

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Thomas Clarkson Academy

Corporation Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 2SE

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 January 2025

Outcome

Thomas Clarkson Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is Matthew Dobbing. This school is part of The Brooke Weston Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Andrew Campbell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Richard Morrison. There is also an executive principal, Richard Scott, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school. They value the warm, inclusive environment. Pupils appreciate the genuine interest adults have in them as individuals. This helps build a culture based on strong bonds of trust and mutual respect.

Despite a decline in the school's published outcomes in 2024, pupils know that leaders and staff want them to achieve the highest levels of success. The majority of pupils respond well to this. They concentrate and focus on their learning. Pupils now benefit from a more stable staffing compliment of subject experts. Consequently, pupils now produce work that is generally of a high standard and does not reflect this drop in performance.

Most pupils behave well. They understand what the school expects of their conduct and how to meet these standards. Learning is rarely disrupted by pupils' behaviour. However, sometimes around school, some pupils find it difficult to consistently meet the school's high expectations.

Pupils enjoy a broad range of opportunities to foster new interests and talents. Sports, performance and other general interest clubs are available. Pupils are enthusiastic about the offer. However, many clubs run at the same time. Some pupils get frustrated as they cannot access all the opportunities they would like.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's curriculum now clearly defines what pupils should learn and when. The curriculum prepares pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), well for their next steps. The school has forensically considered why pupils' outcomes were lower in 2024 than in previous years. This has led to improvements in how the curriculum is taught. Consequently, pupils are once again learning as intended.

The school has ensured that reading is a priority. It has identified the specific barriers to reading for younger pupils who struggle to read. This information is used to develop programmes to help these pupils catch-up. Many progress rapidly to become confident and fluent readers. However, the support for older pupils is not as refined. This means that these pupils do not catch-up with their peers as quickly as they could. The school understands this and has begun to deal with it. However, the impact of its actions is yet to be seen.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. Sixth-form students in particular benefit from their teachers' depth of knowledge. The school has worked well to make sure all teachers have the expertise to teach the curriculum as expected. Consequently, the majority of pupils enjoy high-quality teaching. Explanations of new information are exact and easy to follow. Teachers use the well-crafted information about pupils with SEND to adjust how they explain new ideas where needed. Difficult and abstract ideas in A-level study are explained skilfully so students can understand them. In most cases, the activities that pupils complete help them to secure what they have been taught. Pupils layer new information onto what they already know. This helps pupils, including those with SEND, to learn and achieve well.

Most teachers check carefully what pupils have learned. However, sometimes, the questions teachers ask lack the required level of insightfulness. This results in an imprecision in teachers' understanding of what pupils know. Sometimes, necessary adaptations to teaching are not made, or do not effectively address gaps or misconceptions. Consequently, pupils do not learn some aspects of the curriculum in the depth the school expects.

Sometimes, the school does not make sure that staff implement its policy on managing behaviour and rewards as consistently as they could. Consequently, sometimes, pupils' behaviour falls short of the school's expectations and is not challenged in the way it should be. In other cases, some pupils do not get the rewards and recognition for their conduct, work or contributions. This creates a sense of unfairness and makes it difficult for pupils to fully understand what is expected of them.

The school understands the importance of regular attendance. The school has clear strategies in place for pupils who find it difficult to attend school regularly. These strategies are having a positive impact on improving pupils' attendance.

The school has a well-thought-out personal social and health education (PSHE) programme. This is taught sensitively so that pupils develop an age-appropriate

understanding of key values, such as respect, democracy and tolerance. Sixth-form students contribute to the planning of their PSHE programme. This means they learn about topics that are most relevant to them. The school's careers programme provides pupils with detailed information about a broad range of careers and future opportunities. Pupils make informed choices and are well prepared for their futures.

Governors and trustees robustly challenge leaders to ensure that actions are always taken in pupils' best interests. They check to ensure that actions lead to improvement. Staff are proud to work at the school. Staff know that when they discuss important issues with leaders, such as workload, the school will respond to their concerns.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not ensured teachers have the knowledge to routinely check what pupils understand with the precision needed to accurately identify where pupils have gaps or misconceptions in their knowledge. Where this is the case, teachers are unable to make the necessary adaptations to their teaching and pupils do not learn the important knowledge the school intends. The school should ensure that staff have the expertise to identify weaknesses in learning accurately and adapt their teaching accordingly.
- Some staff do not apply the school's policy to manage behaviour as consistently as the school expects. This means that learning is sometimes disrupted, and around school, some pupils fail to meet the high standards set by the school. Some pupils are not rewarded for their work, conduct or contributions. The school and trust should ensure that all staff have the expertise in how to apply and then consistently enact the school's agreed behaviour policies.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a

school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2020.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137867
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10366657
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,355
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	102
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Richard Morrison
CEO of the trust	Andrew Campbell
Principal	Matthew Dobbing
Website	www.thomasclarksonacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 January 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Brooke Weston Trust.
- The principal took up his role in September 2024, having previously held the position on an interim basis since September 2023.
- The school uses one registered provider of alternative provision.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for up to 15 pupils with SEND. The provision is for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.
- The school is currently providing recently opened accommodation for a small number of pupils from The Wisbech Academy.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the principal and executive principal. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the trust board, local governing body and the trust's executive team, including the CEO.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at documentation about the curriculum and reviewed documentation for pupils with SEND.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments submitted. Inspectors spoke with staff about their experiences of working at the school. Inspectors also spoke to groups of pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning in lessons.

Inspection team

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