

# Thomas Clarkson Academy

Corporation Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 2SE

## Inspection dates

8–9 March 2016

## Overall effectiveness

**Inadequate**

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Until recently, leaders and governors have had little impact on raising achievement. Overall results have declined since the last inspection.
- Regular changes in staffing, staff absence and a reliance on temporary staff, together with difficulties in recruiting new teachers, have undermined the efforts of senior leaders to secure sustained improvement.
- Teaching is too inconsistent. Not enough use is made of the information staff have about pupils to plan learning suited to their different abilities.
- The school's approach to marking pupils' work and providing feedback is not applied consistently, which restricts the progress that pupils make.
- Leaders do not monitor fully whether staff training and professional development leads to better teaching and improved progress for pupils.
- Attendance is rising but remains below average.
- A small minority of pupils for whom the school makes alternative provision do not attend or achieve well enough.
- Recent improvements in pupils' progress are not consistent throughout all year groups. The most-able pupils and some that have special educational needs or disability do not do well enough.
- Until recently, additional funding has not been used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as others.
- There are too few opportunities to broaden pupils' understanding or promote their awareness of fundamental British values.
- Several senior and subject leaders are new and have not had time to have sufficient impact on raising achievement.
- In the sixth form, not enough learners achieve well enough in Year 12 or progress into Year 13.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers are demonstrating that they have the capacity to lead improvements and raise achievement.
- Behaviour is improving. The school is orderly and calm. Pupils are cared for, supported well and feel that the school is a safe place to be.
- Local governors and the trust board show a detailed understanding of the school's context, its local community and the further support needed to improve it.
- Pupils are beginning to make better progress, particularly in Year 11.

## Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

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

- Improve the overall quality of teaching by:
  - making much more use of the information gained from teachers' assessments to plan learning that takes into account the different starting points of all pupils, and checking that this has an impact on improving pupils' learning and progress
  - gaining greater consistency in the school's approach to marking and feedback, so that pupils have time to correct errors and follow up the advice given to them to help improve their work
  - checking regularly, when visiting lessons, that the weekly professional development and training provided for staff is increasing their effectiveness and enabling pupils to make better progress.
  
- Improve pupils' outcomes by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what all pupils are capable of achieving
  - providing additional challenge for the most-able pupils to enable a larger proportion of them to exceed expectations and achieve highly
  - improving the attendance and progress of pupils who learn in the school's 'prep-school' or 'ed-lounge', or who are educated away from the school site
  - improving overall attendance to at least that found nationally, so that more pupils benefit from the improvements being made in the school
  - increasing opportunities to develop pupils' personal, social, health and economic education and understanding of fundamental British values.
  
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that roles and responsibilities of recently appointed senior and middle leaders become firmly embedded and that all of them are held fully accountable for securing rapid improvements
  - monitoring the quality of teaching more rigorously in order to gain a more accurate view of the progress pupils make
  - routinely checking that the quality of pupils' work in lessons closely matches the assessment information provided by teachers
  - increasing the monitoring of the learning and progress made by all pupils who have special educational needs or disability
  - increasing the monitoring and evaluation of the school's arrangements to educate pupils off-site.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Until recently, there has not been enough capacity within the senior leadership team, or at middle-leader level, to drive and sustain much-needed improvement in a school that faces significant challenges due to its rural location and the local economy. The school's growth, as more parents choose to send their children to it; increasing numbers of new pupils who join at times other than the start of the academic year, with little or no English; a higher than average proportion of looked after pupils and a significant proportion of pupils who are at risk and need intensive inter-agency support has placed further demands on school leaders as they strive to make improvements.
- Leaders' efforts are continually hampered by the constant difficulty in recruiting new teachers. As staff have retired or left the school, leaders have been unable to make new appointments in key subjects. This turbulence has left gaps in provision that have weakened the overall quality of teaching and restricted the overall achievement of pupils.
- Leaders at all levels have not been held fully accountable for securing widespread improvement since the last inspection. This has led to poor examination results and insufficient progress made by pupils, over time, in a wide range of subjects. This is now being tackled. The senior leadership team has been restructured this year to provide further capacity to drive improvement and new appointments have been made to lead some subjects. These arrangements are new and have not had sufficient time to demonstrate their full effectiveness.
- Spending of the pupil premium has made little difference to the achievement of pupils. Far fewer disadvantaged pupils attain five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, than other pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils also make much less progress in English and mathematics compared to other pupils. These gaps have not narrowed over the past two years. The school's current assessment information suggests this is changing, due to a renewed focus on raising the achievement of all pupils and improved monitoring of their achievement and welfare by senior leaders.
- Senior leaders know the school's main strengths and weaknesses, but their overall evaluation of its effectiveness is too generous. Their views on their leadership of teaching, its overall quality and the impact it has on pupils' learning were not confirmed by inspectors. This is because leaders are not rigorously checking the quality and quantity of pupils' work often enough and ensuring that it matches the assessment information provided by teachers.
- Monitoring of the progress and welfare of pupils who have special educational needs or disability, particularly those with education, health and care plans, has been strengthened to tackle their persistent underachievement. The recently appointed coordinator responsible for these pupils is not fully trained but is already beginning to make improvements.
- Similarly, the coordination of provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language has also been strengthened to enable them to integrate into school life and to improve their attendance, behaviour and achievement. Current data suggests that these arrangements are beginning to lead to improved rates of progress.
- Despite the difficulties in recruitment, leaders have made tough decisions and taken prompt action when the quality of teaching has not met their expectations. Currently, staff are provided with weekly training and professional development tailored to their particular needs, and whole-school training events to increase their effectiveness. The impact of this on improving teaching overall and increasing pupils' progress is unclear; this is because it is not routinely checked as part of senior leaders' monitoring procedures.
- The curriculum has been amended to ensure that most pupils follow GCSE courses. A few pupils follow work-based courses such as construction, hair and beauty, engineering and sport. The key stage 4 programme begins in Year 9 to ensure that pupils have enough time to prepare for GCSE examinations. In Years 7 and 8, catch-up funding is used effectively to enable less-able pupils to follow the 'ACES' curriculum to help them acquire essential literacy and numeracy skills. This tailored, nurturing approach is helping to boost their confidence and competence, but inconsistencies in teaching, particularly in the marking of pupils' work and the expectations teachers have of them, restricts their learning and progress.
- The drive this year to improve GCSE results has limited the focus of senior leaders to make improvements elsewhere. For example, when asked by inspectors, pupils showed little or no understanding of fundamental British values. Insufficient monitoring of pupils attending the Fenland Learning Base is clearly evident in the low attendance and poor achievement of the majority of them.

