

Thurcroft Junior Academy

Green Arbour Road, Thurcroft, Rotherham, S66 9DD

Inspection dates

4–5 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Over the last four terms, since the academy opened, pupils in all year groups have made at least the amount of progress expected, and progress has been more than expected in most year groups.
- In recent years, under the leadership of the current associate principal, attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has risen strongly. Since the school became an academy this trend has continued. In 2013, for the first time, attainment reached the national average.
- Good teaching is informed well by frequent assessment. Trusting relationships, clear instructions, effective questioning, good resources and strong support from teaching assistants result in productive learning.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, behave well and are proud of their academy. Attendance has increased and is now above the national average.
- The associate principal has brought about a sustained increase in achievement and has improved the quality of teaching.
- The academy trust makes a strong contribution to effective and efficient management and has enabled the associate principal to focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not always sufficiently expert in: higher level reading skills; the precise teaching of language and grammar; identifying and acting on misconceptions in mathematics.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to improve their work by responding directly to the comments teachers have made in their marking.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 part-lessons, including several joint observations with the associate principal.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, newly qualified teachers, and representatives of the governing body and the academy trust.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils from each year group and talked informally with others in lessons and around the academy. Inspectors also listened to them read.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised including the academy improvement plan, evidence about the work of the governing body, data relating to pupils' attainment and progress, records of behaviour and attendance and monitoring and evaluation records about the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors took account of 15 staff questionnaires. There were too few responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire, Parent View, to be published.

Inspection team

Bernard Campbell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Baljinder Khela

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thurcroft Junior Academy opened in July 2012 and is sponsored by the Aston Community Education Trust. It was formerly Thurcroft Junior School.
- The executive principal is the principal of Aston Academy. Thurcroft Junior Academy is led by the associate principal.
- The associate principal was the headteacher of the predecessor school. Most teaching staff were appointed after the academy opened. Three newly qualified teachers joined the academy in September 2013. Two new senior leaders joined the academy in January 2014. A vice-principal from Aston Academy provides on-going, on-site management support.
- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational need, is also well above average.
- The proportion from ethnic minority groups is low.
- In 2013, the academy exceeded the government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The predecessor school was judged satisfactory at its last inspection in March 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of learning by ensuring that teaching is more expert in:
 - assessing and teaching higher level reading skills
 - providing precise and practical methods for extending pupils' vocabulary and use of grammar in writing
 - accurately identifying and tackling gaps in mathematical learning.
- Provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' marking and improve spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Since the academy opened, school assessment data show that pupils in all year groups have made at least the amount of progress expected over the last four terms. In most year groups progress has been more than expected, including by pupils with special educational needs. This has not yet overcome past underachievement in all subjects, particularly in year 5, but pupils are catching up well. Objective tests are used to assess attainment and the accuracy of teachers' marking is checked regularly by senior leaders.
- Academy data show that, in the autumn term, Year 6 made accelerated progress in reading and mathematics. This was the result of well-targeted teaching for slower learners. However, at this stage, pupils have not demonstrated consistently good skills across all types of writing. The academy has a good track record of accurate assessment and this provides a secure basis for their predictions of higher attainment and good progress at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014.
- Over the last few years, under the leadership of the current associate principal, attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has risen strongly. Since the predecessor school became an academy, this trend has continued. For the first time, in 2013, the proportion gaining Level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics reached the national average. However, attainment in grammar, spelling and punctuation was below average due to a weakness in teaching.
- In 2013, the good progress Year 6 pupils made from their different starting points at the end of Key Stage 1 in mathematics and writing was above or close to national figures. However, more-able pupils made less than expected progress in reading due to limits in teachers' subject knowledge in teaching to the higher levels.
- Overall, boys and girls, those eligible for the pupil premium, low, middle and high ability and those with special educational needs achieved as well as similar groups nationally. Pupils supported by school action plus achieved particularly well.
- Pupils eligible for free school meals made better progress in writing and mathematics than the national average for non- free school meal pupils. However they made less progress in reading.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has enabled pupils to make good progress and to catch up on past underachievement.
- Clear and incisive instructions let pupils know what is expected of them and enable them to work productively by themselves.
- High expectations and good relationships based on trust and praise make pupils keen to learn.
- Effective questioning and well-managed and purposeful discussion between pupils clarifies learning points well.
- Teaching provides clear models of what pupils should achieve and pupils' work is well-supported by good learning resources.
- Good teaching by teaching assistants in small-group sessions enables less-able pupils, and those with special educational needs, to make good progress. This is achieved through the introduction of concepts and methods before they are encountered in the main lesson and also by going over learning that has not been secured after the lesson.
- Frequent assessment is used to set work relevant to pupils' needs and to extend their learning through homework.
- Frequent and constructive marking lets pupils know if they have met their objective and what they should do to improve. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to respond to the teachers' advice. Pupils' spelling and punctuation are not corrected and followed up often enough.
- The teaching and assessment of reading requires a stronger focus on the higher level skills of inference and deduction.
- On occasion: writing tasks are not focused precisely enough on particular features of language

