

Thomas Clarkson Academy

Corporation Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 2SE

Inspection dates

31 October–1 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent between year groups and between subjects.
- Although rapidly improving, historically examination results have been poor. There was improvement in 2017, but the progress of pupils between the end of key stages 2 and 4 is still below average.
- New systems for managing behaviour have not yet had time to produce consistently good behaviour across the school.
- Attendance, especially of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below the national average, despite leaders' best efforts. The actions of leaders have been successful in sharply reducing persistent absence.
- British values, such as democracy and the rule of law, are taught in school, but not well enough for pupils to show inspectors that they understand them. While leaders clearly think that it is important, inspectors were unconvinced that pupils are sufficiently well equipped with the knowledge and skills to challenge extremism.

The school has the following strengths

- This is a rapidly improving school. Leaders and the principal share a clear vision for the academic and pastoral well-being of all pupils. Over the last year, new leaders have introduced policies and procedures which are beginning to have impact, but the impact has not yet had time to be realised fully.
- The sixth form is effective. The 16 to 19 study programmes now provide a wide range of academic and vocational courses on which students make good, and in vocational courses very strong, progress.
- The personal development of pupils is good, as are the care and support provided by staff.
- There is effective support from the multi-academy trust (MAT), including:
 - securing effective leadership,
 - challenge and accountability
 - taking the burden of managing contracts, thus enabling leaders to concentrate on improving the quality of education in the school.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, so that pupils' progress accelerates, by:
 - setting work that always challenges pupils and moves their learning forward quickly
 - using more questions that make pupils think deeply and explore one another's ideas
 - improving provision so that the achievement of pupils across all subjects matches that found in the best subjects.
- Raise attendance overall and ensure that no groups of pupils are over-represented in absences.
- Improve behaviour by:
 - adopting a more consistent approach to classroom management
 - engendering in pupils a greater hunger for learning
 - planning lessons that match the needs and abilities of pupils.
- Build on current work to promote fundamental British values to ensure that pupils have the knowledge and skills to understand and challenge extremism.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Over the last year, the new principal and other senior leaders have used their experience of successful school improvement in other schools to provide a sharp focus on improving this school. Leaders spoke of the principal's 'clear-eyed prioritisation'. She is frank about the challenges of the school and does not make or accept excuses for poor performance.
- The MAT has supported the school's improvement over a sustained period. MAT leaders demonstrate commitment to improving the life chances of pupils in the school and the town. They have invested heavily in supporting the school and appointing a highly effective principal and other senior leaders. These leaders are able to maintain a sharp focus on improving the quality of education because the MAT handles contractual and legal matters that might distract them.
- Leaders recognise that further improvement is needed before the school can be judged to be 'good'. They have a highly accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for further development. They have identified and successfully addressed the most urgent issues, such as taking robust action to tackle inadequate teaching.
- Leaders are passionate about improving the life chances of pupils and have worked tirelessly to secure resources to improve the school. For example, the principal would not accept 'no' for an answer and after much effort secured a small number of 'Teach First' trainees to boost the quality of teaching. The recruitment of high-quality teachers is leaders' greatest challenge.
- Leaders have reviewed the curriculum and extended the key stage 3 curriculum to the full three years that are intended. This has not been universally popular with pupils and parents, but leaders have rightly recognised the need to use key stage 3 to develop pupils' basic skills in order to lay a firm foundation for future GCSE study while retaining breadth in Year 9.
- Leaders have used performance management robustly to hold teachers accountable for meeting national teaching standards. Teachers are helped to improve through regular professional development and opportunities to work with colleagues from other schools in the MAT. There are clear expectations of what teachers at different levels of seniority must do, developed through the MAT, which teachers understand and implement. MAT subject leaders provide additional support, and there is a clear link between their support and improved pupil progress and attainment in the subjects that they support.
- Leaders have carefully analysed the spending and impact of additional funding through the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. Money has been used effectively to fund projects which directly benefit pupils. One example is a bus to collect children from a particularly disadvantaged area to improve attendance.
- Similarly, funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively. As a result, the progress of these pupils is rising sharply.
- Staff morale has improved under the new leadership. For example, there has been a 79% drop in staff absence and the school is fully staffed. Most of the small number of

parents responding to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire would recommend the school. This represents a big improvement in perceptions since the previous inspection. However, concerns are raised by parents, particularly those of younger pupils, regarding how well teachers address pupils' individual needs. Comments are mixed. For example, one response states, 'Our looked-after child's learning needs have not been identified or addressed by the school', while another says about another child looked after, 'The Thomas Clarkson Academy has been forthcoming with pre-admission meetings to ensure that they can facilitate all the needs of the young person academically and emotionally with social presentation also being considered.' The main concern of parents is the rate of teacher turnover.