## ■ The governance of the school

- Members of the local governing board (LGB) and the academy trust share the principal's ambition and vision for the school, and support her development plans fully. They acknowledge the importance of securing rapid and sustained improvements if this vision is to be met.
  - Minutes of meetings show that governors ask challenging questions, hold leaders accountable and monitor the impact of the pupil premium, but until recently this has had little impact on raising achievement.
  - The trust has provided effective support for school leaders. An executive headteacher works alongside the principal, and experienced teachers from other schools within the trust are deployed to support leaders of English, mathematics and some foundation subjects.
  - Governors ensure that the school engages fully with the local schools' partnership to foster links with primary schools and develop effective arrangements for pupils' transition into Year 7.
  - Governors oversee the management of teachers' performance effectively, ensuring that only those contributing to improvement are rewarded with salary increases.
  - Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's context, the challenges it faces and the risks faced by young people in the locality, particularly the dangers of exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. The chair of the LGB is a member of the local 'Prevent' panel.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Members of the LGB ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fully met. Senior leaders and governors protect pupils by making sure that all required checks are carried out when recruiting new staff to work with children. By forging strong relations with local support agencies and the police, they develop a thorough, detailed understanding of individual cases, their backgrounds and the constant support they need. This enables them to develop a clear understanding of pupils' needs, follow the procedures they have developed to share information with support agencies and monitor the needs of very vulnerable pupils at risk of harm.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- A combination of some inadequate teaching, vacancies, staff absence and subsequent use of temporary staff due to recruitment difficulties has contributed directly to pupils' underachievement. This is particularly noticeable in English and mathematics, where the proportions of pupils making expected progress have been low for the past two years.
- In meetings with inspectors, older pupils expressed concerns about the large number of teachers they have had and the detrimental impact this has had on their learning. Messages from several parents raised similar concerns. This has stabilised in Year 11. Senior leaders have deployed experienced and effective teachers to teach Year 11 pupils. They are providing additional support for pupils during and after school, and in the holidays, to boost their knowledge and understanding and to prepare them for GCSE examinations this summer.
- Elsewhere, in other year groups, teaching remains inconsistent. Pockets of good practice exist, but there is wide variation within and between subjects. Expectations of what pupils are capable of are too low. The pitch of tasks set is often well within the capabilities of the most-able pupils and does not provide sufficient challenge. Pupils' books show that, in a range of subjects, teachers accept poor presentation and incomplete work. The volume of work, particularly writing at length in subjects other than English, is often minimal for this stage of the academic year.
- Assessment information about pupils' prior learning is not used well enough to plan learning suited to the different starting points of all pupils. For example, questions posed by the teacher in a science lesson did not probe pupils' deeper understanding and were answered easily. Consequently, pupils' interest and attention waned. All pupils, regardless of their ability, were set the same tasks in design technology, which were far too easy for most of them.
- In mathematics, teachers provide few opportunities for pupils to solve problems. They give them repetitive tasks to do involving simple calculations that do not test their mathematical understanding. For example, in Year 7 mathematics, teachers' planning indicates that most pupils had achieved Level 4 or 5 at the end of key stage 2, but tasks involving learning the mode and median were too easy for most of them as they have already learned about these in their primary schools.
- Inspectors found that, where teachers capture pupils' interest and lead learning well, pupils readily engage and make sufficient progress. For example, knowledgeable and enthusiastic teaching with lots of praise led to rapid progress being made in a Year 11 English lesson. In a dance lesson, the teacher's good

subject knowledge, together with the time given to practise and rehearse their dance motifs in small groups, enabled pupils to make good progress. However, when subject knowledge is weak, or when pupils are required to learn without direct support from teachers, some of them lose concentration and drift off task, which slows their progress.

- The school's records show that, throughout 2014 and 2015, teachers struggled to manage pupils' behaviour effectively, which led to large numbers of them being excluded from lessons and sent to the isolation room. This is now improving as teachers are using the school's agreed procedures to manage behaviour in lessons more consistently.
- Not all teachers adhere to the school's approach to marking and feedback. Inspectors found that, in a range of subjects, books had not been marked since last term. Many teachers correct basic errors in spelling and grammar and provide pupils with good-quality advice about improving their work, but there is little evidence in books to show that pupils are expected to follow this up.
- Less-able pupils, including those who have special educational needs or disability, and pupils with a minimal understanding of English receive support from teaching assistants which they find helpful. However, in most subjects their specific learning needs are not always met because too many teachers plan the same learning for all pupils in their class, regardless of their different needs and abilities.
- Appropriate deployment of effective teachers, targeted towards Year 11 pupils, is having a positive impact on their progress and their confidence. In mathematics, teachers' high expectations, clear explanations and tasks promoting regular practice are enabling pupils to increase their understanding and learn topics they have missed in the past. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to intervene quickly to correct pupils' misunderstandings and show them the correct method for calculating. In English, effective questioning and personalised, one-to-one support for pupils' reading of an examination text gave them the confidence to ask their own questions and discuss each other's ideas.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** requires improvement

