

# Thomas Clarkson Academy

Corporation Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, PE13 2SE

**Inspection dates** 22–23 January 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough teaching is good or better. As a result the proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C GCSE grades is significantly below the national average.
- Although achievement is improving, it is not yet good. The most able students in particular are not progressing as quickly as other students.
- Students' attitudes to learning during lessons require improvement. They do not always remain focused and engaged, and this holds back their progress.
- Although improving, attendance is consistently below average and punctuality to lessons is not always good.
- Homework is not monitored or marked consistently well, so it is not having enough impact on improving students' work.
- The sixth form requires improvement. It is improving as new staff settle in, but students are not yet reaching the standards they are capable of in their subjects and courses.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leadership and management are good. Support and expertise from the academy sponsors ensure that the strategies for improvement used by leaders and governors are having a good impact on raising standards.
- The academy works well to support disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and to help Year 7 students who join with limited skills in English and mathematics to catch up quickly.
- The quality of teaching is steadily improving in response to leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning, followed up by well-chosen training to improve staff skills.
- Students feel safe in the school.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons or part lessons, of which six were observed jointly with members of the academy’s leadership team. In addition a number of shorter visits were made to lessons, tutor time and an assembly.
- Inspectors examined closely students’ work and the academy’s data on students’ assessments.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, teachers and other staff. The views of students were gathered in several meetings and informally during lessons and break times.
- Inspectors took account of 21 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, and 83 responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff. In addition the academy’s own parental, staff and student surveys were considered.
- Inspectors observed the academy’s work and scrutinised documents, including the academy improvement plan, self-evaluation documents and records relating to behaviour, attendance and exclusions. All aspects of safeguarding policy and practice were examined.

## Inspection team

Nicholas Asker, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Bruce Clark	Additional Inspector
Jacqueline Pentlow	Additional Inspector
Michael Stanton	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Thomas Clarkson Academy is larger than the average secondary school.
- The academy opened in June 2012 and is sponsored by the Brooke Weston Trust.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds, with approximately one sixth coming from other White backgrounds. An above-average proportion of the students speak a first language other than English.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for children of service families, students in the care of the local authority and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs and are supported by school action is well above the national average, and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The academy has a specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs on site, for 16 students with moderate learning difficulties. This is known as the Cooper Centre.
- Currently, 25 students follow a range of alternative academic and work-related courses with five different providers. Twelve students from Key Stages 3 and 4 attend the Fenland Learning Base. Seven Key Stage 4 students attend On Track Education Services, three attend Education Youth Services, three have one-to-one home tutoring provided by Winchmore Tutors, and one attends BDP Social Care. One student attends both Education Youth Services and has one-to-one home tuition for Winchmore Tutors.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for Year 11 students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement by:
  - making better use of homework to support students' learning
  - marking students' books more effectively, so they are clear about what they have to do to improve their work
  - demonstrating higher expectations for the most able students through setting more challenging tasks for them.
- Improve attitudes to learning in lessons by:
  - ensuring behaviour policies are applied consistently by all staff
  - improving punctuality to lessons so that teachers can make a prompt start to lessons.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- When the academy opened in June 2012, students' standards in English and mathematics were well below national expectations for their age, and they were underachieving. Since then their progress has accelerated. However, there are still considerable gaps in their skills and understanding and some groups, particularly the most able, are not making as much progress as others.
- The Year 11 examination results in 2013 were significantly below national averages. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or above including English and mathematics was just below the government's floor target. The proportion of students making expected progress in English and mathematics was significantly below the national average, and also below the government's floor target.
- However, progress is now rapid in English in Key Stage 4 and good in mathematics. In the Year 11 lessons observed during the inspection, students were working purposefully towards their examinations and most were making good progress.
- The academy is closing attainment gaps between different groups of students. Examination results from 2013 show that students supported by the pupil premium were attaining almost one GCSE grade lower than other groups in both English and mathematics. However, the academy's tracking system shows that by November 2013 these gaps were narrowing. Eligible pupils are now making progress close to that of other groups.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs did not do as well as their classmates in 2013. The provision for these students has been reorganised, and the support they are now being offered is having a greater impact so that their progress, while slower than that of other pupils, is improving at a faster rate.
- The recent reorganisation of the Cooper Centre is enabling early signs of improvement in the achievement of the students who attend. They are able to study for Entry level and some GCSE qualifications, and are taught in the main school for some lessons.
- A significant number of students arrive partway through the year, often speaking English as an additional language. The academy has developed good integration and support programmes for these students, whose progress broadly matches that of their peers.
- Students' achievement across GCSE subjects was variable in 2013. Standards in various sciences and dance were above those seen in other subjects, and in line with those seen nationally.
- A larger-than-average proportion of students arrive at the academy with limited literacy skills. It has spent the Year 7 'catch-up' funding (extra money to support students who did not reach Level 4 in reading and or mathematics in Key Stage 2) on an intensive literacy programme, including timetabled reading sessions in the library, which is improving progress in English.
- The most able students do not make progress as quickly as they should. Not enough of these students are making the progress expected compared to similar students nationally in English or mathematics. The academy recognises that this is not yet good enough.

