

Thornaby Academy

Address: Baysdale Road, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 9DB

Unique reference number (URN): 148186

Inspection report: 10 February 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders and governors are aligned in their purpose to give all pupils at the school the best possible start in life. Their decisions reflect this. Leaders have quickly established and embedded a wide range of systems that have secured rapid improvement across the school. There is a collective sense of purpose in achieving this across staff and pupils. Leaders have an astute understanding of the effectiveness of the school's provision. Their actions to date and priorities for moving forward are highly focused and driven by making decisions in the best interests of pupils. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The trust has had a profound impact on the school's improvement in recent years. Leaders at all levels are expertly supported. Trustees provide appropriate support and challenge. They fulfil all of their statutory responsibilities.

The professional learning programme at the school is high quality and evidence based. It develops staff expertise and it is well matched to the needs of the school. Leaders have introduced several opportunities for parents and carers to be more widely involved in their children's education. These include coffee mornings, learning walks with the principal and 'fish and tips' study-support evenings. Staff are extremely positive about the way that they are supported by leaders. They are proud to work at the school. Leaders have implemented a range of systems that increase staff wellbeing and reduce staff workload.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have embedded an extensive and well-constructed personal, social, health, citizenship and economic (PSHCE) programme. It prepares pupils tremendously well for life beyond school, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who are disadvantaged. Pupils are highly confident and ambitious. They understand fundamental British values, such as democracy and the rule of law, and the integral role they play in society. Pupils have a detailed understanding of cultural differences. They have a depth of moral grounding and know that it is wrong to discriminate against people. Pupils learn about relationships and sex education and health education.

Leaders have ensured that local safeguarding risks are taught specifically through the PSHCE programme. If a safeguarding issue arises in the local community, leaders swiftly adapt the programme to address this. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, both online and offline. Leaders have established highly effective systems of pastoral support for those pupils who need it.

The careers programme is comprehensive and effective. It is woven deeply into the PSHCE programme and the wider curriculum. All pupils benefit from at least 3 one-to-one careers meetings during their time at the school. Local colleges and apprenticeship providers speak to pupils regularly. There are regular careers fairs, which are attended very well. A range of local employers, including the police, health professionals, opticians and lawyers, visit as part of these events. Twice a week, there is a 'careers corner' at lunchtime, which allows

pupils to hear about specific areas of employment. Pupils are very aspirational about the future.

Many pupils take up leadership roles within the student council. These include democratically elected roles as president, vice-president and subject representative. Pupils speak effusively about how they have helped improve communication across the school and with the local community. This has included visits to the town centre to hand out cakes and singing Christmas carols to strengthen community links.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils' achievement in national tests and examinations has improved over time. It is now close to national averages across many measures. The achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged is significantly above average in some areas. Leaders are not complacent and they have implemented a range of strategies to drive further improvements in pupils' attainment.

Pupils generally achieve well across the curriculum. They secure the basic knowledge and skills that they need in reading, writing and mathematics to be able to succeed in their wider learning. Leaders have established systems to ensure that any gaps in these areas are closing quickly. Pupils who face other barriers to their learning, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, generally make suitable progress in their learning.

The improvements in outcomes mean that pupils are generally ready for the next stage of education, training or employment. This is reflected in the increased number of pupils who go on to sustained destinations after school.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders analyse attendance data systematically and effectively. They use this information well to identify trends and the reasons for pupils' absences. Leaders have developed comprehensive strategies to address these areas. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved significantly in recent years. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils realise the importance of being in school and they want to attend. Far fewer pupils are regularly absent than was the case previously.

Leaders have established clear behaviour routines and systems across the school. Pupils understand these, and staff apply them consistently. Pupils are respectful and polite towards others. Classrooms are calm places that promote learning. Incidents of unkindness and bullying are unusual. If they do occur, they are dealt with effectively. Older pupils speak very positively about the improvements in behaviour over time. Pupils happily show their 'Proud Cards' to staff when they have been recognised for behaving well. Fewer pupils are suspended from school due to their behaviour than in previous years. A number of pupils join the school during each year. Sometimes, they initially find it difficult to adjust to the high

behavioural expectations. Staff work closely with these pupils to ensure that they manage to do so successfully.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed and established a broad, ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum. It builds pupils' knowledge progressively over time. Leaders have identified the key concepts and subject vocabulary within the curriculum that pupils need to learn.

There are regular opportunities for pupils to recap and secure this essential core knowledge. Teachers use effective approaches to model the pronunciation of important vocabulary, which pupils then rehearse. This helps pupils to learn these key words effectively. Pupils are given timely opportunities to practise their fluency in their learning through independent activities.

