

The Thetford Academy

Croxton Road, Thetford, IP24 1LH

Inspection dates 12–13 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Students' achievement is low. Standards in English and mathematics have been below average for the past two years.
- Standards in science, physical education and design and technology are particularly low.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not receive the help they need to achieve well enough.
- Extra funding to support disadvantaged students is not used effectively, so they do not achieve as well as others.
- Teaching is not helping the majority of students to make enough progress. Too much teaching is inadequate.
- Attendance is persistently low. Students' frequent absence prevents teachers from helping them to make progress.
- Behaviour is inadequate. Students feel unsafe and too many are excluded from the academy.
- Many older pupils display casual attitudes towards learning. They are not working hard enough to prepare themselves fully for examinations later this year.
- Leaders and managers, including the governing board, do not have the capacity to secure essential improvements.
- The sixth form is inadequate. The quality of provision and its leadership and management do not enable students to achieve well.

The school has the following strengths

- Standards in Key Stage 3 and in mathematics in Key Stage 4 are rising.
- The merger of two schools into one academy and the construction of new academy buildings is being managed effectively, keeping students safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons, four of which were jointly observed with senior staff. In addition, the lead inspector toured both of the academy sites and visited lessons with the principal and a vice-principal.
- Meetings were held with the principal and consultant principal, senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Board and four groups of students.
- Inspectors checked and took account of responses by parents and carers to the online questionnaire (Parent View) but there were very few responses. Staff questionnaires were not circulated.
- The inspection team observed the academy’s work, scrutinised data about students’ achievement, behaviour and attendance, looked at reports used by leaders to check the academy’s work, reviewed the minutes of meetings of the governing board and scrutinised students’ books in lessons.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
John Mason	Additional Inspector
John Greevy	Additional Inspector
Paul Bartlett	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this academy 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 academy are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the academy.

Information about this school

- The academy opened in September 2010 in existing buildings on the sites of the two predecessor schools, Rosemary Musker High school and Charles Burrell High school. The academy is sponsored by Easton College, Norfolk County Council, Wymondham College and West Suffolk College.
- The accelerated opening of the academy did not begin well. Many parents and carers, and some students, resisted the move towards a single secondary school in the town. In December 2010 the lead sponsor changed. A new principal was appointed in April 2011. A large number of staff left the academy in July 2011. Staffing changes continued in 2012 with a large number leaving or joining the academy and some persistent staff absence.
- Students and staff travel regularly between the two sites which are three miles apart. By September 2013, all students and staff will relocate into new buildings currently under construction on one of the sites.
- The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The large majority of students have a White British heritage; approximately one fifth are from East European or Portuguese backgrounds.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for particular groups of students including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is higher than found nationally.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is above that found nationally. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. Students' additional needs relate mostly to moderate learning or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - taking decisive action to eradicate teaching that is regularly less than good
 - setting basic rules about what is expected of students in all lessons and gaining the commitment of every teacher that these agreed rules will be applied consistently
 - gaining greater consistency in how teachers use assessment data to plan lessons that meet the needs and interests of all students and make all learning stimulating, interesting and enjoyable
 - deploying classroom assistants effectively in lessons to accelerate the progress made by all students in need of additional help
 - stabilising the teaching staff to reduce the reliance upon temporary supply teachers
 - using the best teachers in the academy to illustrate highly effective practice and show how this

contributes to raising students' achievement.

- Raise the achievement of all students, in all key stages and subjects by:
 - adding greater urgency to ensuring that all students engage fully in learning in lessons and revision classes, particularly those taking examinations later this year
 - using assessment data more rigorously in lessons to check that all students make accelerated progress, especially students supported through additional funding, disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
 - getting a much higher proportion of students attending the academy and remaining in lessons regularly to improve their progress
 - increasing the number and rigour of the checks of students' progress and welfare in the sixth form.

