

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



17 December 2015

Mrs Clare Claxton
Principal
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 19 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your senior leadership team and other leaders including the acting subject leader for mathematics, a representative of the academy trust, representatives of the local governing body and groups of pupils from Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. I scrutinised documentation relating to the achievement, attendance and destinations of disadvantaged pupils. I looked at examples of pupils' work, governors' minutes and the academy's policy, planning and review documents. I also observed learning taking place within a number of lessons.

Context

The academy was last inspected in January 2014, when its overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement. Leadership and management were judged to be good. Since the inspection, there have been changes to the composition of the senior leadership team and the teaching staff. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils has increased. A significant proportion of these pupils join the academy at other than the usual transfer times; during the 2014/15 academic year, for example, 60 pupils joined the academy during Key Stage 4. A high proportion of disadvantaged pupils have special educational needs or speak English as an

additional language. The academy faces difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly in mathematics, the sciences and modern foreign languages.

Inspection findings

Results achieved by disadvantaged pupils who sat GCSEs in 2015 were poor. The gap between these pupils' outcomes and others narrowed, when compared with the previous year, but this reflects poor attainment overall rather than any improvement in disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. Difficulties in recruitment have limited the capacity of senior leaders to make rapid improvements in provision and outcomes, especially in mathematics, design and technology, physical education, history and Spanish.

Many disadvantaged pupils started their GCSE courses with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. This is because, until recently, leaders have not ensured that Key Stage 3 pupils have received sufficient additional help to close these gaps. The same pupils continue to make slow progress in mathematics. While some Key Stage 4 pupils are starting to benefit from one-to-one and small group intervention in mathematics and other key subjects, this support is not being given to all pupils who need it.

In design and technology, history and Spanish, additional support that teachers give to individual pupils is often not targeted at the aspects of their work that need improvement. Pupils also indicate that the quality of feedback on their work is not always helpful. As a result, they continue to make the same mistakes. The most-able disadvantaged pupils do not complete challenging enough work and typically make insufficient progress. This is because assessment procedures are not good enough.

The curriculum leader has not evaluated the impact of the academy's 'session 6' programme of activities that takes place after the final period of the day. This represents a considerable investment in time and staffing – approximately 190 hours a year for each pupil. At present, leaders and governors do not know whether the programme improves outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

It is worrying that leaders do not track the progress being made by disadvantaged pupils in Year 9 and Year 10 in any of their subjects. Nor are they clear about the extent to which additional help for these pupils is making a difference. Leaders also acknowledge that there is insufficient capacity to provide additional support for pupils in these year groups in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. As a result, senior leaders are unable to identify quickly where progress remains poor and take appropriate action to remedy this.

Governors lack a full and up-to-date understanding of the progress that disadvantaged pupils are making because leaders have not shared the information that they have with governors fully. This means that governors are unable to evaluate fully the impact of the academy's use of pupil premium funding, and the

extent to which the objectives within the pupil premium 'action plan' are being met. Governors have started to make focused visits to increase their understanding of standards within English, mathematics and science but it is too early to determine the impact of this.

Most disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 are making similar progress to that of other pupils, in English, science and mathematics. Leaders have put in place additional help for disadvantaged pupils who join the academy at Year 7 with low levels of literacy or numeracy via the ACE curriculum. Testing is used well to determine the most appropriate help each pupil needs. The academy's monitoring information indicates that this is helping to close the gaps in individuals' knowledge and understanding. Work with local primary schools has helped teachers to re-plan courses so that pupils do not repeat work that they have already completed at Key Stage 2 unless they need to catch up.

Recent monitoring information indicates that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils at Key Stage 4 making expected progress in English has increased because teaching and feedback has become more effective. Additional support for Key Stage 4 pupils in English and mathematics is precisely targeted, though at present too few pupils are able to benefit from this. Many disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in the academy's small sixth form.

The work of senior leaders has led to improvements in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. This has been particularly successful in promoting the high attendance of looked-after children. Pupils have responded to the sanctions in place for latecomers and the rewards for being consistently punctual in arrival at school and to lessons. Lateness, previously a significant issue, has declined dramatically, and is now infrequent.

The behaviour of disadvantaged pupils has improved at a more rapid rate than that of others because leaders are paying particular attention to the needs of this group. The academy's tracking of disadvantaged pupils' participation in a wide range of sporting, cultural and other activities outside the classroom demonstrates high levels of engagement. Pupils spoke positively about the careers information and guidance they receive; they understand the qualifications and personal qualities they will need to succeed and think that they are well-supported when making their applications.

External support

The support provided by the academy's sponsor, the Brooke Weston Academy Trust, has not been timely or extensive enough to secure sufficient improvement to the teaching of mathematics. The trust recently arranged for an executive headteacher from a partner school to provide teaching and leadership within mathematics and plans to use additional resources to improve the quality of teaching and provide additional tuition. Disadvantaged pupils' progress within mathematics remains unacceptably low at Key Stage 4, and pupils currently in Year 11 will have a limited

amount of time to benefit from any extra help that is provided. A subject leader for English from a partner school has provided support to the academy's English department over a longer period. The academy's monitoring information indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in Year 11 as a result.

The strengths in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- Leaders work well together to make sure that disadvantaged pupils have high levels of attendance and that they arrive at the academy promptly and ready to learn. The academy's behaviour policy is effective in ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are able to learn within a calm and orderly environment.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance helps disadvantaged pupils to make well-informed decisions about further and higher education, employment and apprenticeships. Leaders provide disadvantaged pupils with many opportunities outside of the classroom and their work to encourage them to engage in these is successful.
- Leaders have made changes to courses so that pupils in Year 7 do not need to repeat Key Stage 2 work unless they need to catch up. Those who need it benefit from help to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

The weaknesses in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- Teaching is not effective enough to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress at Key Stage 4. Leaders have not ensured that teaching promotes disadvantaged pupils' progress, particularly within mathematics.
- In design technology, history and Spanish the work that pupils complete does not help them to develop the full range of skills and acquire the depth of knowledge that will equip them for success at GCSE.
- Feedback often does not help disadvantaged pupils to understand where they need to improve their work and how it is they can do so.
- Leaders and governors have limited information about the progress of disadvantaged pupils in Years 9 and 10.
- Too few Key Stage 4 pupils are able to benefit from the one-to-one and small group additional tuition that is now being made available.
- The curriculum leader has not evaluated the impact of the 'session 6' programme securely. This means that leaders and governors cannot be

sure that it is the best way to secure improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly within mathematics so that disadvantaged pupils of all abilities make at least the expected level of progress.
- Improve the assessment tasks that pupils complete, so that these help pupils to build, practise and develop their skills over time, and provide teachers with clear and precise information about what individuals can and cannot do.
- Ensure that all teachers provide disadvantaged pupils with precise feedback so that they know how they can improve their work.
- Ensure that senior leaders and governors monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups and all subjects, and that leaders and teachers use this information to plan appropriate and timely improvements and interventions.
- Expand further the one-to-one and small group teaching sessions so that a greater number of disadvantaged pupils can benefit from these.
- Evaluate the impact of 'session 6' activities upon the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and make any changes that are necessary.

Given the concerns raised in this letter, Ofsted will bring forward the next full inspection of the academy.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire, to the Secretary of State for Education, and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector