

Thornaby Academy

Baysdale Road, Thornaby, TS17 9DB

Inspection dates

2–3 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders' capacity, at all levels, to improve the school, is fragile. Therefore, this is a school that requires special measures.
- Outcomes for pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are inadequate. By the time they reach Year 11, progress for too many pupils has been weak across a range of subjects.
- Despite green shoots of improvement, the quality of teaching is far too variable. This is resulting in current pupils making slow rates of progress.
- Some leaders' views of the quality of teaching are too generous. Alongside this, some middle leaders do not have a firm grasp of how to secure improvements in their departmental areas.
- Learning is poorly planned. Teachers do not take account of pupils' needs or their starting points well enough. As a result, some pupils do not access learning activities or make the progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils are not sufficiently challenged in their learning, especially those with high prior attainment. Teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Adults do not encourage pupils to think deeply about their work.
- Strategies to improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism have not been wholly effective. While some pupils now attend school more frequently, absence remains too high for some groups of pupils.
- While many pupils behave well, a minority of pupils fail to adhere to the school's expectations. The proportion of pupils excluded from school on a fixed-term basis, although reducing, is too high.

The school has the following strengths

- Since the appointment of the headteacher, roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability have been more clearly defined.
- The headteacher, chief executive officer (CEO), and trustees are firmly committed to improving the school.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils feel safe at school. The headteacher, supported by other staff, has created a caring ethos. Pupils are respectful and tolerant of differences.
- Most pupils wear their uniform smartly and are proud to attend Thornaby Academy.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make stronger progress in their learning, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with high prior attainment, by:
 - ensuring that all staff have consistently high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve,
 - making sure that teachers take account of pupils' different starting points to plan learning that meets their needs
 - ensuring teachers check pupils' learning and address misconceptions effectively
 - making sure that teachers extend, develop and deepen pupils' learning of concepts and ideas.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - establishing a clear strategy for teaching and ensure that it is understood and implemented by all staff
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan includes precise targets for the impact of leaders' actions
 - making sure that leaders at all levels have a clear knowledge and understanding of what is working well, what is not, and what needs to be addressed to improve the school's performance
 - ensuring that strategies to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress are implemented consistently across the school by all staff
 - thoroughly evaluating the impact of spending of the pupil premium funding
 - ensuring middle leaders develop the skills they need to effectively fulfil their roles
 - holding leaders at all levels to account for the impact of their work
 - continuing to reduce the proportion of pupils who are excluded from school.

- Urgently improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence, by:
 - regularly evaluating strategies to ensure that they have a positive impact on increasing levels of attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils and girls
 - continuing to engage with families, so that they fully understand and support the school's drive to ensure all pupils attend school as frequently as possible.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Turbulence in staffing and leadership at the school has hindered the headteacher and the board of trustees. Improvements to the school have not been sufficiently swift and effective. The capacity to improve the school has been, and remains, too fragile.
- The headteacher has defined roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability for senior and middle leaders. However, the extent to which some leaders understand their responsibilities and how they are held to account is highly inconsistent. They are not securing improvements with sufficient urgency, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and rates of pupils' attendance.
- The headteacher is reflective and has produced an accurate improvement plan which is focused on the right priorities for the school. However, some staff are not consistently following the actions defined in the headteacher's plan.
- Pupils' rates of attendance are significantly lower than the national averages overall and for groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and girls. This contributes to their underachievement. Leaders' efforts, despite their determination, have had little effect. Pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should.
- Poor teaching has not been tackled effectively. For example, there is no coherent strategy around teaching. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. Teachers' planning is weak.
- The school's pupil premium strategy is up-to-date and accurately summarises the key barriers to learning for pupils. The leader responsible for this work knows the cohort of pupils well and is clear about what is needed to support disadvantaged pupils' learning and progress. However, some strategies are in their infancy or not consistently applied and, therefore, the impact is not evident at this time. The substantial additional funding the school receives is not having the desired effect on improving the attendance and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This is compounded by poor teaching that does not consider disadvantaged pupils' needs or barriers. Disadvantaged pupils make weak progress.
- The use of additional funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has had very little impact on improving their attendance and outcomes. However, pupils with SEND are identified quickly. They are supported in a timely manner in relation to their personal, social and emotional well-being.
- The school's curriculum provides a range of subjects for pupils to access. The poor planning of the curriculum at a subject level is leading to a high proportion of pupils, across a range of subjects, underachieving. However, there have been recent improvements in some subjects.
- The headteacher, alongside other staff, has created a caring ethos at the school. As a result, behaviour has improved and there has been some reduction in incidents of poor behaviour. Many parents agree that pupils behave well at the school, are safe and happy at the school.

- The school engenders an ethos where pupils are respectful and tolerant. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is developed well during their time at the school because of effective pastoral care.
- The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- The CEO and board of trustees are compassionate and caring people. They have worked tirelessly to bring about stability at the school. However, they acknowledge that the capacity to improve the school under the current structures and constraints is not secure. They are honest in recognising that the impact of work to improve the school has been too variable. Notwithstanding, they want the best for pupils at the school and for the local community.
- The board of trustees makes no excuses and fully understands that standards in the school are not where they should, or need, to be. Although trustees check on the work of leaders, they have not had the desired impact when challenging and supporting them.
- The trustees are a highly skilled group of people and are astute. Nevertheless, they accept the need to use their skills more effectively to improve the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher, alongside other leaders, has ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding are robust. Staff know the pupils well and pupils appreciate the care, guidance and support they receive from them. There are clear guidelines in place to safeguard pupils who may be at risk of harm. Staff are aware of these and follow them to identify or raise concerns.
- Staff receive regular training and are knowledgeable about safeguarding. Leaders work with various external agencies in order to support pupils and ensure that support is timely and effective.
- Procedures for vetting staff before they begin to work at the school are clear. The school's record of these checks is well maintained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Over time, the quality of teaching has been weak. Despite some green shoots of improvement evident for current pupils, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is highly variable and inconsistent. Consequently, teaching is not supporting current pupils to make enough gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding.

