

New Rickstones Academy

Conrad Road, Witham, CM8 2SD

Inspection dates

13–14 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- There has been rapid improvement since the previous inspection. Students, including those supported by the pupil premium funding, are making faster progress. A much higher proportion of students, throughout the academy, are making good progress in English and mathematics.
- The sixth form is good; it is well led and managed. Standards are above average, as a result of good teaching. Sixth form students are focused on what they have to do to in their progress towards higher or further education or employment.
- The quality of teaching has improved substantially in the academy since the previous inspection. Teachers have high expectations of their students.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is good. The academy has a calm and harmonious atmosphere, and students are polite and helpful.
- The academy keeps students safe and they greatly value the support and care that is provided for them.
- The headteacher is supported by a governing body which has been effectively strengthened since the last inspection. Governors have a thorough understanding of the academy and have taken a lead role in driving improvement. The Academies Enterprise Trust has supported the governing body and academy well.
- Senior and subject leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally teachers do not adapt their planning so that the work they set has an appropriate level of challenge for all groups of students.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent. In some subjects students do not always have a clear enough understanding of how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 21 lessons, of which four were jointly observed with one of the academy's senior leaders. Inspectors also made a number of short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students and staff, including subject leaders, members of the governing body and members of the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- Inspectors observed the academy's work and looked at policies, the academy's self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, information about students' progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students' work.
- The views of 20 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account. Inspectors also looked at the 58 responses to a staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alison Moore, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Charles Dickinson	Additional Inspector
Kathryn Herlock	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- New Rickstones Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, is one in four, which is above the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is low and very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is four in ten students, which is above the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The sixth form works in partnership with the sixth form of Maltings Academy, with some courses offered in only one of the two sixth forms.
- Alternative provision for a few students is provided at The Colchester Institute, The Red Balloon, Heybridge Alternative Provision School and Tiptree Equestrian Centre.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes of staff and in the membership of the governing body.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move more good teaching to outstanding by:
 - making sure that all teachers adapt their planning so that the work they set has an appropriate level of challenge for all groups
 - improving the consistency of marking so that all students have a clear understanding of how to improve their work, and are able to demonstrate to their teachers that they have understood the advice they have been given.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Since the last inspection the headteacher has developed a senior leadership team that has successfully improved the quality of teaching. There is now a culture of high aspirations for all students that supports learning effectively. The Academies Enterprise Trust, the governing body, senior leaders and the staff all now share the same vision for the success of the academy. The Regional Director of the Trust meets regularly with the headteacher and has seconded expertise from the Trust to the Local Governing Body.
- Senior leaders have helped subject leaders to extend their leadership skills. The subject leaders now share in the monitoring of teaching and have clear action plans in place to drive further improvement. The quality of teaching is rigorously checked, and support and training are provided where needed. Firm action is taken if teachers have not met the high standards expected. Teachers are closely held to account for the progress made by their students, and salary increases are only awarded if progress targets are met. As a result, teachers, in their subject teams, have high expectations of what their students can achieve.
- There has been a particularly strong focus on raising the quality of teaching in English, humanities and science. This has resulted in teaching and learning in these subjects showing good improvement. More generally, the quality of teaching has strongly improved across the academy.
- Subject leaders, and the teachers they lead, are making effective use of data to carefully and regularly check and analyse the progress of all groups of students. This ensures that underachievement can be quickly tackled. A range of interventions is offered including the after school club 'catch up' sessions to prevent students falling behind.
- The academy's self-evaluation is rigorous, detailed and accurate. It focuses strongly on areas for improvement linked to the issues raised by the previous inspection; all of them have been effectively addressed.
- The curriculum is well planned. It provides a suitable range of subjects. Students have a choice of options that include academic and vocational subjects. Students also benefit from extra-curricular activities, such as the 'Evolve' dance club which is composed of different year groups, catch up classes and a fashion club. The academy uses alternative provision for a small number of its students. The broad curriculum supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and promotes good behaviour and an understanding of the importance of respect and courtesy.
- Tutor time provides an interesting programme that supports and prepares students for life in modern Britain. Discrimination is not tolerated and all students are treated equally and fairly. Students successfully understand their moral responsibilities to society, their families and friends. They are encouraged to recycle materials thoughtfully, for example in food technology lessons.
- Pupil premium funds are being used effectively. These funds are currently providing additional teachers in mathematics and English to support small-group tuition, and to promote the attendance rates of this group of students. In addition, disadvantaged students take part in residential 'booster weekends' where they successfully improve their English and mathematics skills. As a result, disadvantaged students are making better progress. In mathematics, disadvantaged students are making faster progress than others in the academy.
- Safeguarding meets requirements. The single central record is up to date and all necessary checks are carried out on staff. Risk assessments are carried out for activities in and outside school to keep students as safe as possible. The staff keep a careful watch over students' attendance, behaviour and progress when they are taught in alternative provision.
- The Academies Enterprise Trust has supported the headteacher in training and developing an effective team of senior and subject leaders.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body and the Academies Enterprise Trust have been instrumental in the drive for improvement since the previous inspection. The Trust has enhanced the effectiveness of the governing body by new appointments. Governors have an extremely good understanding of the issues facing the academy, including the impact of falling rolls, and they are ensuring that the academy retains high-quality provision. They have a good understanding of performance data and compare the academy's performance with that of schools nationally.
- Governors extensively challenge leaders at all levels of leadership about how they will raise achievement and maintain a focus on improving the quality of teaching. Governors check carefully that pupil premium funding is used effectively and challenge the academy's leaders to ensure that there is sufficient impact on the achievement of disadvantaged students. This means they understand how effective the quality of teaching is in raising students' achievement.
- Performance management systems are in place and reviewers have been trained. There have been whole staff presentations so that all staff understand their responsibilities in terms of their performance and know their appraisal objectives and how this links to their pay. Governors know that good teachers are rewarded with promotions and how underperforming staff are supported.

