

# The Ramsey Academy, Halstead

Colne Road, Halstead, CO9 2HR

**Inspection dates** 4–5 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The new headteacher has an astute understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. He has raised teachers' expectations of students' achievement and has improved the quality of teaching and students' behaviour.
- All leaders and managers, including governors, have high ambitions for the students. They have made sure every student has the opportunity to achieve as well as they can.
- Inspection evidence indicates that students achieve well. Students across year groups make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. The academy's accurate tracking system, and the effective support it provides for individual students, have led to rapidly improving progress by disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Teaching is improving and is, for the most part, consistently good.
- Additional adults are highly effective in supporting students' learning, both in lessons and in small groups.
- Behaviour around the academy is good. Students respect one another and adults. They have a positive attitude towards their learning and are proud to be part of the academy.
- The academy provides a safe environment for students. Students say they feel very safe.
- Governors rigorously monitor the work of the academy and hold senior and middle leaders to account. They are actively involved in steps to improve it further.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Marking is not always effective as not all teachers give students clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Teachers do not always employ the kinds of probing questions that would make students think really deeply about their learning and thereby make rapid progress.
- Sometimes progress is slower than it could be, particularly in mathematics. This is because the work set for students is too easy and lacks challenge. This limits students' progress, including that of the most able.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 29 lessons to observe learning. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors for three of these observations. Inspectors also looked at work in students' books and in lessons, and conducted five work scrutinies to look at progress across a range of subjects.
- Inspectors observed one reading support session and visited two tutor periods.
- Inspectors visited two house assemblies.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including the academy's analysis of its own work and its improvement plan, information on students' academic progress, and documents relating to the quality of teaching, behaviour, and attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors talked to three groups of students and held informal discussions with students at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors took account of the 31 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the academy's own parental surveys.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, four members of the local governing body, senior leaders, heads of subject faculties and the executive headteacher. The lead inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority, which funds specific projects within the academy.
- The inspectors received and considered the view of the 46 staff that completed questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Caroline Parry, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Nicola Hood

Additional Inspector

Anthony Felsenstein

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Ramsey Academy opened in September, 2013. It is sponsored by the North Essex Multi-Academy Trust (NEMAT).
- The Ramsey Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for support through the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Most students are White British.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average.
- At the time of the inspection, the academy offered alternative educational provision for six students in Year 11, who attend The College at Braintree for one day a week. The students study one of the following courses: City and Guilds in construction skills, City and Guilds introduction to hair and beauty skills and the Institute of the Motor Industry award in vehicle maintenance.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- In 2014 a small number of students were entered for two different GCSE mathematics courses.
- The current headteacher took up post in September, 2014.
- The academy trust provides support for the academy via an executive headteacher who supports and evaluates the work of senior leaders. Governors of the academy work in partnership with the board of trustees and two are members of this board.

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

- Improve teaching so that more is outstanding and leads to even better achievement, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring all teachers consistently:
  - provide all students with appropriately challenging activities that rapidly improve their progress, particularly in the case of the most able
  - ask questions that make students think hard about what they are learning in order to deepen their knowledge and understanding
  - provide students with clear guidance on how to improve their work, and check that they act on it.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- At the time of this inspection the new headteacher had been in post for two and a half terms. In this time he has quickly gained the confidence of academy staff. All those who responded to the staff questionnaire said they thought the academy was well led and managed, a view also held by most parents. All staff said they are proud to be a member of staff at the academy.
- The headteacher has evaluated the work within the academy perceptively and has built upon its many strengths in order to improve achievement. For example, the academy now regularly checks the progress of all students in different year groups rather than just their attainment at the end of Key Stage 4. This enables the academy to identify students who are falling behind with their work much earlier and to provide support quickly in order to help them catch-up. This is ensuring much greater equality of opportunity for all.
- The headteacher has raised expectations in relation to students' behaviour, and teaching. Students have responded well and speak positively about the improvements in behaviour and teaching.
- The leadership of teaching is highly effective. Leaders rigorously track and monitor the quality of teaching using a variety of information, including students' progress, to inform their judgements of teachers' effectiveness. Where they deem teaching to be less than good, they provide additional support through coaching and training so that these teachers meet the required expectation. As a result almost all teaching is now at least good.
- Arrangements for the management of teachers' performance are thorough. Leaders ensure that pay rises are always linked to evidence of teachers' effectiveness and their impact on their students' achievement.
- The effectiveness of middle leaders has been enhanced this year. Their role has been extended and they are now responsible for monitoring the standards of teaching and achievement across their faculty area. Inspectors saw evidence of rigorous monitoring and effective action by subject leaders that was improving both progress and teaching. They, in their turn, are held to account by senior leaders and governors.
- Leaders' close tracking of the achievement of disabled students and those who have a special educational need has resulted in improved progress for these students. They benefit from well-targeted support within the classroom and the effective use of small group teaching outside. The academy has arranged good support for a small number of students in Year 7, who are taught English, mathematics, science and humanities subjects in a small group. This is successfully building their confidence as learners as well as enabling them to make good progress in these subjects.
- Academy leaders monitor the progress, attendance and behaviour of students in alternative education placements carefully. Regular reports and contact between these establishments and the academy ensure that leaders can deal swiftly with any issues that arise.
- The additional funding for those students supported by the pupil premium grant is used well to: employ additional staff so that students can be taught in smaller classes; provide one to one tuition; ensure disadvantaged students have the same access to curriculum trips as other students; and provide help with the cost of materials that disadvantaged students require for their learning. Through its effective mentoring and small group teaching, the academy provides students with strong emotional support, which helps them to overcome barriers that may be inhibiting their progress.
- The academy offers a broad and balanced curriculum. All students have the opportunity to study a range of humanities, languages, technological and creative subjects, in addition to mathematics, English and science in Key Stage 4. Senior leaders have recently undertaken a curriculum review and have identified that changes are required in order to ensure the most able students are appropriately challenged both by the range of courses they study and by the teaching they receive in them.

