

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



6 October 2016

Mrs Anne Hill
Principal
Thomas Clarkson Academy
Corporation Road
Wisbech
Cambridgeshire
PE13 2SE

Dear Mrs Hill

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Thomas Clarkson Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 September 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the executive principal, members of your senior leadership team, middle leaders and the chair of the governing body. I made short visits to classes, spoke to pupils about their work and scrutinised work in books. I also met with a group of pupils to discuss the changes that have taken place at the school since the previous inspection. I looked at a range of documentation relating to the impact of actions that leaders have taken to improve the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance at the school. I also evaluated the trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Context

There have been a number of significant changes at the school since the previous inspection. You took up the post of principal on 1 September 2016. A new vice-principal and a senior teacher for mathematics also started on that day. Fifteen teachers left the school at the end of the last school year and eight new teachers were appointed. Following a reduction in the number of form groups, in key stage 3 and key stage 4, the school is now fully staffed and no short-term supply staff are

currently being employed. Further changes are planned to the leadership team in the near future, as two vice-principals will be leaving the school in October 2016.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Despite the significant changes that have occurred at the school since the previous inspection, school leaders have ensured that there has been a strong and effective focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The evidence seen during this inspection indicates that the actions that have been taken are having a positive impact on standards across the school.

Pupils' attainment in their GCSE examinations improved significantly in 2016. The percentage of pupils achieving A* to C in English rose to 57%, from 37% in 2015. In mathematics the figure was 48%, up from 44% in 2015. Pupils' rates of progress also improved in both mathematics and English.

Systems that school leaders use to check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been strengthened since the previous inspection. Regular visits to classrooms, scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of teaching are now regular features of a typical working day at the school. As a result, school leaders have a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and the weaknesses that remain.

There has been a focus on developing the quality of teaching and ensuring that all teaching at the school is at least good. During the summer term the trust commissioned an external review of teaching, learning and assessment. The information gained through this process, and the school's improved monitoring systems, have been used to identify and support those teachers whose practice has been judged to be less than good. Training and support were provided during the summer term and this has continued into this school year. Good use is being made of expertise from other schools within the trust. Regular support is being provided by two senior teachers who are deployed full time at the school, sharing expertise and supporting staff development.

Following the previous inspection, school leaders reviewed the provision that is made for those pupils who are educated off-site. These pupils are now being educated at the Octavia Alternative Provision Academy in Wisbech. Better systems are now in place to ensure that school leaders monitor academic progress and attendance, which have improved since the inspection.

You have worked with other leaders to develop a plan which you are using to ensure that the necessary improvements are made to the school. The plan addresses all the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection, allocates clear responsibilities to staff, includes ambitious timescales and is linked well to the trust's statement of action.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The trust has provided effective support to the school since the previous inspection. As well as overseeing the permanent appointment of key members of staff, it has also deployed senior teachers at the school whose role it is to support the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff from other schools within the trust provide regular support, for example through subject leader meetings. They also supported you in the recent training day you held with local primary schools aimed at raising aspirations.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector