

New Rickstones Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135651
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	364395
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
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	758
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Cruickshank
Headteacher	Debbie Bull
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Conrad Road Witham CM8 2SD
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 33 lessons in the main school and three in the sixth form, taught by 33 teachers. They held meetings with the Executive Principal and headteacher, senior and middle managers, the governing board including the chair and the chief executive of the Academies Enterprise Trust, and four groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including questionnaires from 63 parents and 386 from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The team checked whether the academy could clearly illustrate that the underachievement of some students in 2010 has been fully addressed and that students in all year groups and key stages are currently achieving what they are capable of, based on their starting points.
- The robustness of assessment and monitoring procedures used by teachers and managers to ensure that all students make sufficient progress was analysed.
- Inspectors investigated whether the curriculum is suitably matched to students' interests and abilities and meets the needs of those not suited to GCSE studies.
- The team analysed the quality of support and challenge provided for middle managers and the extent to which they are held to account by senior leaders for the standards achieved in their subjects
- The quality of provision in sixth form and its impact on outcomes for students was assessed.

Information about the school

The New Rickstones Academy opened on the site of the predecessor school in September 2008. The Academy is smaller than average. Plans are in place to replace the old buildings with new accommodation, built on the same site, by 2012. It is part of a federation with three other academies in the area, all sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The majority of students are White British; the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national average. A higher-than-average percentage of students has special educational needs and/or disabilities. Thirty students have a statement of special educational needs. A new headteacher has been in post full-time since September 2010. A new Executive Principal oversees the academy on behalf of the Academies Enterprise Trust. A new Chair of the Governing Board was appointed in 2011. The chief executive of the Academies Enterprise Trust and the Executive Principal have joined the board. The academy holds the Healthy Schools status, and has International schools and IIP awards. It specialises in mathematics and the arts.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Rickstones Academy provides its students with a satisfactory education. It provides a safe, friendly environment in which to learn. Procedures for safeguarding students are good. Students attend well and enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities. Older students recognise the changes that have taken place during the school's transition into an academy and speak positively about the impact of the new headteacher. They say behaviour is much better and that they feel they are on-track to achieve the targets set for them in this year's examinations.

The percentage of students attaining five or more higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, has risen year on year to 40%. However, fewer students achieved five higher grades overall in 2010 compared with the previous year. This was due to a small but significant minority of Year 11 students, who were not suited to GCSE studies, underachieving because they were not closely monitored. In addition, far fewer students attained at least a grade C in science and in information and communication technology (ICT) than expected. This prompted governors and sponsors to take decisive action to strengthen the leadership of the academy and implement immediate plans for improvement. The impact of these actions and the sustained efforts of staff are evident in improved outcomes this year; although attainment remains low, the learning and progress of all students, including those that have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are improving securely and quickly and the vast majority of them are achieving satisfactorily.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Inspectors noted a residue of inadequate teaching but this is being addressed by the headteacher. The proportion of good teaching is rising but it is not high enough to accelerate students' progress in all subjects. The expectations of some teachers are too low. Not all of them plan a range of activities to suit students of different abilities. Inspectors noted very few opportunities for students to use computers in lessons. Marking of students' books does not address the variable quality of their work, which is often careless and poorly presented. Younger students have daily opportunities to develop their reading skills but their use of language and other basic skills is not readily promoted in other subjects.

Senior leaders have rightly prioritised the improved use of assessment data to improve the monitoring of all groups of students and raise achievement throughout the academy. Regular staff training and additional consultancy support are enabling teachers and managers to gain an improved understanding of data. More of them are using this information to monitor the progress of students in Year 11 much more closely, and to target support towards students who need it most including those on the borderline of attaining at least five or more C grades. These procedures are working and are beginning to permeate their way into all year groups, but are less well established in all core subjects

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in Key Stage 3. A few teachers and subject leaders have not yet developed a firm grasp of how this information can be used to bolster students' progress and improve results.

