

Inspection of The Thetford Academy

Croxton Road, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1LH

Inspection dates: 4–5 March 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and enjoy their time at The Thetford Academy. Pupils take part in many clubs and programmes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils appreciate being able to learn a musical instrument. Recently, pupils had the chance to share their talents performing in a concert to parents and carers.

Pupils, including sixth-form students, say that they feel valued and cared for. Pupils say that if they have any difficulties, staff listen. Pupils trust adults to act swiftly if they experience unkind behaviour or bullying. Such incidents are rare.

There are high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils say that due to the new behaviour policy, 'you can't get away with stuff anymore'. Pupils appreciate this and say that being well behaved in lessons helps them to learn.

Throughout the school, pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum that focuses on deepening their knowledge. Pupils read often. There is time during the school day to read for pleasure. However, students in the sixth form do not regularly experience as good a curriculum across all subject areas as in the rest of the school. Where this is the case, students do not achieve as well as they should.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

More recently, there has been a sharp focus on getting behaviour right. As one pupil said for many, 'It is helping us to learn the skills to get on in life.' Teachers appreciate the fact that they can now teach without interruption. Leaders' approach of 'let's work together to get it right' means that staff and pupils feel supported. Leaders' high expectations are clear. Pupils aspire to meet these because they want to do well.

Subject leaders and teachers have planned a curriculum that ensures pupils deepen their thinking. Teachers revisit prior learning so that pupils are not left behind. For example, in Year 7 mathematics, pupils repeat calculations in different contexts. Teachers make sure that pupils understand before moving on. Last year, Year 11 pupils' mathematics progress was in the top 20% of schools nationally. This was also the case for science and modern foreign languages.

Where the quality of the curriculum is more effective, leaders consider carefully how pupils develop skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, in English, teachers plan activities that explain clearly the mechanics of writing. This means that pupils can express themselves well. The development of pupils' reading skills is also well planned. Pupils who are struggling readers or those pupils who are learning English as an additional language very quickly gain confidence so their reading improves.

Pupils' personal development is thought through. Every department has a personal development focus. For example, in physical education (PE), pupils learn about

nutrition. Through the careers programme, pupils participate in a range of employer events and Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) talks. Through assemblies and form time, pupils receive regular input about British values.

Staff's confidence in identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and supporting these pupils in the classroom is growing. Staff have recently received training on supporting pupils with SEND. This is recent work and has not had time to be fully developed throughout the school. As a result, there is inconsistent practice by staff when responding to some pupils' needs.

Sixth-form students' achievement in some areas of the curriculum is better than in others. Where this is stronger, subject leaders and teachers have considered what students know and what they need to learn. Where there is weaker planning, students struggle to follow and keep up. Some students tread water rather than moving on and gaining the knowledge they need to deepen their learning.

Sixth-form students enjoy mentoring younger pupils, work experience, politics club... the list goes on. Students say that they are well informed about choices post-18. More students than previously secure their next steps in either university, work or apprenticeships.

More staff are helping pupils access support services, for example, for mental health. Pupils' social and emotional needs are being met. There are fewer fixed-term exclusions and incidents where pupils are sent out of lessons. Pupils are sensible when they move around the school. There is a calm atmosphere where pupils sit chatting during social times. Canteen staff say the difference in attitudes and behaviour is 'fantastic'.

The trust is supportive and makes sure that leaders have the resources they need. The attendance team is working well to help pupils attend more regularly. Attendance is improving, but it is not yet where it needs to be, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The diligence of leaders regarding their duties for safeguarding is impressive. They ensure agencies are responsive so that all, including the most vulnerable pupils, are safe. Staff are well informed about risks, including local risks such as county lines.

Pupils are confident that they know what to do if they witness violence online. Pupils are also aware that sexting is illegal and morally wrong. Leaders make full use of the link safer schools police officer, who advises on different risks, such as countering radicalisation. Governors monitor carefully the safeguarding culture of the school. Record keeping is thorough.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Previously, there has been a lack of understanding about how to support pupils with SEND in the classroom. To address this, leaders ran staff training. This is in its early stages and there remains inconsistent practice when responding to some pupils' needs. Leaders need to ensure that teachers know and use the best methods of supporting pupils with SEND so their needs are met and consequently, pupils with SEND achieve well.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form has been too low. There has been a focus on improving the rigour and ambition of the curriculum as well as the quality of teaching in some subjects. Leaders need to ensure that there is consistency in planning and delivery so that pupils achieve more highly. In particular, leaders should ensure that teachers match activities to meet students' needs.
- Some pupils do not attend school well enough. This hampers their learning of the curriculum. Leaders need to continue their drive to support these pupils to attend more often.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136204
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10110221
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,125
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	86
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Tibble
Principal	Dan Carter
Website	www.inspirationtrust.org/thetfordacademy
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The principal was newly appointed at the time of the previous inspection.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- During this inspection, we held meetings with the chief executive officer and the director of standards for the trust, subject-specialist leaders for the trust, governors, the executive principal, the principal, senior leaders and subject leaders. We also met with the office administrator who manages the single central record.

- I had a telephone conversation with the chair of the trust.
- The deep dives of English, mathematics, art, history and geography were considered as part of this inspection. We spoke to subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils. We listened to pupils read and visited the reading programmes taking place.
- In addition to the deep dives, we looked at provision in other subjects, reviewing pupils' and students' work, as well as speaking with teachers.
- We visited form time and watched music club.
- We spoke to pupils and students about their experiences of school life and what it is like to be a pupil or student at The Thetford Academy. We also observed behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- We scrutinised a range of documents, including those related to curriculum planning and development, safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, exclusions and the school's development plan and evaluation. We also looked at the trust's improvement reports and the minutes of trust and governing body meetings.
- We considered the 69 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. There were no free-text comments. We also read an email from a parent. We considered the 85 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 130 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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