and grammar; teachers do not always pick up on misconceptions or gaps in mathematical learning to make a teaching point.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to learning and consistently demonstrate their willingness to contribute to whole-class dialogue and to work individually and in groups. As a result, lessons run smoothly.
- Pupils are proud of the academy and all pupils were wearing the new academy uniform. Behaviour is good at playtime. Pupils walk sensibly along corridors and are polite to adults, holding doors open for visitors. Pupils were attentive in assembly and enjoyed singing.
- Low-level disruption is uncommon and is kept to a minimum by the clear expectations of good behaviour and well-established, trusting relationships between adults and pupils. Pupils with particular behavioural needs are supported well. The academy's analysis and response to behaviour incidents is managed effectively. Exclusions are low.
- Pupils value the rewards for good behaviour. The opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and gain recognition for leading aspects of academy life are underdeveloped.
- Bullying is uncommon and pupils show a good awareness of its different forms, including cyber-bullying. There is a little prejudice-based name-calling, but it is tackled well by staff when it occurs.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe at the academy. The academy trust health and safety team frequently checks the safety of premises and checks the effectiveness of any actions taken.
- Attendance is higher than at the predecessor school and is now above the national average. The incidence of persistent absence is low. Close checks and prompt action by the education welfare officer employed by the academy trust have increased attendance. For example, if a pupil is absent with no reason given, parents receive an immediate home visit.

The leadership and management are good

- The associate principal has brought about a sustained improvement in attainment and progress. She continues to drive improvement by raising the expectations of what pupils can achieve. She has made a detailed and accurate evaluation of teaching and learning across the academy and works to a robust plan with precise actions and deadlines for improvement.
- Extra management support and expertise provided by the academy trust has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the academy. By removing the burdens of diverse administrative responsibilities from the associate principal, the associate principal has been able to focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning. The academy trust has invested in new and extra staff which has stabilised staffing, improved the continuity of learning and increased the flexibility to organise groupings of pupils to meet identified needs.
- The associate principal has used robust recruitment methods to appoint new staff. Many teachers are relatively young and inexperienced, with three newly qualified teachers who are developing well. They are increasing their skills rapidly as a result of good professional development and mentoring, within the academy and by the academy trust. The deployment of teaching assistants is effective in improving pupils' learning. A culture has been created in which staff are keen to improve.
- New senior leaders have increased the capacity of the academy to further improve mathematics and reading. They have a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in these subjects and have already started to implement their plans. They provide good models of teaching and provide precise and practical support for newer teachers.
- Regular meetings to check pupil progress ensure that teachers account for the progress of each pupil. New performance management arrangements for teachers have sharpened the focus on

pupils' progress. Teaching staff are taking the initiative to propose actions to bring about improvement. Responsibilities for the wider range of academy subjects are underdeveloped, but plans are in place.

- The associate principal frequently works alongside staff, observes their work and provides accurate feedback about the next steps for improvement. The academy trust provides a range of external observers to assure the accuracy of these lesson judgements.
- The academy trust has improved the quality of the learning environment and the provision for sport and physical education. The new uniform and these improvements have increased pupils' pride in themselves and the academy.
- The curriculum has been developed flexibly to meet the needs of pupils. The grouping of pupils is varied by subject and ability to target learning needs. The use of additional small-group learning is linked well to whole-class teaching and helps pupils make better progress in their main lessons. The curriculum is enhanced by visits which provide a good focus for writing and other subjects.
- Parents attend the Christmas Fair, school performances and parents' evenings in good numbers. Leaders have not yet succeeded in finding ways of working with parents to help more of them to support their children's reading and learning.
- Safeguarding meets requirements.
- The primary school sport funding, and a weekly programme run by sports specialists from the academy trust, provide all pupils with two hours of sport a week. The opportunity to try out a varied range of sporting and physical activities enables pupils to develop healthy lifestyles, develop their physical well-being and achieve success in new skills. During the inspection, pupils were clearly inspired by working with visiting paralympians. The experience of taking part in regional sporting events has stimulated their aspirations.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body and trustees have a good range of expertise which is used well to scrutinise the academy's progress. Governors have a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and pupil progress. They understand the use of the pupil premium funding and its impact.
 - Governors and trustees play a strong, strategic role in guiding the development of the academy. The executive principal demonstrates a strong commitment to the academy community, has high aspirations, and provides clear direction and accountability. At the same time, she empowers the associate principal to act independently in leading and managing the academy.

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	138357
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	408829

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponser-led
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Long
Headteacher	Rebecca Scutt
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01709 543194
Fax number	01709 544870
Email address	info@thurcroftacademy.org

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