- Improve students' behaviour and reduce the numbers excluded from learning by:
 - ensuring that every teacher and classroom assistant takes full responsibility for managing students' behaviour effectively in all lessons
 - seeking the views of students about what else needs to be done to help them manage their own behaviour and meet the academy's expectations of them
 - providing different, stimulating activities and regular breaks to retain students' interest and attention during longer lessons
 - ensuring that all pupils feel safe and free from bullying, and have confidence in staff that issues they raise will be fully resolved.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - providing additional external support to resolve long-standing staffing issues and give the principal more time to focus on raising achievement across the academy
 - ensuring that the efforts of senior leaders in securing improvements are clearly illustrated by much better teaching, rapid improvements to behaviour and attendance and higher standards achieved by all students
 - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders and managers, and ensuring that they are held fully to account for raising achievement in their subject areas and across all key stages
 - convincing all stakeholders of the opportunity presented by the new academy to transform the educational opportunities for all young people so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their training, employment or further education
 - providing a clear, strategic direction for the sixth form and using the planned opening of new facilities to re-launch it as a centre for academic and vocational learning
 - arranging external training for the governing board on using performance data so they can hold senior leaders to account for the achievement, behaviour and attendance of all students.

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

- Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Most students join the academy with skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are well below national averages. Senior leaders rightly evaluate students' achievement as inadequate. They recognise that there is not enough good teaching in the academy to accelerate students' learning and progress, or to make up for these shortfalls in students' knowledge and understanding.
- Assessment data show that fewer students in Key Stage 3 attained the expected levels in English, mathematics and science in 2012 than in the previous year, but overall standards are marginally higher than at the time the academy opened.
- In Key Stage 4, the academy has focused much of its efforts in increasing the percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Results have risen but this masks some significant underachievement. Results in science were exceptionally low. Results in mathematics rose sharply last year. Students were entered for GCSE examinations early in their final year but very few of them sat the examination again to improve their grades.
- Additional funding through the pupil premium has not been used wisely to raise the achievement of those it is intended for. It is used extensively to provide additional one-to-one support and revision classes, but the average points scores of students known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children show they persistently attain less well than others.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not receive the support and guidance they need to achieve well enough. The percentage of these students gaining GCSE and other qualifications is much lower than for other students in the academy.
- There were no marked differences in the performance of boys and girls in 2011 but a significant gap opened up in 2012 as girls out-performed boys. A significant proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 attend off-site, alternative education at a local college or in work placements. Their overall achievement is no better than that of their peers.
- In lessons, younger students benefit from being together on one site where their progress and welfare can be monitored carefully. Many older students are less motivated to learn. Travelling between the two sites, regular use of temporary teachers, changes to the curriculum and the absence of rigorous checks on their progress leads to their lack of engagement with teachers and only a casual interest in their work. Most more-able, older students are keen to learn, especially when they receive good teaching. In several lessons, however, students of all abilities in Year 11 showed little sense of urgency or willingness to make an effort to prepare themselves for forthcoming examinations.
- In the sixth form, students do not achieve well because they do not have sufficient prior knowledge to meet the demands of advanced level courses and the quality of teaching is not good enough to accelerate their progress. Attainment in Year 12 is low and only a small proportion of students move into further study in Year 13. In the few courses provided for students more suited to vocational learning, achievement is also low. A minority of students do not attend regularly and this restricts their learning and progress.

The quality of teaching is inadequate

- In half of all the lessons seen by inspectors, the teaching required improvement or was inadequate. The persistently low standards achieved by students indicate that the quality of teaching over time is not good enough to accelerate students' progress from their low starting points, or prevent them from underachieving. Senior leaders could show where improvements to the quality of teaching had been made, but their evaluation that it is better than inadequate is inaccurate.
- Too many teachers are under-prepared. They do not use assessment data well enough to match learning to what students already know, so tasks are often too easy and fail to capture their interest, or are too difficult. Teachers do not target their questioning to engage all students in discussion or to test their understanding, so some students remain passive.
- Despite being raised as priorities for improvement at the time of the academy's first monitoring inspection in 2012, the marking of students' books remains variable. It does not provide enough feedback to students on how to improve their work. Classroom assistants are not deployed effectively to work with students in need of support.
- The expectations of some teachers are too low. Basic procedures for managing students as they arrive at and during lessons are not followed consistently. Teachers do not challenge students who use mobile phones, drink juice, arrive late or wear their coats or bags in lessons. New procedures to manage students' behaviour are not applied consistently. Consequently, a minority of students disrupt the learning of others. This is made worse by teaching that fails to inspire or interest them, or when students are programmed for three-hour long lessons in some subjects.
- In a significant proportion of lessons, teaching was good and at times outstanding, reflecting the impact of a number of recent new appointments made. A notable strength of the academy is its care and support for newly qualified and recently appointed staff. Despite their relative inexperience, their teaching is good because they are well organised. They manage students' behaviour effectively by setting high expectations and making learning interesting and enjoyable. The most effective teachers are not being used well enough to model best practice and show others what they need to do to promote good achievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