Governance

- Governance is shared between the MAT and the local governing board.
- The MAT brings together individuals who have a strong blend of relevant educational, financial and legal skills to oversee and monitor the governance and performance of the school.
- Local governors have a deep knowledge and understanding of the local context, which helps leaders to recognise the challenges.
- The MAT leaders responsible for governance and local governors regularly visit the school and hold leaders to account for the quality of education, pupil welfare and safeguarding.
- MAT leaders responsible for governance know the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the school well and provide effective challenge and support through regular board meetings.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding lies at the heart of the school. Staff are acutely aware of most aspects of safeguarding. Pupil services, situated in the centre of the school, are praised by pupils.
- Rigorous systems are in place. School policies and procedures are implemented well and checked by a representative of the MAT.
- All staff have received appropriate training on keeping pupils safe. Staff know what to look out for and how to raise concerns.
- Pupils, staff and parents are positive about pupils' safety and well-being. Pupils are very well cared for and cared about.
- The one area of relative weakness is that, although community relations in the school have improved enormously, pupils from different backgrounds are not fully accepted by other pupils until their grasp of English is well developed. The school provides an oasis of community tolerance, but teachers could be more explicit in preparing pupils for life in multi-cultural Britain and equipping pupils with the knowledge and understanding to protect them from extremism that they may encounter outside the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Following the previous inspection, there was a loss of effective teachers. Leaders and the MAT leadership work hard to recruit effective teachers to the school. Leaders prioritise pupils in Year 11 and in the sixth form to benefit from the most effective teaching. As a result, pupils in lower year groups experience teaching that is too often lacklustre and dull.
- Below Year 11, teaching too often takes little account of the different needs and abilities of pupils in the class. Teachers often use closed questions and limit their questioning to those willing to volunteer answers. As a result, pupils are allowed to 'switch off'.
- Too little is expected of pupils, especially in Year 7. Teachers take insufficient account of the knowledge and skills that pupils should be bringing from primary school.
- Pupils in Year 11 and students in the sixth form are very complimentary about the quality of teaching. Although best in these year groups, effective teaching is found across year groups and across a range of subjects. For example, in a Year 8 music lesson, pupils worked hard in a composition activity because they knew they had to perform to the rest of the class.
- There are many lessons in which feedback to pupils in various forms is used well, such as in English, humanities and art. As a result, pupils show improvement over time, for example in developing more complex writing.
- In many lessons and especially in Year 11, teachers are aware of and act to overcome the things that get in the way of learning for disadvantaged pupils.
- Where learning is most successful, teachers provide pupils with suitable challenge and interesting tasks. Pupils respond positively, forming productive relationships with teachers and other pupils.
- School leaders and MAT staff provide well-regarded training and coaching, which are improving the quality of teaching. Expert subject leaders from the MAT have had the positive impact of improving results, especially in mathematics and modern languages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are smart and wear their uniforms with pride. The fabric of the building is well cared for. Pupils' books are neat and well presented. Most pupils are proud of their school.
- Careers advice, guidance and support are well developed. This is a rapidly developing aspect of provision. Work experience has taken place for the first time for Year 12, and planning has taken place to enable Year 10 work experience to take place in February. In addition to giving pupils employability skills, this demonstrates confidence by leaders that pupils are good ambassadors for the school.