- Students take full advantage of the opportunity to take part in a wide range of after-school and lunch time activities. Attendance in these activities is high. There are good opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills through membership of the house council and the anti-bullying groups, and to become prefects. The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. It places great emphasis on encouraging students to acquire the key values the academy stands for, such as tolerance, compassion and understanding, and which it believes underpin the British way of life. Students participate in a wide range of activities within the community. As a result, students are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Although the academy is sponsor led it maintains strong links with the local authority. The headteacher uses the authority, together with the executive headteacher from the trust, to validate the academy's self-evaluation. The local authority has provided funding for aspects of the academy's work, for example in a current curriculum project with local primary schools.
- All students receive independent careers advice in Years 10 and 11. Students in Year 9 are also offered advice prior to choosing their Key Stage 4 subjects. Students told inspectors they found this advice both informative and useful. In 2014 all students who left the academy progressed to further education or training.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy's work. Academy leaders, including governors, are committed to securing equality of opportunity for all the students. They ensure that there is no discrimination and that students feel safe and confident. They have identified that there is still work to do to secure outstanding achievement for all groups of students before leadership and management can be outstanding.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have a wide range of skills and use these to monitor and evaluate various aspects of the academy's performance. They are highly effective in their monitoring of achievement, the quality of teaching and behaviour. They do this via the reports they receive from the headteacher, meetings with leaders and managers, their involvement in achievement reviews and visits to the school.
  - The governors are actively involved in discussions with senior leaders about future developments and regularly evaluate the impact of their own work on academy improvement.
  - Governors are well trained in a variety of relevant areas so they understand student progress data and know how students in the academy are performing compared with other students nationally. They ensure that additional funding is used appropriately and is having an impact on the progress of disadvantaged students.
  - Governors are well aware of, and fully support, the actions leaders have taken to improve teaching. Members of the governing body take part in discussions relating to staff pay awards and ensure that pay rises are only awarded to staff who meet their targets.

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

**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are attentive in lessons and are keen to learn. They move calmly around the building. They are polite to one another, hold doors open for each other and adults and say 'thank you' to each other and to adults and visitors.
- At break and lunchtime students mix well together. They are respectful of one another and told inspectors that behaviour in the academy has improved. Year 7 students said that older students had made them feel welcome and supported them when they joined the academy. A group of Year 9 students said that behaviour has improved since they joined the academy and they can now learn much more effectively in lessons than was the case last year.

- Students have a positive attitude towards their learning. They are punctual to lessons and arrive with the correct equipment. Work in exercise books is well presented and students take a pride in their work.
- When teachers set work that is engaging and challenges students' thinking, students show a real enthusiasm for their learning. In almost all lessons they are focused on their work. Inspectors observed a small amount of off-task behaviour in lessons but, when checked, the students responded quickly to the teacher's instruction to concentrate on their work. Academy records show that lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Students confirmed this when speaking to inspectors.
- The behaviour of the students at the alternative placement is good. They enjoy attending college and their attendance is good.
- The vast majority of parents and staff feel that behaviour in the academy is good.

### Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students told inspectors that they feel safe. One group said they feel safe in the academy because 'there is no one in the academy that makes it unsafe. No one can come in, bullying is rare and there are no areas we wouldn't go to.'
- Procedures for ensuring students' safety and well-being meet the current requirements. Staff check the identity of visitors to the academy carefully and they are provided with information on safeguarding.
- Parents and staff unanimously agree that the academy is a safe environment.
- Students are taught how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including the safe use of technology, through the assemblies, information technology and personal development lessons.
- Students say that bullying of any kind, including homophobic bullying, and racism are rare. However, should it occur, they know who to go to and have confidence that staff will deal with any concerns they might have. Students told inspectors that staff in the house offices were 'really nice and listen to you if you have a problem.'
- The academy leaders ensure that the Year 11 students who attend the alternative education placement are safe. They transport the students to college to ensure they arrive and return safely. Leaders have ensured that the appropriate health and safety checks are in place for the students and that the staff teaching courses off-site have been properly vetted.
- The attendance of students is now in line with other schools nationally. There are rigorous procedures in place to follow up absence. The impact of this can be seen in the decline in the proportion of students who are persistently absent from the academy.

