

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Peter Hales  
Headteacher  
The Ridge Academy  
Clyde Crescent  
Whaddon  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire  
GL52 5QH

Dear Mr Hales

### **Short inspection of The Ridge Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2017 with Deirdre Fitzpatrick, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in July 2013.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, the governors and leaders from the multi-academy trust demonstrate an ambition and commitment to improve the school further. You have been appointed as headteacher since the previous inspection. You continually reflect on and analyse what is working well and what needs to be improved. You readily accept the ongoing guidance and support given to you by the trust's leaders. As a result, the school is securely on a journey to continue to improve and build the leadership capacity further.

Staff provide the care and support pupils need to be able to learn and achieve. They build effective relationships with their pupils. Some pupils have missed part of their education and arrive at the school feeling vulnerable and insecure. You and your staff provide a nurturing learning environment, building pupils' confidence and self-esteem over time. Consequently, they feel valued and learn to trust the adults who look after them. Pupils' attitudes to learning improve as they settle at the school and experience success in their learning and personal development.

Since the previous inspection, you have focused on building the capacity of the leadership team so that they have a greater impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. With the support of leaders from the trust, you have worked with your leaders and staff to develop more effective systems to assess and record pupils' learning and achievement. As a result, staff have a greater

knowledge of pupils' achievement and the progress they make. Teachers and teaching assistants work together effectively to provide the support pupils need. This work is helping pupils to understand and manage their emotions and anxious behaviours more successfully. This enables them to make good progress from their starting points in a range of subjects across the curriculum and in their personal development.

The youngest pupils start at the school with significant gaps in their learning and take time to settle. In order to meet their social, emotional and academic needs, you have established a focus on learning through play. Teaching staff encourage pupils to play together, learn to share, take turns and manage their frustrations when upset. In addition, you are developing your outdoor learning curriculum to support pupils further. As a result, pupils learn to build their early literacy and numeracy skills. They experience success and make friends with their peers, which helps them to feel more secure and ready to learn.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leaders ensure that the staff understand the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and implement them effectively. Staff receive the training they need to carry out their roles and responsibilities successfully. This includes training to identify and act on signs of risk or harm. In addition, staff are trained to recognise the dangers of radicalisation or extremism. Governors check that the single central record is maintained accurately. They demonstrate a determination to ensure that the culture of safeguarding is strong and take every opportunity to improve their procedures further.

Staff work very closely with families to provide strong support to help them manage their child's transition into the school. Parents praise the work of the school, and in particular the care provided by the family support team. This work helps pupils to settle and deal with the challenges and frustrations they may face in their lives and at school. Consequently, pupils say they feel safe at school. They say staff listen to them. Responses to the pupil questionnaire confirmed that they would recommend the school to a friend. In discussions at break, pupils described the importance of not talking to strangers on the internet. Attendance is rising across the school. Most pupils now attend regularly, which represents a significant achievement when compared to their attendance at previous schools.

Staff ensure that pupils are supervised at the beginning and end of the school day. Leaders check pupils' safety vigilantly as taxis arrive and leave the school site. In addition, visitors sign in according to the school's policy so that leaders know who is on the school premises. The governor responsible for safeguarding visits the school regularly to check that the school's policies and procedures are fit for purpose and that records are detailed.

## Inspection findings

- We agreed the key lines of enquiry at the start of the inspection to check that the school remains good. Firstly, we evaluated how well leaders and governors have improved the quality of education and the school's performance since the previous inspection. You and your leadership team are new in post since the previous inspection. However, you have worked closely with leaders from the trust to develop your knowledge, skills and leadership styles to support the school's journey of continued improvement. The school's capacity to improve further is good.
- You continually reflect on the school's strengths and identify areas for further improvement. For example, you are determined to use the expertise of your staff and those in local schools to provide opportunities for teachers to develop the quality of their teaching. You have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve and focus on providing support to staff to plan and deliver effective learning in their lessons. Staff share your high expectations. They are equally determined that pupils learn to manage their feelings and behaviours so that they achieve well. Parents say that staff 'know their children very well'. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points, particularly in mathematics and reading. Work in the books of the most able pupils confirms that they make more rapid progress once they are settled and feel secure.
- We evaluated the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the impact this has on pupils' progress. Following your appointment as headteacher, you identified the need to establish an accurate assessment of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, in relation to their academic achievement and personal development. Teachers now have a good understanding of pupils' starting points. This is particularly important as pupils arrive at the school at different times of the year. Most do not join the school in the early years and have significant gaps in their learning. Teachers use the information they keep to plan work which meets the individual needs of each pupil. For example, the youngest pupils learn their initial sounds and begin to read and spell simple words. Work in pupils' books across the school confirms that they take pride in their work. The school's data and work in pupils' books show that pupils, and particularly the most able pupils, make steady progress over time. Progress in writing is slower than in reading. However, teachers work tirelessly with pupils to overcome their reluctance to writing. As a result, pupils' confidence builds and they make more rapid progress.
- Next, we analysed how well the curriculum is planned to take account of the needs of pupils. In particular, we focused on the effectiveness of subject leaders in raising standards in their subjects. Since taking up your appointment, you have reviewed the design and delivery of the curriculum. As a result, staff teach a range of subjects through topics such as 'Egypt' and 'India'. These topics are chosen to interest and motivate pupils to learn successfully. Visits to places of interest such as the Slimbridge Wetland Centre support pupils effectively to engage in learning. To further support the academic curriculum, pupils benefit from therapy support in art, music and drama to develop their emotional and social development. This work helps pupils learn to manage their emotions more

successfully.

- Subject leaders are new to their roles. At present, these leaders have not had sufficient training to enable them to monitor standards in their subjects effectively. In addition, they have not yet had opportunities to check that pupils' work is of a consistently high standard across a range of subjects and classes. You have plans in place to develop the capacity of these leaders further.
- Finally, we discussed the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements. In particular, we evaluated the school's response to the high rates of exclusions and number of incidents involving physical intervention recorded in previous years. Since taking up your appointment, you have taken robust action to decrease the frequency of incidents. You have ensured that staff have received appropriate training to handle pupils safely, when necessary. However, you have also worked with your staff to ensure that they understand the triggers and reasons behind pupils' anxieties and frustrations. As a result, records show that the number of incidents has reduced this year. Exclusions are rare. Nonetheless, you agree that pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to provide their views following an incident. You have plans in place to address this.
- Leaders from the Academies Enterprise Trust provide strong support for the school on its improvement journey. They visit the school regularly and challenge school leaders for further improvement, such as in pupils' outcomes. In particular, they have provided effective support for you to develop the rigour and impact of your work. As a result, the school has the capacity to continue to improve.
- Governors visit the school regularly to see for themselves the difference leaders' actions are making to improve the school. Minutes of meetings confirm that they ask challenging questions to check the progress of pupils and in particular the progress of groups. For example, they know that disadvantaged pupils make better progress than their peers. Their work is having a positive impact in providing both support for staff but also the challenge required for further improvement.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders, including subject leaders, further embed the school's assessment systems to ensure that information is used to plan pupils' learning to meet their needs effectively
- subject leaders develop their role further so that they take greater responsibility for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subjects
- pupils are given the opportunity to provide their views following incidents involving physical intervention.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other school leaders, and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also met with leaders from the Academies Enterprise Trust. Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the day. In addition, the lead inspector spoke with parents at the start of the school day and met with a group of parents during the inspection. Inspectors visited lessons, accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, to observe pupils' learning. In addition, inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and discussed their achievements with the deputy headteacher. They took account of two responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, text messages from parents, 10 responses from pupils and 19 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information about the achievement and outcomes of pupils, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.