- The academy has entered students early for GCSE examinations in mathematics. These students continue to study mathematics with the intention of improving their grades, and the academy's tracking system shows that the vast majority are on track to do this.
- The small number of students who study on other sites make good progress on their courses. A designated member of staff visits each student in their placement, to make sure it continues to meet their needs.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. The sixth form is developing, as the academy takes over responsibility for teaching from the local college. Students are making progress broadly in line with national expectations, but there is variation between examination results in different subjects. Students do better at A level than at AS level.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- The proportion of good or better teaching is not high enough. This is limiting the rates of students' progress. The proportion of inadequate teaching is reducing steadily and the majority of lessons seen during the inspection were at least good, but these improvements are not enough to overcome the gaps in students' learning and progress.
- In lessons where teaching requires improvement, it is often because the students are not sufficiently motivated and engaged by the teaching. This leads to loss of attention and focus, and not enough progress is made.
- In most cases students are positive about their teachers, and relationships in the classroom are good. Teachers ask questions skilfully to probe students' understanding, and use their knowledge of what the students already know and can do to set tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty. However, the most able students are not always set tasks that make them think harder or work at a higher level, and as a result do not make as much progress as they should.
- The impact of marking and the use of assessment is variable. The academy uses formal assessments well to track students' progress, but marking of class work and homework does not always help students to improve their work. Some teachers make clear to students what they need to do to improve, but other marking is superficial and unhelpful.
- The use and monitoring of homework are not yet consistently effective. Over 400 students attend homework clubs each week, supported by staff. Some subjects (notably mathematics) use online homework systems effectively. Students are aware that the rigour with which homework is checked varies between teachers, and as a result some choose not to complete it.
- Where teaching is good or better, teachers have high expectations of the students and use their subject knowledge to plan challenging tasks and activities that enthuse and engage them. For example, in a Year 11 art lesson the teacher creates a 'studio atmosphere' in the classroom and gives detailed feedback that enables all students to make rapid progress.
- Teaching assistants make an important contribution to the learning and progress of the students, especially those who have special educational needs. Some plan lessons with teachers, and effectively lead small group sessions for students to help them make good progress.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement. Although the sixth form is relatively small it is growing and offers a good range of academic and work-related courses. Teachers develop good relationships with their students.. All sixth form leavers in 2013 progressed to employment,