### The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good overall, and is improving. This ensures students make good progress across a range of subjects throughout the academy.
- Teachers have established an effective climate for learning, where students have positive attitudes to their work in almost all classes and subjects. The great majority of students are interested and fully engaged in their learning. When teaching is most effective, students are given work that is demanding and that makes them think carefully about how to find the correct answer. . For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson students were engrossed in finding different methods to work out how long it would take for a Scalextric car to travel around the track. However, teachers in mathematics sometimes allow students, including the most able, to work on tasks that are too easy for them.
- Additional adults, known in the academy as co-educators, provide good support for students, especially those who are disabled or who have an identified special educational need. They encourage these

students to try to think hard and to work out solutions to problems for themselves before seeking help. Inspectors saw examples of this very effective support in mathematics, drama and physical education lessons.

- Reading and writing are taught effectively. The curriculum includes weekly 'drop everything and read sessions' where students read for pleasure... Students read in lessons and have the opportunity to write at length in a variety of subjects. The effective use of basic arithmetic sessions in morning tutorials helps develop students' skills and confidence. Students have the opportunity to use these skills in a range of subjects.
- Teachers have positive relationships with their students and support them well in their learning. As a result, students have the confidence to attempt the work provided for them. Teachers monitor their work carefully to check they are making progress and provide support for any who are falling behind.
- The majority of teachers use questioning skilfully so that students can explain their thinking and extend their answers. In the minority of lessons where questioning is not sufficiently probing and does not always extend students' thinking sufficiently, they are not making the rapid progress seen elsewhere.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and inspectors saw some good examples where students were given detailed information on how to improve their work. They made sure that students made the necessary corrections and, as a result, these students made good progress. However, the marking in some classes and subjects is not as clear and helpful as it is in the best practice, and not all teachers ensure students act on the advice they have been given.

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Typically students enter the academy with attainment that is below average for their age. School data and work in students' books show that, while in the academy, they make good progress and achieve well. Students make particularly strong progress in English. Progress in mathematics is rapidly improving.
- Since converting to an academy, achievement has improved strongly. In 2014, 60% of Year 11 students achieved five or more good GCSE grades including mathematics and English, when taking into account their best entries.
- This year the headteacher has shifted the focus of the academy's strategy for improvement so that teachers pay more attention to the progress students make in their different year groups, rather than merely focusing upon GCSE outcomes at the end of Year 11. As a result teachers are providing better support for all groups of students as they move through the academy, and academy data and inspectors' own observations confirm that their achievement is improving. In particular, the progress gap between mathematics and English, seen in recent years, is narrowing.
- In 2014, GCSE attainment in subjects other than English and mathematics was broadly in line with that seen nationally. Information provided by the academy, and confirmed by inspection evidence, indicates that the current Year 11 students are on track to achieve better results this summer.
- As a result of the well-targeted support they receive, the progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs has improved this year. They are now making good progress from their individual starting points.
- Teachers now track meticulously the progress of disadvantaged students and use targeted interventions, such as one-to-one support, mentoring and small group teaching, to improve the achievement of these students. Consequently, their progress is rapidly improving, especially in Key Stage 3.
- In 2014, the difference in the attainment between disadvantaged students and other students both nationally and in the academy was approximately one and a quarter grades in English. In mathematics the gap was one and a quarter grades when compared to all students nationally and one and a third when compared to other students within the academy. Attainment data for the current Year 11 students

indicates that the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers has reduced to a quarter of a grade in mathematics and three quarters of a grade in English. Work in their books confirms that disadvantaged students are making faster progress, this year, and that they are closing the gaps in attainment with other students in the academy.

- The progress of students who attend The College at Braintree is good. All students are on track to gain their vocational qualification, mathematics and English GCSE in line with their target grade. In 2014 all of the students on these courses went on to further education or training.
- The academy makes good use of the 'catch up funding' to support students who enter the academy with below expected levels in reading and writing. These students quickly catch up with their school peers and inspectors saw evidence of students reading proficiently and writing extensively.
- The progress of the most able students is good in English. In 2014, the proportions making expected progress and more than expected progress were just above average. In mathematics, progress was below average because teaching failed to challenge the students sufficiently. However, as a result of improved teaching, the most able students across the academy are now making better progress in mathematics and, increasingly, are progressing as fast as they do in English. Their progress in other subjects is also now good.
- In 2014 the academy entered a group of Year 11 students for a modular course in mathematics. When academy leaders reviewed the results, it was evident that the students entered for the more conventional linear examination had achieved higher grades. The academy now only enters students for courses in mathematics that are based on a single final assessment, so that students sit only one examination.



## 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>	139248
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	450199

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	548
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Elizabeth Ward
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rob James
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26-17 June, 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01787 472481
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