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

- The behaviour of students is good. In lessons students show their willingness to learn and work well as individuals and in groups. Reports from, and visits to, the off site and alternative provision show that behaviour and attendance are good.
- Around the academy there is an atmosphere of calm. Students are polite and courteous, showing respect for their teachers and for each other, and presenting themselves smartly, showing pride in their uniform. They are punctual to lessons and are patient, whether queuing in the canteen at lunchtime or waiting for a lift. Exclusion is reducing and is rare.
- Inspectors observed that teachers were consistent in their application of the academy's behaviour policy with the effect that students clearly understood their expectations in lessons and around the academy.
- Students like their academy and are proud of it. They are given the opportunity to fill positions of responsibility, such as library assistants. They feel they are part of a caring community. They say that they feel safe at school because 'we all look after each other'. They have good relationships with their teachers and know who to go to if they have a problem. They feel confident that staff would deal with issues properly, should they arise. Their attitudes to learning are positive and students were keen to explain their future aspirations, showing the effectiveness of the academy's useful information, advice and guidance.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The single central record is thorough and protocols for off-site visits are in place. Health and safety records are well documented and policies are fully in place. Students in the academy and those who attend alternative provision feel safe because staff keep a close eye on them where ever they are studying.
- Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and of the different forms that bullying can take, including a detailed understanding of what to do if they experience cyber bullying. They said that incidents of bullying were rare and that adults supported them well when they did occur.
- Strategies to improve attendance, such as awarding badges, have reduced absences since the previous inspection. In particular, the attendance of disabled students and those who have special education needs, and disadvantaged students, has improved.

The quality of teaching is good

- Leaders rigorously check the quality of teaching and there is an 'open door' policy for subject leaders to

support their staff in lessons. As a result teaching has improved and is now good.

