

# Rickmansworth School

Scots Hill, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, WD3 3AQ

**Inspection dates** 24–25 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics is well above the national average. Students make good progress and achieve well.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned, with a range of interesting activities.
- Students who need extra help to catch up are given good support. As a result, most of them are making good progress.
- Students enjoy school and behave well. They have positive attitudes to their learning.
- The sixth form is good. Students are guided well and benefit from teaching which is of a consistently high quality.
- School leaders have developed a good understanding of how well the school is doing and are working effectively on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The governing body understands the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors hold staff to account for the school's performance and the progress of the students.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Work is not always sufficiently well matched to each student's needs to enable them to make the maximum possible progress in every lesson.
- Questions are not always used well enough by teachers to encourage students to think deeply.
- Students are not always given enough opportunity to work independently and find things out for themselves.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 55 lessons or part lessons, of which 26 were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of students and looked at samples of students' work.
- Meetings were held with a wide range of staff, including the executive headteacher, interim headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders, and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 143 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 36 responses to the staff questionnaire during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents including the school's summary of its strengths and weaknesses, records of students' progress, other monitoring records and safeguarding documentation.

## Inspection team

David Talbot, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Stephen Palmer	Additional Inspector
Angela Skinner	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
David Belsey	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- Rickmansworth School converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2011. When the predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected it was judged to be good.
- The school has been through a period of significant change at senior leadership level. Since January 2013, there have been two successive interim headteachers, the second of which took up his post in September 2013. The school is presently also supported by an interim executive headteacher.
- The school is part way through a building programme, aimed at improving the existing accommodation.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and other groups, is much lower than the national average.
- The school receives additional government funds for the small proportion of students now in Year 7 who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in English or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The large majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- A small number of students attend off-site provision at West Hertfordshire College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum levels expected for students' attainment and progress.

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

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
  - providing more opportunities for students to learn independently
  - making better use of prior learning information to plan lessons that allow all students to make outstanding progress
  - increasing the amount of probing and open-ended questions that students are asked.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with levels of attainment that are well above average. They make good progress, and the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is also well above the national average. Although this figure fell in 2013, attainment remained high in a large number of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- The proportions of students making or exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics is consistently well above the national average. Good progress in these subjects was seen during the inspection in lesson observations, work scrutiny and discussions with students.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium for the small number of students who are eligible for it. In 2013, results for these students were equivalent to half a GCSE grade higher than other students in English and mathematics. Students in the current Year 11 who are eligible for this support are about half a GCSE grade behind their peers at the moment and the school is taking steps to close this gap.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used to provide extra support in literacy and numeracy for students who need further help in developing key skills. This support is helping these students to make good progress and is particularly successful in numeracy. Although at an early stage of development, sixth formers are also beginning to support the progress of Year 7 readers and all those involved in this are very enthusiastic about it.
- More-able students make good progress and some of them are sometimes entered early for GCSE examinations in a very limited number of subjects, including mathematics. This varies from year to year, depending on the needs of the students, and does not prevent them from achieving the highest grades.
- The small number of disabled students and those who have special educational needs make generally good progress as a result of the way in which any additional support is managed. Progress is monitored carefully and changes are made to levels or type of support when an individual's progress is slower than expected.
- The progress of the very small number of students who attend off-site provision is monitored and most of them achieve very well.
- Both the attainment of students on entry to the sixth form and retention rates into Year 13 are above the national average. Attainment and progress in the sixth form are good. Students are given good support during their time in the sixth form and are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The majority of parents and carers who expressed a view were positive about the progress their children are making at the school and the information they receive from the school on their children's progress.