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The poor attitudes towards learning of a significant minority of pupils are clearly evident in their low attendance over the past two years. However, the unrelenting efforts of staff to raise expectations, follow up absence and build relations with parents and carers is leading to sustained improvement. Fewer pupils are persistently absent so far this year compared to the previous year.
- The attendance of a small minority of pupils attending the alternative provision on site and at the Fenland Learning Base is far too low and is not being followed up with the same rigour. The attendance of a small minority of pupils with education, health and care plans is also too low.
- The school welcomes new pupils arriving in the local area from other countries. Staff are well versed in communicating with them and their parents, and ensuring that they become integrated into school life.
- 'Session six' offers a wide range of enrichment opportunities for younger pupils which approximately half of them engage in regularly. This time is also used effectively to direct support towards those in Year 11 who need additional help to prepare for GCSE examinations.
- Many pupils readily volunteer as school councillors and ambassadors. They feel that they have an important role to play in communicating ideas to senior staff, supervising areas such as the library and supporting the school's anti-bullying strategy. Inspectors noted good examples of pupils helping newly arrived pupils with limited English to communicate with others.
- Advice about choosing options to follow and future careers begins in Year 8 and continues throughout key stage 4. This includes one-to-one interviews, off-site visits and visitors to talk about education and training opportunities. Pupils are not offered the opportunity to gain experience of the workplace.
- Pupils do not value the time they spend in daily tutorials. This time is not used well enough by teachers to prepare pupils for learning, improve their learning and skills or provide them with a wider personal, social, health and economic education.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is developed effectively through a range of opportunities in assemblies, tutorials, visiting speakers and local community links which help to promote pupils' understanding. Provision is carefully mapped to monitor which subjects are providing additional opportunities and pupil ambassadors have recently been appointed to raise pupils' awareness further.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The introduction of a zero-tolerance policy towards unacceptable behaviour has raised expectations of pupils. After an initial period of heightened challenge from pupils, and the overuse of yellow and red cards, the policy is beginning to embed and lead to improvement. Pupils and staff told inspectors that behaviour has improved. The school's records show that fewer pupils are excluded from the school and the proportion of pupils referred to the isolation room is falling.
- Some challenges remain. A disproportionately high number of pupils who have special educational needs or disability are removed from lessons and referred to the isolation unit, and over fifty pupils with the most challenging behaviour are taught in separate units within the school or at off-site provision.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in the school and appreciate the care and support provided by staff. They say that incidents of bullying do arise, mostly name-calling and some personal abuse, but these are dealt with effectively by staff.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the exceptional school buildings and this contributes towards a calm, purposeful environment in which to learn and socialise. They told inspectors that they consider the school to be a community and, at times, like a home-from-home. They value highly the opportunity to mix together, make healthy choices at mealtimes and eat with their peers and staff in the restaurant.

