

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9158
Direct E: rachel.dayan@serco.com

26 November 2014

Mrs Clare Claxton
Headteacher
Thomas Clarkson Academy
Corporation Road
Wisbech
Cambridgeshire

PE13 2SE

Dear Mrs Claxton

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Thomas Clarkson Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 25 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss behaviour at the academy.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the academy.

Evidence

I considered evidence including:

- observations of students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of students' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with students
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Context

Thomas Clarkson Academy is a larger than average-sized secondary school. Most students are from White British backgrounds, with approximately one quarter coming from other White backgrounds. A significantly above-average proportion of students speak a first language other than English. The proportion of students who are disadvantaged is above the national average. A higher than average proportion of students have special educational needs; the proportion with a statement of special needs is broadly average. The proportion of students who join the academy other than at usual transfer times is above average. The academy faces difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

At the start of the current academic year, the academy's leaders introduced a 'zero tolerance' policy towards poor student conduct around the academy site, lateness, and disruption within lessons. Students understand what is expected of them and why, and the consequences of not meeting these expectations. Most teachers follow the academy's revised behaviour policies. Staff and students believe that behaviour is improving, and this is supported by the academy's monitoring data.

Students generally behave well around the academy, socialise companionably during break periods and move to lessons quickly. They treat the academy's facilities with respect; there is very little litter or graffiti. The overwhelming majority of students are punctual, polite and smartly-dressed. Teachers and other adults are respectful and calm when making their expectations clear; one student noted that 'this shows us the best way to behave.' Relationships between students are positive; during the inspection, a new student who spoke very little English was welcomed and helped by her peers.

The academy's monitoring data indicates that the use of racist, homophobic or otherwise unacceptable language is uncommon; none was heard during this inspection. Bullying is rare and dealt with quickly and robustly. Leaders have responded to concerns from some about bullying via the internet by showing students how to stay safe online. Students say that they feel safe in all areas of the site during break periods and before and after school.

Leaders support those who find it difficult to manage their behaviour; education in isolation for a period helps them to avoid temporary exclusion, and has minimised serious classroom disruption. Attendance has improved further since the previous inspection and is very close to the national average. This is because the academy's leaders use effective strategies to ensure students attend regularly.

Disruption to learning is dealt with effectively when teachers reinforce high expectations and follow the academy's behaviour policy. Sometimes, teachers do not make their expectations clear, or continue to give verbal warnings to individuals, which are ignored. At times, some teachers tolerate a degree of disruption without

acting to challenge or correct it; as a result it continues and limits learning. Consequently, in Key Stages 3 and 4, conduct within lessons, and attitudes to learning, remain variable. In some lessons, a very small number of students, often boys, disrupt learning by calling out answers, talking over the teacher, or interrupting their peers when they are contributing to class discussions. Most teachers make clear that these behaviours are not acceptable, and they stop quickly. During a science lesson, the teacher refused to accept answers that students called out and directed questions at particular individuals. This kept all engaged and enabled a swift start to the practical task. The academy's monitoring data indicates that fewer students ignore informal or formal warnings than was the case before the 'zero tolerance' policy, that the incidence of low level disruption is declining, and that it is almost unknown in the sixth form. Staff and students agree.

Priorities for further improvement

Further reduce disruption to learning, and improve students' attitudes to learning, by ensuring that all teachers:

- follow the academy's behaviour policy when responding to unacceptable behaviour during lessons
- reinforce the academy's high expectations within all lessons

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Cc Chair of the Governing Body (or equivalent)