- Leaders have established very effective assessment practice across the academy. In many lessons observed, teachers outlined what needed to be done to achieve a high grade. This was the case, particularly in the sixth form, where students used examination assessment criteria to evaluate their work. The marking of written work is inconsistent, however, not all teachers provide clear enough advice for students about how to further improve their work.
- There is some excellent practice in promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, teachers create displays reflecting the centenary of First World War, lead trips to Auschwitz, and provide after school clubs (for example, the fashion club encouraging a theme of recycling in dress design). Many of these activities offer an opportunity for students to engage in activities which nurture their social skills and help prepare them for life outside of school. They receive valuable careers advice which helps them to plan for their future lives.
- Students' literacy is rigorously supported through the academy's accelerated reader programme for students in Year 7 and 8. The programme is managed by the learning resource manager, who liaises closely with the special education needs coordinator and the head of English. This means that barriers to a student's progress can be followed up directly. Many lessons have a strong emphasis on literacy, and effective writing frames are used, for example, in history.
- Teachers use a variety of engaging resources that match the interests and abilities of their classes so that students make good progress. The use of images and charts with less able students is particularly effective. This ensures that the teaching of English and mathematics are good.
- Occasionally teachers do not adapt their planning to provide sufficient challenge or support for the wide range of abilities in their classes. This sometimes results in a few students finding the work too easy or too difficult.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students typically enter the academy in Year 7 having achieved significantly below average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of students, currently in the academy, on course to make the expected and faster rates of progress in English and mathematics has increased considerably. New well-thought-out policies and procedures are now in place to ensure that students make at least good progress in reading, writing and more generally in literacy in other subjects.
- In 2014 the proportion of students in Year 11 gaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, were below the national average. The proportion of students meeting A*-G GCSE grades was above average. The academy's robust assessments indicate that students in the current Year 11 are on track to improve on the results from 2014. Currently an average proportion of Year 11 are working at A*-C in five subjects including English and mathematics.
- The most able students achieve well. More students are on target to gain higher grades, particularly in English, where externally verified English coursework data shows, on average, that grades are expected to be one grade higher than that achieved last year.
- Inspection evidence shows that a greater proportion of students of all groups make good progress in mathematics. External moderation as well as the Academy's own systems show that students are now on track to achieve well. The Academy does not generally have an early entry policy.
- Since the previous inspection, most students are making faster progress, in all year groups and all subjects, including in English, mathematics and science where progress and results were previously below average. In English, the academy is ensuring that a greater proportion of its students are making good progress. This is because the new leaders are tracking and monitoring learning more effectively and putting in place actions to deal with underachievement, for example, they successfully use teaching assistants and 'catch up' clubs.

- The very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are making similar rates of progress to other students.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported and make good progress. Leaders have ensured that the quality of their support has improved. As a result these students are currently making better progress than their classmates. They benefit from a range of interventions, including one-to-one and small group support in English and mathematics. The coordinator for special education needs keeps an open door policy for parents who attend student progress reviews for their children.
- The attainment gap between disadvantaged students and others in the academy is closing rapidly. Disadvantaged students are making progress at least at the same rate as others in the academy, and in some year groups their progress is faster.
- The gap between disadvantaged students and other students in the academy, in 2014, was half a grade less in English and three-quarters of a grade less in mathematics. The gap between disadvantaged students and others nationally was three-quarters of a grade in English and one grade in mathematics. In 2014, gaps in results were considerably narrower than in 2013.
- The achievement of those who are educated in alternative provision is good. Students who are educated off site for two days each week benefit from a curriculum that is appropriate to their needs. They are well supported on and off the site. They enjoy their learning and, as a result, their attendance is regular. They know how well they are doing and what they still need to do to achieve their goals.

The sixth form provision is good

- Leadership in the sixth form is good. A new head of sixth form has been appointed who has introduced a more rigorous programme of monitoring performance. The sixth form curriculum has been changed to include more appropriate pathways for students and better advice and guidance. Students are offered a variety of vocational and academic courses at Level 2 and Level 3, either on site or at the Maltings Sixth Form. Student pathways have been improved so that the academy better meets the aspirations and aptitude of its students. As a result, students are well motivated, behave well and have positive attitudes.
- Mathematics and English GCSE retakes are offered for the large proportion of those that enter the sixth form without these qualifications. Students are also offered the choice of a one year Level 2 programme with additional mathematics and English as an option for those who wish to progress directly into employment or training.
- The sixth form offers students an opportunity to take part in a range of programmes, for example the academy's leadership programme 'Insight into Leadership'. Other students take part in internships that support vocational learning. The academy offers good careers information and advice for its students, including a university application writing day and curriculum vitae clinics, to prepare them for full time employment or work based training.
- The sixth form leadership closely monitors students' achievement and progress. Teachers ensure that barriers to learning are addressed in a timely fashion. This means that students make good progress, especially those on vocational courses. This has resulted in good teaching and an increase in attainment in Year 13. Results for 2014 improved for the third year in succession.
- The most able students achieve very well in the sixth form. Rates of progress from their starting points are significantly above average in both academic and vocational courses. Results over the past three years show that attainment at A level has risen sharply and, in 2014, nearly a half of students gained the highest grades. This was also the case at AS level and BTEC where students also achieved well.

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	135651
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	453686

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	478
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	68
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Chudleigh
Headteacher	Trenica King
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2013
Telephone number	01376 515756
Fax number	01376 502194
Email address	contactus@newrickstonesacademy.org

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