- Pupils are extremely positive about the care offered by the school and in particular 'student services'. For many pupils, school represents a safe space. They are taught to be safe and healthy, including when using the internet. The school monitors the progress and well-being of the small number of pupils receiving part of their education at another site.
- A range of trips and visits, whether abroad or to English universities, helps to raise pupils' aspirations and broaden their experience beyond the local community. Charity fund-raising opportunities are used to develop pupils' moral awareness.
- There is now a programme in place to broaden the awareness of fundamental British Values. These values are promoted in tutor time, assemblies and throughout the curriculum. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is also planned through a range of opportunities in assemblies, tutorials, educational visits, visiting speakers and local community links, which help to promote pupils' understanding and knowledge in this area. However, the quality of delivery and the impact on pupils is not checked, and inspectors discovered that pupils were not always able to talk about what they learned in sessions scheduled for the previous day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The proportion of sessions missed by pupils is too high. There has been improvement due to the successful actions of leaders. For example, penalties are issued for persistent absence. As a result of very effective strategies used by staff and the MAT's education welfare officer, persistent absence has reduced sharply. Nevertheless, the proportion of lessons missed by disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains too high and pupils are disadvantaged by this.
- Behaviour in lessons is too often marred by low-level chatter and lack of attention, often stemming from teaching that fails to adequately engage pupils. Pupils in some year groups said that their learning is regularly disrupted by low-level poor behaviour. The school's behaviour policy is not used consistently by staff. Where teaching is stronger, pupils engage positively in learning.
- Pupils told inspectors that there is name-calling, which they identify as bullying. They do not report it as they view it as part of school life. Pupils who have arrived from other European countries described being picked on and feeling isolated until their English became good enough for them to integrate into the school community. The situation has clearly improved greatly since the previous inspection, and inspectors are convinced that leaders would not tolerate tension between pupils. However, there has not been sufficient time to develop a culture in which pupils from different backgrounds are fully accepted.
- Pupils arrive at lessons on time, with the correct equipment and fully prepared to learn.
- At breaktimes, most pupils get on well together. At the end of breaks, pupils disperse quickly to their lessons.
- Overall, the school is an orderly environment. Many pupils are polite and helpful to visitors.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 was below average in 2017. However, this was the second year of improved progress. There is a clear trend of improved progress and attainment.
- The progress of pupils seen in lessons and in books is variable. It is greatest in Year 11 and in the sixth form because this is where teaching is the best.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, while improving, lags behind that of other pupils nationally, even more than overall pupil progress.
- The school's assessment information for current Year 11 pupils shows them to be on target to make progress, from very low starting points, to be in line with other pupils nationally. Leaders rightly remain concerned about outcomes for disadvantaged most-able pupils and the attainment of boys. This is a major focus this academic year.
- Across a wide range of subjects and across year groups, pupils' progress is no longer inadequate.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has risen sharply because of changes to arrangements for their provision and new leadership.
- The attainment of Year 11 pupils in summer 2017 was above the previous year's floor standards for the first time. Leaders are proud of the attainment of pupils in this summer's GCSEs, some of whom achieved the very highest grade in the new, more-demanding examinations.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is very well led. Leaders have high expectations. Students know that leaders aspire for them to achieve highly and they are rising to the challenge. Increasing numbers are choosing to stay into the sixth form and complete their planned courses. Completion rates are now above average.
- Improvements have been driven by the sixth-form leadership supported by the principal. Leadership has a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and monitoring the progress of students to ensure that there is appropriate support for those who need it and challenge for the most able. Leaders have introduced a specific programme to help students gain places at the most prestigious universities. As a result, students began attending courses at such universities for the first time this year.
- Leaders have introduced a programme of work experience for Year 12 students that is relevant to their needs. There is effective impartial careers guidance, which begins before students enter the sixth form and involves taster sessions. This supports students to choose the right courses and successfully move to the next planned stage of their education, training or employment.
- Students make good progress from their starting points because the school offers appropriate and challenging study programmes. Students appreciate the support and guidance that teachers offer to help them meet their individual targets. Attainment at A level is improving and on vocational courses is well above average.
- Teaching in the sixth form has improved, and in the best lessons teachers inspire confidence in students with their subject expertise and skilful questioning. In these

lessons, teachers effectively assess students' progress and address misconceptions. In a minority of lessons, this is less successful when teachers do not consistently follow the school's policy on giving feedback to students.

- Students feel safe in school and are encouraged to stay healthy. They are respectful and punctual, and their attendance is good. They are encouraged to attend school events and are now more confident that their opinions are being listened to and acted on. They welcome the recent move to sixth-form-specific tutor groups, but would like a broader enrichment programme tailored to support their cultural, sporting and artistic capabilities and interests. They are appropriately prepared for life in modern Britain and benefit from the expertise of visiting speakers.
- The very small number of students without high-level GCSE passes in English and mathematics follow relevant courses and all have been successful in the last two years.
- The school meets the requirements for the 16 to 19 study programmes, and the 16 to 19 minimum standards are met.

School details

Unique reference number	137867
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10036273

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

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 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,218
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	105
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	David Bailey
Principal	Anne Hill
Telephone number	01945 585237
Website	www.thomasclarksonacademy.org
Email address	office@thomasclarksonacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	8–9 March 2016

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than the average secondary school.
- The majority of the pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs or an education,

health and care plan, is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is higher than average.
- The school makes arrangements to educate a small proportion of pupils off site at the TBAP Octavia AP Academy.
- The school did not meet the government's floor standards (the minimum targets that schools are expected to achieve) in either 2014, 2015 or 2016. It met the government's floor standards in 2017.

Information about this inspection

- One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Ofsted inspectors carried out the inspection over two days.
- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence from lesson observations, some carried out with senior leaders; short visits to lessons; discussions with pupils and staff; meetings with staff, the chief executive and representatives of the MAT and the chair of the local governing board; reviews of pupils' work in books; reviews of the school's website, documents and assessment information; and general observations of the daily operations of the school, including social areas.
- Inspectors analysed the 30 standard responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, alongside the 57 free-text responses to the same questionnaire. No pupil survey responses were received and no questionnaire responses from staff.

Inspection team

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Dan Leonard	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Smith	Ofsted Inspector

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