

The Ridge Academy

Clyde Crescent, Cheltenham, GL52 5QH

Inspection dates 2–3 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching at The Ridge is good. As a result, pupils who are often behind in reading, writing and mathematics when they join the academy are able to quickly start to catch-up.
- Teachers plan lessons very precisely to meet pupils' individual needs and this helps them to make good progress.
- Pupils make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in improving their behaviour. Staff are calm, kind and firm. They teach pupils different ways to manage their emotions and help them to communicate more effectively.
- Pupils whose behaviour is very challenging are given excellent support.
- The Principal's leadership is outstanding. She is completely committed to making sure that the academy continually improves. She has been highly effective in improving the quality of teaching and the outcomes for the pupils since the academy opened. Senior staff support her very well.
- Staff are full of good ideas about how to help pupils to succeed, and put these into action in their lessons and the activities they run.
- Governors frequently visit the academy to monitor its work and to meet staff and pupils. They know what is going well and what still needs some more work. They ask good, challenging questions of the senior leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils learn many different subjects each week in addition to English and mathematics. However, the academy does not yet have enough precise information about how well they are doing in these subjects.
- The youngest pupils often enjoy their learning and make progress with their communication skills, reading, writing and mathematics. However, they do not have the chance to do enough purposeful play-based activities to help them to learn really well.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in four lessons and parts of nine other lessons. Three of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. During the lesson observations, she talked to pupils about their learning, and looked at their work.
- The inspector observed break and lunchtimes, and watched pupils arriving at the academy in the morning. She held meetings with senior leaders, staff, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a parent governor and another parent, a representative of the academy's sponsor, and two police officers who work closely with the academy.
- The inspector looked at the responses from parents and carers to a questionnaire that the academy had sent out during the last term, and to pupils' and staff's responses to the academy's questionnaires. There were no responses to consider on the online survey, Parent View.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents, including pupils' work and the academy's information about pupils' progress, the academy's evaluations of teaching, records of pupils' behaviour, the academy's improvement plan, the governing body minutes, and information about the academy's management of teachers' performance.

Inspection team

Sue Morris-King, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy opened in September 2012, replacing a school in special measures. It is sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- The academy has designated places for 44 primary-aged children, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It is the only specialist primary provision in Gloucestershire for this group of pupils, who travel long distances to and from the academy.
- Just over 10% of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. No pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The majority of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Around a fifth of pupils are looked after by the local authority. The academy receives the pupil premium (additional government funding) for both these groups – around 75% of pupils in total.
- The vast majority of pupils are in Years 4 to 6, with very small numbers from Years 1 to 3. There are very few girls on roll.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop ways of assessing pupils' progress in the subject areas other than English and mathematics, and use this information to evaluate the success of different approaches and to inform future planning.
- Develop a more suitable approach to teaching the youngest pupils, drawing on appropriate aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, including the use of purposeful play-based activities.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The rate of progress that pupils make has accelerated considerably since the academy opened in September. The vast majority of pupils are now making progress at the nationally expected rate for primary school children in reading, writing and mathematics. In each of these areas of learning, there are pupils who are progressing rapidly.
- Progress is strongest in mathematics, where more than a third of pupils are making more than the progress expected for their age and nearly a quarter of pupils have made outstanding progress during the year. The academy's assessment information is backed up well by the good volume and accuracy of work in pupils' books.
- Since the academy introduced a stronger focus on reading, pupils' progress in reading has accelerated. Many are now making good progress with their reading skills, such as being able to 'sound out' words they do not know, and being able to explain what they have read.
- Progress in writing is not as strong, but most pupils are progressing steadily and some are progressing at a rapid rate. Pupils are motivated to write by the range of interesting activities they do in their literacy lessons, and around and outside the academy. For example, pupils in Year 6 have written to different theme parks to ask specific information that they wanted to find out, and have received some good responses.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium are in the majority in this academy, and they do as well as, and sometimes better than, their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. There are no differences in the progress made by minority ethnic pupils, girls and looked after children when compared to their peers.
- The youngest pupils' progress has been more patchy than in other classes. They tend to have complex needs and do not always settle well in a traditional classroom. More-active approaches to learning that the academy has started to introduce have helped some of them to focus better on their work.
- A few pupils have not made much academic progress during the year. These tend to be pupils who have joined the academy later on, or who have the most complex behavioural or emotional difficulties. Almost all these pupils have made progress with the length of time they stay in class, their ability to concentrate and their relationships with peers and adults, as well as with some aspects of their academic work.

The quality of teaching is good

- The academy has extensive, precise assessment information about pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers use this information very well to plan what pupils need to learn next. This precise planning is a major factor in the good progress that pupils are making in English and mathematics.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have formed strong class-based teams. These teams have an excellent knowledge of pupils' individual needs and use this well to help pupils to develop a positive, resilient attitude to their work. Pupils' learning skills have developed very well during the year, particularly in the middle two classes, where they can now often concentrate on their work for an hour at a time.
- The teaching of social skills is very strong. Staff systematically teach pupils to respond well to new challenges, work together in pairs and groups, cooperate, and cope with making mistakes. Pupils' social skills have improved considerably since September, which has in turn helped their academic achievement.
- The classroom environments are bright and stimulating. One, for example, has parrots hanging from the ceiling and large inflatable palm trees, related to their current topic of pirates. 'Working walls' for mathematics are used effectively – pupils' learning from the day before is displayed and they refer to this in their lessons. Pupils' work is displayed attractively in all classrooms.