## Outcomes for pupils

## are inadequate

- Since the last inspection, GCSE results have declined. Floor standards (the minimum targets the government expects schools to achieve) have not been met for the past two years. Attainment in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics, design technology, physical education, history and some modern languages, was notably low. Too many pupils have left Year 11 without the essential qualifications they need for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The school's assessment information shows the impact of regular changes in staffing and some poor teaching. Based on their low starting points on entry into Year 7, the proportions of pupils making expected progress in English and especially in mathematics over the last two years has remained well below national averages. The proportions of the most-able pupils exceeding national expectations were particularly low. This represents inadequate progress.
- Different groups of pupils have underachieved, including disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs or disability and those who are most able. Poor attendance has contributed to pupils' underachievement. For example, those pupils attending alternative, off-site provision last year did not attend regularly and did not attain the GCSE grades expected of them.
- Pupil premium funding has made little difference to the outcomes achieved by pupils. For the past two years, gaps in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils in the school have not closed, and in some subjects have widened. There are early signs that this is now improving as new strategies to raise the achievement of all pupils are beginning to embed.
- Improved rates of progress are also recorded for pupils in other year groups, but this varies widely and shows that some pupils continue to underachieve. For example, pupils in Year 10 are making much less progress than others, mainly due to the variable quality of teaching they receive. Assessment information also shows some notable discrepancies. For example, over 80% of pupils in Year 7 are judged to be making expected progress in mathematics, but, other than the impact of catch-up funding and the 'ACES' curriculum for a minority of these pupils, it is unclear how this is being achieved in a subject where teaching has been identified by senior leaders as in need of significant improvement.
- The school's latest assessment information shows that the strategies introduced to raise achievement are working. Pupils are making better progress than in the past. This is most evident in Year 11 where effective teaching and targeted interventions are leading to much higher proportions of pupils making or exceeding the progress expected of them in English and mathematics. The school's current assessment information indicates that pupils are on track to meet its target of 45% of Year 11 pupils attaining five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics.
- Inspectors found that the school's current assessment of improved progress is not supported by the quality and quantity of work in pupils' books in a range of subjects and year groups. Senior and middle leaders are not making sufficient checks of pupils' work in lessons to ensure that it closely matches the assessment information provided by teachers.



## 16 to 19 study programmes

## require improvement

- The school's last inspection noted that further improvements were needed to raise achievement in the sixth form. This continues to be the case. Some improvements have been made, but overall achievement remains below that found nationally.
- Approximately half of all learners joining in Year 12 do not continue their studies into Year 13. School leaders feel that this low rate of retention is due mainly to their higher expectations of learners, as they must meet their target grades before progressing onto A2 courses, and also the attraction of a wider choice of courses offered at other providers nearby.
- Higher expectations of learners promoted by the leader of the sixth form are ensuring that pupils remain focused and committed. Current assessment information indicates that the majority of learners in Years 12 and 13 are on track to meet their targets.
- Learners benefit from working in small groups, enabling them to receive effective teaching and tailored support to aid their progress. Results in 2015 show that most learners who continue their studies make sufficient progress and achieve their target grades. The majority of them progress to university.
- The sixth form's small size enables leaders to monitor learners' progress effectively. The sixth form leader liaises regularly with teachers and subject leaders to gain an accurate overview of learners' progress. Those who show early signs of underachieving are expected to attend extra study support at the end of the school day.
- Learners value the information, advice and guidance provided to help them choose the next stage of their education and training, and prepare their applications for higher education.
- Learners attend regularly and are kept safe. They form part of vertical tutor groups of pupils of all ages, and are expected to lead by example and support younger pupils with their learning. This helps to promote their personal development and involvement in school life, but limits the time they have to meet together on a daily basis.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137867
<b>Local authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10010324

This inspection 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 16 to 19 study programmes</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,339
<b>Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes</b>	79
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Bailey
<b>Principal</b>	Clare Claxton
<b>Telephone number</b>	01945 585237
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thomasclarksonacademy.org">www.thomasclarksonacademy.org</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@thomasclarkson.cambs.sch.uk">office@thomasclarkson.cambs.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	22–23 January 2014

## Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average secondary school.
- The majority of 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 or disability, including those with 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 pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils entitled to free school meals or looked after by the local authority.
- The school makes arrangements to educate a small proportion of pupils off site at the Fenland Learning Base.
- The school did not meet the government's floor standards (the minimum targets that schools are expected to achieve) in either 2014 or 2015.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons and five tutorials and carried out two learning walks to observe pupils at work. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, three groups of pupils, a group of sixth form learners, the school council, governors and two members of the academy trust.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documents, including the safeguarding policy and procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of governors' meetings, assessment information, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by school leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work from different subjects and year groups. They considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View; the 31 free texts sent by parents and carers; one written complaint; 118 pupil responses and 82 responses from staff to Ofsted's inspection questionnaires.

## Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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