- Last year, teachers left responsibility for tackling poor behaviour to senior leaders and this led to an unacceptable numbers of students being removed from lessons. This has changed since September 2012. Teachers now understand it is their responsibility to apply procedures to manage behaviour. Removals from lessons are reducing but remain too high and behaviour is still inadequate. Temporary exclusions from the academy also remain too high.
- Students expressed concerns about bullying, mostly name-calling and physical bullying. They knew which teachers to approach if they had concerns but were not confident that they would do enough to stop the bullying. Inspectors pursued this further and found that records show that bullying does happen, including some racist incidents, and is recorded systematically. Records do not show, however, what action was taken or whether incidents were fully resolved.
- Action taken to improve attendance has led to some improvement. More students regularly attend the academy than was the case when it opened. However, overall attendance remains below average. Travelling between the two sites, long lessons of three hours in some subjects and the ingrained attitudes of a minority of older students present significant challenges to maintaining regular attendance.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leadership and management are inadequate because they are not showing that they have the capacity to secure essential improvements in those areas that are preventing students from achieving well enough.
- Senior leaders work hard, but they have not checked rigorously enough that their plans for improvement lead directly to significant gains in students' achievement, their attendance and behaviour. Procedures to check the quality of teaching and the use of assessment data to track students' progress have been strengthened, but these are not generating significant improvements.
- The principal and a consultant principal have worked jointly to manage the merger of the two predecessor schools into one academy and ensure that pupils remain safe during the construction of new buildings. Stronger links are being forged with local primary schools to tackle common issues about underachievement and low attendance. The principal has set out priorities to challenge ineffective teaching, reduce staff absence and tackle some resistance from some staff unwilling to support the academy's development. This has absorbed much of her time and prevented her from focusing on raising students' achievement. Self-evaluation lacks clear judgements about the academy's overall effectiveness in comparison to all schools nationally.
- The academy inherited a range of middle leadership roles which has required some restructuring. Leaders of faculties, subjects and key stages are unclear who has overall responsibility for securing rapid improvements. Some of them do not have a thorough understanding of how they can use performance data to raise achievement. Subject leaders in a range of subjects, especially science, design and technology, and physical education are not driving improvements. There is no permanent, experienced leader of the sixth form and no clear strategy to improve provision and outcomes for sixth-form students.
- The academy's accelerated opening, a change of principal and a major building programme have presented significant barriers to quickly making the improvements needed. Not all academy staff, students, parents and carers have been convinced of the need to support the academy's vision. This is jeopardising the opportunity to build an academy capable of providing all young people in Thetford with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need for the next stage of their training, employment or further education.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The members of the governing board are knowledgeable and experienced, and they know the local context well. They check that the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks is regularly maintained but are less vigilant about ensuring arrangements are in place for sixth-form students to sign in and out of school as they should do. The governing board has a clear strategic view of the academy's future direction and knows most of its strengths and weaknesses. For example, they know that some teachers have moved up the salary scale even though their teaching is not consistently good. These arrangements were inherited from the two schools that formed the academy. Governors are supporting the principal in her actions to resolve all staffing issues. The governing board is not adequately checking that the academy is performing well enough to meet expectations. It is not checking that all of the academy's resources, including the use of pupil premium funding, are being used to generate significant gains in students' achievement, attendance and behaviour. Minutes of meetings show that they ask challenging questions about the performance of students and teachers, but they are not using these data rigorously to hold senior leaders to account for the academy's performance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136204
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	399770

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	1263
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	157
Appropriate authority	The governing board
Chair	David Lawrence
Headteacher	Catherine Spillane
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01842 754875
Fax number	01842 765036
Email address	principal@thetfordacademy.com

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