- The topic-based approach to some of the other subjects is developing well. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the topics, such as the circus and theme parks. Teachers plan exciting activities, using their knowledge of the pupils' needs for these topics and for other subjects such as music and modern foreign languages. However, the assessment and tracking of pupils' learning across the range of subjects is not detailed enough.
- In the youngest class, as in the other classes, staff have excellent relationships with the pupils. Pupils often respond well to active, physical approaches to learning. For example, during the inspection, pupils thoroughly enjoyed singing and dancing to a song about pirates, which was modelled very well by staff. The academy has started to develop more active learning in this class, and learning through play, but there is not yet enough of this to meet the younger pupils' developmental needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The majority of pupils behave calmly and sociably almost all of the time. In lessons, they are enthusiastic and many show excellent attitudes to their learning. Pupils are proud of their work and their books are very well presented.
- Pupils take a pride in their academy and take responsibility for each other and their classrooms. They help each other when they make mistakes. For example, when one pupil dropped a pot of pens on the floor, two more immediately picked these up with no fuss and without being asked, and got back on with their learning.
- Pupils try hard to become 'mentors'. They earn this right through behaving consistently well, and wear different coloured sweatshirts to the rest of the academy. They take their responsibilities seriously. During lunchtime, for example, a younger pupil became upset. A mentor left his lunch to go to talk to him and to bring him back to his table.
- There is a very consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Expectations are very clear and staff help pupils to uphold these. Importantly, behaviour management is also responsive to pupils' individual needs. Staff recognise when pupils are in crisis and are unable to meet expectations, and they support them in a wide variety of ways.
- Very clear routines help pupils to behave well. When pupils arrive in their taxis, they are greeted by senior staff and go straight to their classrooms. The music and movement 'Wake and Shake' session that starts the day is lively and helps pupils to relax before they start their lessons. Pupils' participation in this session is excellent.
- At lunchtime, pupils queue sensibly to collect their meals and eat sociably together with staff. Many play cooperatively outside, while others choose to sit quietly. Break and lunchtimes are well supervised and safe. Staff are always on hand to spot any issues and to help any pupil who is upset. Pupils know that they can seek help at once if they are feeling picked on or bullied.
- Some pupils' behaviour is very challenging. Pupils, including those with the most complex needs, make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in learning to manage their own behaviour and to control their emotions. The academy's records show a considerable decrease in the number of incidents over the year and the vast majority of pupils spend all of their time in class.
- Attendance has increased over the year. The vast majority of pupils attend over 90% of the time, and many have attendance rates of over 95%.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal has an extremely clear vision for the academy. She is completely dedicated to enabling each individual pupil to achieve to the highest standard, both academically and socially. Senior leaders and staff share this vision, and all the academy's systems and structures are built around it. Through strong teamwork, they have established a calm, stable school where the focus is on learning, and enabled pupils to succeed academically and socially.

- Leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of the academy's work very well. They analyse closely what factors have helped pupils to make outstanding progress or not enough progress. They look critically at the range of additional support, including that funded through the pupil premium, to see how effective it is. The Principal monitors the quality of teaching very thoroughly and holds teachers to account for their performance.
 - The analysis of behaviour and attendance is equally thorough. The academy uses this information to make changes. For example, it has changed the routines at the start of the afternoon, which has led to calmer starts to lessons and fewer incidents of poor behaviour. Over the course of the year, the use of fixed-term exclusions has decreased considerably. The academy now has a wide range of alternative responses, and exclusion is seldom used. Procedures for tracking attendance and challenging non-attendance are rigorous.
 - The leadership of subjects is developing well. Improvements to the quality of teaching and assessment in mathematics and English have made a substantial difference to pupils' learning and test results. Staff are just beginning to take on the leadership of other subjects and aspects of the academy's work.
 - The academy's support for families is very strong. The family liaison team are involved from the outset, assessing pupils' and families' needs and working with a range of agencies as required. They arrange a wide range of social interventions, in and out of the academy, for pupils and their families, including adult mentors, counselling, animal care courses, and activity days during the school holidays which are run by academy staff.
 - The academy's sponsor provides good support. The local authority, academy and sponsor work well together on relevant matters such as safeguarding and admissions.
 - The academy makes good use of the support from a local outstanding primary school and consultants provided by the sponsor. It has excellent relationships with the local police, who frequently visit the academy to work with staff and pupils.
 - **The governance of the academy:**
 - Governors have a good range of skills which they use well. They have a good understanding of the progress that pupils are making, including compared to all pupils nationally, and the quality of teaching. They scrutinise the Principal's judgements about teachers' performance and consider carefully the implications for teachers' pay. Governors visit the academy frequently. Their visits are clearly focused on specific areas of the academy's improvement plan and are recorded for other governors to see. This enables governors to see first-hand evidence of what is reported to them in meetings. Consequently, they provide well-informed challenge as well as support. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent and discuss the academy's evaluation of the impact in meetings.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138430
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	427808

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philippa Dancey
Principal	Heather Ingram
Date of previous school inspection	NA
Telephone number	01242 512680
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