- Teachers' planning is not effective. It does not meet pupils' needs. In too many lessons teachers' planning does not consider what pupils should be learning or the depth to which they should explore an idea or concept. Too many activities are designed to keep pupils busy, and do not build well on pupils' starting points or prior learning. The progress of some groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, is weak.
- Some teachers do not check pupils' understanding throughout lessons, for example in mathematics and science. Consequently, pupils leave their lessons with misconceptions and wide gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Although teachers use questioning to gauge pupils' ideas, many fail to ensure pupils think deeply about concepts or ideas. Teachers expect, and accept, superficial responses.
- Some teachers, for example, in physical education and history, make effective use of their strong subject knowledge and develop pupils' knowledge and skills well.
- In the main, positive relationships exist between staff and pupils and between pupils. Pupils are content to support each other's learning and enjoy taking part in different activities, where they can work together and learn from one another.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Most pupils enjoy school, take part in their learning and are polite and respectful to staff, their peers and visitors. However, this is not the case for all pupils. A minority spoil the school's positive, caring ethos.
- The concerted efforts of leaders and staff have created an environment that is nurturing and caring. As a result, pupils have confidence in staff and trust them to provide help and support when it is needed.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors say that bullying happens rarely, but that where it does occur, staff deal with it effectively and in a timely way.
- Pupils who are involved in the school council speak with pride about the school and how they feel their views are acted upon.
- Pupils can explain how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of school and when using social media. The school's approach to promoting pupils' personal development ensures that pupils are respectful and tolerant towards anyone who is different.
- A small number of pupils attend other providers for part of their education. There is regular contact between school and the providers. Leaders have ensured that these pupils' personal development and welfare is developed appropriately well.

Behaviour

- Pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. As a result, pupils' behaviour is judged to be inadequate.
- Despite leaders' concerted efforts, pupils' absence remains far too high. It is not improving quickly enough for some groups of pupils, especially for disadvantaged pupils and girls. For a number of individual pupils, intervention and support is ensuring they attend school more frequently. In addition, more pupils, this year, have 100% attendance. Parents now need to play their part in supporting the leaders' drive to ensure pupils attend more often.
- Those pupils who attend alternative provision attend regularly and this is monitored by leaders. The provisions they attend support their behavioural and social needs.
- Despite a reduction this academic year, the proportion of pupils that have been excluded on a fixed-term basis remains too high. A minority of pupils do not conform to the school's increased expectations and standards. Pupils spoken to during the inspection reported instances of low-level disruption and poor attitudes from a significant minority of pupils. These disruptive pupils have a negative impact on the learning and progress in lessons.
- Most pupils are clear about what is right and wrong. They understand there will be consequences to their actions. They behave well, dress smartly and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils leave the school at the end of Year 11 having made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils, boys and those who enter the school with high prior attainment. Pupils' attainment by the end of key stage 4 is low because pupils are underachieving considerably.
- In 2018, the progress of disadvantaged pupils was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally. This demonstrates that during their time at the school they have underperformed considerably. Despite some signs of recovery, inspection evidence reflects that disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are not achieving well.
- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, underachieve. This is because teachers do not challenge pupils sufficiently well.
- Current pupils' assessment information indicates pupils are not making the progress expected of them. Despite some improvement at key stage 3, pupils' rates of progress remain inconsistent across a range of subjects, especially mathematics.
- The headteacher's work to raise aspirations has had a positive effect on pupils' destinations when they leave Thornaby Academy. An increasing number of pupils are accessing education, employment or training. For disadvantaged pupils in particular, an increasing number are aspiring to, and have applied for, further education places.

School details

Unique reference number	144495
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10087496

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	362
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	John Baker
Headteacher	Donna Butcher
Telephone number	01642763244
Website	tltrust.org/thornaby-academy
Email address	info@thornabyacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The school became a sponsored academy on 1 September 2010 and was re-brokered to Teesside Learning Trust on 1 September 2016. The board of trustees is responsible for the governance of the academy. Details of the academy's trustees and the scheme of delegation are available via the school's website.
- The vast majority of pupils are white British.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is significantly higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEND and with an education, health and care plan is well above the national averages.
- The school uses alternative provision for four pupils. They attend on a part-time basis.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a range of lessons across a range of subjects of those available. During the inspection the school was hosting the first week of the Year 6 into Year 7 transition weeks and Year 10 were out of school attending work experience.
- Inspectors examined and evaluated the progress of pupils through a range of books. The samples included the work of pupils with different starting points and from different year groups.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils, both formally and informally around the school, including before and after school, and break and lunchtime. The lead inspector also met with the school council.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders and a group of trustees. A meeting was also held with the CEO of the trust. Inspectors also spoke with two groups of staff who were at various stages in their career.
- Inspectors took into account the 20 responses from Ofsted's parental questionnaire, Parent View, and 13 free-text responses. They also considered the nine responses from pupils, and 25 from the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors examined several documents, including the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plan, and the pupil premium strategy plan. Inspectors evaluated the school's own records pertaining to the quality of teaching and learning, minutes of governors' meetings and a wide-range of documentation focusing on safeguarding, child protection, and pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Darren Stewart, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jill Bowe

Ofsted Inspector

Janet Gabanski

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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