**The quality of teaching is good**

- Good teaching supports the good achievement of the students. The school judges the quality of teaching to be good and inspectors agree. No inadequate teaching was observed during the inspection.
- Positive relationships are a feature of lessons in this school and encourage high levels of motivation and commitment from the students. They want to do well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and this is recognised by the students as a strength of the school. Teachers use their expertise to plan interesting lessons that help the students to make good progress.
- In the most effective lessons, students are given opportunities to explore ideas independently or in groups, something which they clearly enjoy doing. In a particularly successful French lesson in Year 11, groups of students had to prepare and then present a 'Dragon's Den' type activity in French. They rose to the challenge and worked with lots of enthusiasm, making good progress.
- Where teaching falls short of outstanding, it is often as a result of the teacher dominating the lesson and offering few opportunities for the students to learn independently. Questions are not always used as well as they could be to probe students' understanding and to prompt them to think more deeply for themselves.
- Teachers do not always use the assessment data available to plan lessons that enable all students to make better progress. Sometimes, every student is expected to complete the task in the same way and in the same period of time, no matter what their learning needs might be.
- Teachers provide helpful feedback to students. This includes information about the students' current progress as well as what they need to do to improve.
- Other adults are used well to support the learning and progress of students who require extra help. This is monitored carefully and helps these students to make good progress.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge, know the students well and provide a range of challenging activities that enable the students to make at least good progress. In a geography lesson in Year 13, the teacher challenged the assumptions being made by the students, making them think again, so that they developed a very clear idea about what makes an A\* response.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Relationships between different members of the school community are good. Students are polite and courteous. There is a sense of pride in the school and the students show respect for the school environment.
- Students behave well and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Behaviour around the school is good, including at break and lunchtime. The students are coping very well with the restrictions imposed by having a building project on site.
- The overwhelming majority of students have positive attitudes to their learning and respond well

to the systems the school uses to manage behaviour.

- Sometimes, students can be passive in class. In such situations, students are not always encouraged by the teacher to act more independently and so take more control over their own learning.
- Students feel safe in school and are aware of different kinds of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They say that if they have a problem they can talk to a member of staff about it. One student remarked, 'The school takes looking after us and safety seriously'.
- Sixth formers make a positive contribution to the life of the school, including supporting in some lessons, listening to readers in Year 7 and as prefects. They are good role models for younger students.
- Attendance has improved dramatically and is now above average. The attendance of some students eligible for the pupil premium is below average and the school is taking steps to encourage improved attendance for the small number of students to whom this applies.
- The majority of parents and carers who expressed a view agreed that their children are safe at the school and behaviour is well managed.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- There have been significant changes in the leadership of the school over the past year. Strong leadership from interim school leaders has ensured that the right areas for improvement have been identified and implemented, with a view to building on achievement that is already good.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because, although there is a renewed focus on students' achievement and the quality of teaching across the school, they are not yet at the highest level. There is both the scope and capacity for leaders at all levels to bring this about and teachers are very supportive of the priorities for improvement identified by school leaders.
- There is an effective system for managing the performance of teachers. Teachers have targets that reflect the school's priorities, as well as their own level of responsibility and development needs. Each teacher's performance is monitored and is linked to pay progression.
- Teachers are offered a range of training opportunities to support their professional development. The school has introduced a coaching programme, which has been welcomed by staff and has helped to improve the quality of teaching. Links have also been established with other schools and organisations, in order to accelerate the rate of progress that is being made in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The curriculum is broadly academic with a limited number of vocational opportunities and meets the needs of the students. It is well organised and allows students a choice of subjects when they begin Year 10 or enter the sixth form.
- Students are given good support as they move from one stage of their education to another. This helps them to make informed choices about what are the best courses for them.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. The students value the way in which the sixth form is run and the support they are given.

■ The school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is wide-ranging and an area of strength. Students show an awareness of the diversity of cultures in modern Britain, and visits to places of worship, such as a Hindu temple, are arranged. The school is the hub for an impressive sports partnership of over 40 schools and this is very well received by those involved.

■ The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements, including checking on the attendance of students at alternative provision.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is very effective. Governors hold senior leaders to account and are prepared to take robust action when the situation demands it. They have a good understanding of how well the school is doing and the quality of teaching and learning, particularly as seen in students' achievement. They are aware of the pupil premium, how it is spent and the difference it makes. Governors understand the system for managing the performance of teachers and how decisions about pay progression are made. They oversee the school's finances effectively and ensure that good value for money is achieved.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136606
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425396

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy converter
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1226
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	250
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John de Braux
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mark Allchorn (interim headteacher)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01923 773296
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