A satisfactory curriculum meets the needs of most learners. The alternative arrangements made for a small minority of students in 2010 did not work. These students received a good level of care but the quality of support and academic guidance was insufficient. This has been replaced by the 'springboard' centre, which is helping students with challenging behaviour, and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, to make satisfactory progress and integrate fully into school life. Attendance is above average because it is monitored effectively. The deployment of 'advocates' to manage students' day-to-day behaviour is leading to improvements and this was confirmed in discussions between inspectors and students.

The headteacher is ensuring that senior leaders are managed much more rigorously in order to drive further improvements. Lesson monitoring has improved the quality of teaching but is not sufficiently focused on how well students are learning. There are higher expectations of middle leaders but results in different subjects are not improving at similar rates. Science and ICT have temporary subject leaders in place. Specialist subjects help to foster community links but make a limited contribution to school improvement. Support from the Executive Principal is valued by the headteacher. His presence and that of the Chief Executive of the Academies Enterprise Trust on the governing board, alongside a new Chair of the Governing Board, is adding further to the capacity to generate improvements, which is satisfactory. Leaders acknowledge that not enough has been done yet to raise achievement, strengthen links with the local community and foster good relations with parents and carers. Value for money is satisfactory.

About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement throughout the academy so that standards are much closer to national averages by:
 - completing accurate assessments of students' attainment in all core subjects throughout Key Stage 3
 - building on these foundations through intensive monitoring of individual students' progress in Years 10 and 11 and intervening early to support those at risk of not attaining what they are capable of in all subjects
 - planning regular opportunities in all lessons to reinforce and test students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is never less than satisfactory and is increasingly good or better in most subjects by:
 - using assessment information to plan interesting and enjoyable activities that stimulate and challenge the most able and help less-able students to succeed
 - increasing the use of computers to aid students' learning
 - shifting the focus of lesson observations from what teachers are doing to what students are learning

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- raising teachers' expectations of students to instil in them pride in the quality of their presentation, and rewarding them for sustained effort and good quality work.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - strengthening the leadership of science and ICT and providing further challenge for leaders of subjects which are not improving quickly enough
 - ensuring that all teachers and managers develop a full understanding of assessment data and its use in raising students' achievement
 - using the academy's specialist subjects to engage fully with the local community and engender the full support of parents and carers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are below national averages, but based on the below-average starting points of most students, this represents satisfactory progress. Assessments made in English are more robust than in mathematics and science which show that standards declined in 2010. Attainment in ICT is persistently low and in most lessons inspectors noted that students had few opportunities to use computers. The rapid improvements to the standards achieved by students at the end of key Stage 4 in 2009 were not matched in 2010. This year, the academy can point to a range of improved outcomes to illustrate better achievement in core subjects. Current assessment data indicates that the academy is on track to meet or exceed its targets this year.

In lessons, inspectors found that students generally made satisfactory progress because they are interested in what they are doing, behave well and apply themselves to their work. Learning is restricted when teachers do not provide tasks for students of different abilities, so work is either too easy or too difficult for them. Students are not encouraged to improve the presentation of their work. Closer monitoring of students that have special educational needs and/or disabilities and improved communication with their parents and carers is ensuring that they achieve similar to other students.

