussions with many pupils and observed interactions during social times.
- Inspectors listened to a group of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils read.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation, analysis of performance information, action plans and evaluations, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding files, recruitment checks and governor minutes.
- Inspectors considered the 278 responses from parents who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Seventy-two members of staff and 85 pupils completed Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys. All these responses were taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Lee Elliott, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Campbell	Ofsted Inspector
Garry Stout	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Cleary	Ofsted Inspector

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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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