further education or training.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Their attitudes to learning are improving but are not consistently good, and their eagerness to learn in lessons is not always apparent. This has a detrimental effect on their learning and the progress they make.
- In a minority of lessons students are slow to settle to their tasks and do not arrive on time. However, the strategies to improve behaviour in lessons are having an impact when they are teachers apply them consistently. Instances of students not paying attention and talking when the teacher is teaching are reducing, and the students themselves report that behaviour has improved.
- A majority of those who responded to Parent View agree that the academy makes sure students behave well, a view supported by the academy's own parental questionnaire. However, a majority of staff report that behaviour of the students is not always good, with several responses to the staff questionnaire noting that this is caused by a small number of students.
- Attendance is below the national average but has improved significantly in the last year. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced since last year and there have been no permanent exclusions to date.
- Behaviour around the academy and between lessons is improving, as students take more responsibility for their own behaviour. During the inspection inspectors observed students being generally polite and courteous to each other and to adults, and they talk positively about the school atmosphere. The use of discriminatory and derogatory language is uncommon.
- Students show pride in their academy and the new building is treated with respect. Uniform is worn by all, with minor transgressions from the uniform policy quickly picked up by the staff.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View and the academy's own parental questionnaire agree that the academy keeps their child safe.
- Students understand risk, and respond accordingly in classrooms, workshops and laboratories. They have a good knowledge and understanding of internet safety, and risks associated with their health.
- Students are aware of the various forms bullying can take. Records show that the number of incidents is in steady decline. The academy monitors patterns and rates of bullying closely, and a zero tolerance approach has developed through joint work between the junior leadership team (made up of students) and senior managers.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The governing body, the academy sponsor and the senior leaders have a clear and consistent vision for improving the quality of education in the academy and the wider community. The academy is realistic in its self-assessment and what it must do to improve. Senior staff are visible around the academy and model high expectations to the staff and students.

- The academy's development plan is clear and identifies a number of different areas for improvement. Recent improvements to the quality of teaching, achievement and behaviour show that the senior team have the capacity to continue to have an impact on improving the academy.
- A large majority of respondents to the staff questionnaire agree that the academy is led and managed well, a view shared by the majority of parents who completed Parent View and the academy's own parental questionnaire.
- The proportions of good and outstanding teaching are rising as a result of the strategies introduced by the senior leaders. Monitoring is frequent and judgements of teaching quality are accurate. Teaching that is inadequate or requires improvement is quickly identified, and effective training and coaching are used to improve it.
- Leaders have reviewed the effectiveness of both the Cooper Centre and off-site provision, and the results have led to significant changes in the way they are used and monitored. The academy has also improved the way students who speak English as an additional language are catered for, with resulting improvements in their achievement.
- The academy uses a range of strategies and activities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result the students, including those returning from a fixed-term exclusion, are able to identify right from wrong and the need to learn from their mistakes. Good use of academic and pastoral mentors and resources from the academy sponsors ensures that students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Pupil premium funding is used in a number of ways to make sure that eligible students are able to access the full range of educational activities. National 'catch-up' funding is also used well to provide intensive support through the 'Accelerated Curriculum on Entry'. These students are making good progress in Year 7 and Year 8.
- The academy is working hard to make successful links within the community it serves. It is liaising with local primary schools to ease transfer between schools at the end of Key Stage 2 and is providing support and expertise to teachers of pupils who have special educational needs.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. The academy is effectively managing the transition from using the College of West Anglia teaching staff to using academy teaching staff. Students in the sixth form are overwhelmingly positive about the provision.
- Middle leaders (subject leaders and progress leaders) are effective and clear about their roles in improving achievement and behaviour. The vast majority of staff say that they have an effective relationship with their line manager.
- All safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements.

**■ The governance of the school:**

- The governors, supported by the academy sponsor, are clear about the academy’s priorities for development, and regularly and rigorously challenge its leaders. They visit frequently and use their professional expertise freely for the benefit of the academy. The academy sponsor provides training for senior and middle leaders, as well as an experienced mentor for the Principal. The Principal reports on the quality of teaching and students’ progress at every governing body meeting, and governors have been trained by senior staff to interpret performance data in a number of forms. They know the quality of teaching and are taking active steps, including using the resources of the sponsors, to recruit and retain better teachers so that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching increases. They manage the performance of staff well to reward good teaching. Finances are monitored regularly to ensure proper procedures are followed and that the academy gives value for money, including for the use of pupil premium and Year 7 ‘catch-up’ funding.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137867
<b>Local authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	399911

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1292
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	102
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Shirtcliffe
<b>Principal</b>	Clare Claxton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01945 585237
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