Teachers are well supported to implement the curriculum effectively through a comprehensive professional learning programme. They generally teach the curriculum well. Teachers carefully establish pupils' starting points, including pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Where pupils show misconceptions or misunderstanding, these are usually addressed effectively. Occasionally, teachers do not adapt activities as well as they could to ensure that all pupils are able to access the learning.

Where pupils have gaps in their reading, writing or mathematics knowledge, expert staff provide targeted support. This helps pupils to catch up rapidly. Leaders have prioritised reading at the school. The library is widely used by pupils, and many pupils now read for pleasure.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have established a culture of inclusion across the school. The school's pupil premium strategy is well considered and identifies approaches that help disadvantaged pupils to achieve well and thrive.

Pupils' needs are identified quickly and accurately. Individual learning plans help staff to meet the specific needs of pupils who face barriers to their learning. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These plans generally mean that pupils get the support they need. Leaders have established clear systems to ensure that the impact of the plans is reviewed regularly.

Staff understand how to adapt their teaching effectively to help pupils who need extra help. Leaders engage widely and effectively with families, external agencies and other professionals to establish a comprehensive network of support for pupils who need it. Pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND study the full curriculum. They are fully included in the life of the school. Leaders collaborate with the virtual school to make sure that personal education plans meet the needs of looked-after children.

A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. This is done in the best interests of these pupils and helps them to succeed.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Thornaby Academy is a rapidly improving school. Pupils are proud to be part of it. Pupils are safe in school. Most pupils attend well. They are happy and they enjoy learning. Bullying does not happen often. If it does, it is addressed quickly and effectively. The school is calm and orderly. There are warm, positive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils learn about respect and empathy. This is reflected in their behaviour towards one another. There are very few incidents of derogatory language. If pupils hear it, they adopt the school's 'no bystanders' approach and report it to an adult.

Older pupils recognise and value the changes that leaders have made. They speak very positively about the many improvements that they have seen during their time at the school. Pupils' achievement in national tests and assessments has improved significantly in recent years. Pupils talk enthusiastically about this and they aspire to do even better themselves.

Pupils enjoy the well-organised way in which they learn. They can explain how this helps them to build their knowledge over time. They like the routines that are common across all lessons. Pupils who face barriers to their learning feel well supported to be able to access the curriculum. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training and for life in modern Britain.

Pupils value the badges that they can achieve through the school's 'iAspire' programme, which encourages them to complete a series of character-building challenges. Most pupils take advantage of the wide range of enrichment opportunities that are available to them. These include cultural trips to the theatre and museums, visits to local faith centres, sign language club, robotics club, and hair and beauty training sessions. Many of these have been introduced in response to pupils' interests and requests.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is taught consistently well across all subjects and that this is reflected by further improvements in pupils' achievement.
- Leaders should secure and maintain high levels of attendance over time by further strengthening their work with families and external partners.

About this inspection

This school is part of Northern Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jane Wilson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark Sanders.

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

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the principal, other members of the senior leadership team and a number of staff from the trust during the inspection. Inspectors also met with teaching and support staff. The lead inspector held meetings with the chair of the trust board and with the CEO.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has a specially resourced provision for up to 10 pupils with communication and interaction needs.

The school makes use of 4 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. It joined Northern Education Trust in January 2024, having previously been part of another trust.

Principal: Kendra Brownless

Lead inspector:

Tim Johnson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Joanne Owens, Ofsted Inspector

Rebekah Ramsden, Ofsted Inspector

Christine Durand, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 10 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

478

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

790

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

67.99%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.18%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

14.64%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

OTH - Other Difficulty/Disability

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	47.5%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	36.5%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	25.0%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	40.9	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	36.8	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	33.9	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.36	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.51	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	45.3%	25.8%	Above
2023/24 (final)	33.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	10.0%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	39.9	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	35.2	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	26.3	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.34	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.96	-0.57	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	45.3%	53.1%	-7.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	33.3%	53.1%	-19.8 pp
2022/23 (final)	10.0%	52.4%	-42.4 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	39.9	50.4	-10.5
2023/24 (final)	35.2	50.0	-14.8
2022/23 (final)	26.3	50.3	-24.0

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.34	0.16	-0.50
2022/23 (final)	-0.96	0.17	-1.12

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	84%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	79%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	82%	94%	Not available

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	14.5%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	16.2%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	13.2%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	40.7%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	48.4%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	42.4%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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