

Inspection of Thomas Clarkson Academy

Corporation Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 2SE

Inspection dates: 21–22 January 2020

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are doing well now at Thomas Clarkson Academy. Leaders have made substantial improvements to the quality of education for pupils since the previous inspection. Parents and carers, pupils, staff and members of the community comment on the positive changes at the school. They say that the school is unrecognisable compared with a few years ago.

Pupils say that the quality of teaching and behaviour has improved a great deal. Most pupils behave sensibly in class and around the school. Leaders have high expectations of all pupils and what they can achieve.

Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Staff increasingly motivate pupils to work hard and try their best. Sixth-form students want to learn, and adults prepare them well for their future. Students are good role models to younger pupils.

Pupils feel safe and well supported in school. They are known as individuals by their teachers and other staff. Most pupils behave well during social times and the atmosphere in the school is a calm and orderly environment. Leaders do not tolerate bullying and pupils say that adults deal with it effectively.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that helps pupils to succeed. Pupils study a broad range of subjects. Leaders want pupils to gain qualifications that will act as 'tickets for life' and help pupils to move on successfully to the next stage of education or employment. Leaders have arranged the curriculum topics thoughtfully and carefully. Pupils gain the skills and knowledge they need for future learning.

The curriculum is ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. Pupils with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language study the same subjects as all pupils. In the resource unit, pupils learn and achieve well.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong in many subject areas, particularly mathematics and English. Teachers use their understanding of what needs to be taught to plan learning that meets the needs of pupils. Teachers advise pupils well so that pupils understand what they are learning and how to improve further. Sometimes, there is too much variation in the way adults provide opportunities for pupils to learn the technical vocabulary that is essential in all subjects. Equally, there are some pupils who could achieve even more. Leaders know that they need to provide further training to adults to raise expectations for these pupils.

Behaviour in the school has improved since the previous inspection. Staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct. Most pupils live up to these expectations in lessons and during social times. Leaders provide effective support for pupils with social,

emotional and mental health needs. The amount of persistent poor behaviour leading to exclusion has reduced. Fixed-period exclusions are now below the national level.

Pupils' attendance is improving. Leaders have clear strategies to challenge pupils' absence and these are rigorously applied. These strategies are beginning to have an impact.

Leaders are committed to developing pupils' wider interests and talents. The range of extracurricular activities continues to further develop. Pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, take part in the activities that are offered. Leaders have planned pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) effectively. Pupils have opportunities to learn about the wider world and their place in it. Leaders provide helpful careers advice and guidance to broaden pupils' aspirations. Almost all Year 11 pupils move on to further education, employment or training.

Leaders ensure that sixth-form students have the support required to be successful. Students value the distinctiveness of the sixth form while still feeling part of the school community. They can choose from a wide range of subjects. Students' attitudes are very positive. They maintain a strong focus on their studies. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to challenge students and help them learn.

Leaders are committed to the national aim of increasing the number of pupils studying the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). Currently, the number of pupils entered for examinations in the full range of EBacc subjects (English, mathematics, science, history or geography, and languages) is below the national average.

The school is well led. The dedication of leaders and governors to the school, the pupils and the local community is impressive. Governors and trustees know the school well and provide effective support and challenge for leaders. Leaders work hard to engage parents and gain the confidence of the community. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff with responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained. Staff know their pupils well and can spot potential safeguarding concerns. When concerns arise, staff act swiftly and appropriately. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

Leaders carry out the necessary checks on adults who work in the school to ensure they are suitable to work with children. Governors and trustees are rigorous in ensuring that school leaders carry out their responsibilities effectively.

The great majority of pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is carefully planned in most subjects. In a small number of subjects, such as modern languages, leaders are beginning to adapt and revise the curriculum to better support pupils' needs. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum is coherently planned and taught equally well across all subject areas.
- Leaders have taken effective steps to develop teachers' subject knowledge in many subjects. However, there remains too much variation in how pupils develop their vocabulary in all subjects. This is especially the case for pupils who have the potential to achieve higher standards. These pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate what they know. Leaders should continue to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and the vocabulary pupils need to fully understand all subjects.
- Leaders have been very effective in securing improvements across the school. With the help of the trust, they have provided support to build the skills of middle leaders, some of whom are relatively inexperienced. Leaders should refine this work further so that curriculum planning, implementation and outcomes continue to improve across all subjects.

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	137867
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10121367
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,210
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	88
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	David Bailey
Principal	Richard Scott
Website	www.thomasclarksonacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	31 October–1 November 2017

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school is part of the Brooke Weston Trust.
- The majority of the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school currently uses alternative providers to contribute to the education of a small number of pupils: Octavia AP Academy, Pilgrim PRU, the Darwin Centre for Young People, NT & AS Tutors, and Vision (B and D).

Information about this inspection

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

- We held meetings with the principal, other senior and middle leaders, and groups of teachers. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and

the trust's chief executive and executive principal. A telephone conversation was held with the director of education for Cambridgeshire local authority. We held formal and informal discussions with pupils.

- We reviewed a wide range of evidence, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the school's plans for further improvement. We scrutinised records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. We also reviewed minutes of governing body and trustee meetings.
- To inspect safeguarding, we looked at safeguarding policies and reviewed the school's record of checks on the suitability of staff and governors. We met with the designated safeguarding lead and spoke to other leaders and staff. We spoke to pupils and considered parents' views.
- We considered the views expressed by parents and carers in the 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 29 free-text comments. We also considered the 70 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 78 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- We did deep dives in the following subjects: mathematics, English, science, art and history. We met with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils and reviewed pupils' work.

Inspection team

John Constable, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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