The academy's own records show that a small minority of students misbehave but teachers and a team 'advocates' are helping to modify their behaviour and retain them in learning. Suitable sanctions are in place but rewards for good behaviour are less apparent. Students lead healthy, active lifestyles. Weekly personal, social and health education lessons promote their well-being but some students would like more advice about their personal health. They make a satisfactory contribution to the academy and the wider community by volunteering as peer mentors, councillors and junior sports leaders. Rising attendance and low persistent absence rates help to secure their economic well-being but not all students are as punctual as they could be. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural education is satisfactory; they are sociable and respond well to artistic, sporting and cultural opportunities.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Positive relations, specialist subject knowledge and opportunities for students to learn by themselves and in small groups provide the foundations of effective lessons. Teachers capture students' interest and enthusiasm, maintain the pace of learning and encourage them to evaluate their own work and that of others. However, in some lessons their progress is restricted because students of different abilities end up doing the same tasks regardless of their ability. Students are not encouraged to take pride in their work; there are no common rules for presentation and marking does not challenge poor quality work.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is enhanced by theme-days and after-school clubs. Few students regularly use ICT in lessons but plans are in place to develop this further once the academy moves to its new facilities later this year. A range of programmes in Key Stage 3 increase opportunities to promote students' literacy and numeracy skills but their impact is not fully reflected in outcomes at the end of Year 9. Students appreciate the range of courses offered in Key Stage 4. An increasing selection of vocational courses, including in its specialist areas of music and the performing arts, are popular and results are consistently high. The care and support for the majority of students is satisfactory. Students appreciate the guidance they receive when choosing their options and preparing for further study or the work-place. A heightened level of guidance and support is in place to ensure that students not suited to GCSE studies make sufficient progress and attain suitable qualifications.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has shared her vision for the academy and enlisted the commitment and support of the vast majority of staff. Her actions have been instrumental in tackling the underachievement noted last year and in ensuring that students are currently achieving satisfactorily. Staff now have pertinent information about the progress and well-being of all groups of students and are able to target additional support to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and discrimination is avoided. Senior and middle leaders are held more accountable and have been set challenging targets to raise achievement throughout the academy. Science and ICT are being managed in the short-term by assistant vice-principals but do not have permanent subject leaders to secure and sustain further improvements. An intensive programme of lesson monitoring has generated better quality teaching and provided senior leaders with a clear picture of where the strengths and weaknesses lie.

Governance is satisfactory. It is very effective in ensuring the strategic development of the academy. It has been less effective in challenging senior leaders and avoiding the under-achievement of some students last year. A new Chair of the Governing Board and the Executive Principal are committed to improving this and to developing further partnerships with the other academy in the town. The governing board meets all of its statutory duties, including promoting community cohesion which is satisfactory. Safeguarding procedures are rigorously monitored and good quality training for staff and governors is provided.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Strengthened leadership of the sixth form has led to improvements in provision which are beginning to have a positive impact upon students' achievement. In 2010, the progress made by students who completed A-level courses was good but a significant proportion of students did not continue into Year 13 after examinations in Year 12, so that overall progress is satisfactory. Attainment is low but improving and this year's results are on course to be close to national averages. Students respond well to some good, but mainly satisfactory teaching. Relations between staff and students are positive. At times, students are not given enough responsibility to research their work or to become more mature and independent learners. They appreciate the range of courses available, both at the academy and in partnership with the other academy in the town. Students make a positive contribution to the school and the wider community by collecting for charity and supporting younger students. They feel safe and enjoy the social aspects of academy life. They feel that more could be done to support them with their personal health and how to cope with stress, especially during examination and coursework deadlines. Attendance is lower in the sixth form than other years. Students receive improved advice about making choices before they enter the sixth form and about the next steps in their education or employment.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The number of questionnaires returned by parents and carers was very low, illustrating that the academy does not yet do enough to engage their full support. The large majority of them feel that their child enjoys school, is making enough progress and is well prepared for the future. A small minority would like more help to support their child's learning and want more regular contact with staff. A minority of parents also feel that the academy does not deal effectively with students' unacceptable behaviour but inspectors found no evidence to support this. Recent developments, particularly the use of advocates, are having a positive impact on improving behaviour. A couple of parents commented that some challenging students were taken out of school during the two day inspection. On investigation, inspectors found that eight students were attending another local academy to learn life-skills and to prepare them for the world of work. This event was programmed prior to the announcement of the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at New Rickstones Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 63 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 758 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	22	36	57	8	13	4	6
The school keeps my child safe	11	17	44	70	5	8	2	3
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	16	34	54	14	22	3	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	17	34	54	15	24	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	7	11	35	56	14	22	4	6
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	10	27	43	24	38	3	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	8	35	56	17	27	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	8	13	34	54	12	19	3	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	4	6	39	62	11	17	3	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	8	32	51	17	27	4	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	8	32	51	15	24	4	6
The school is led and managed effectively	10	16	32	51	13	21	3	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	16	36	57	8	13	4	6

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of New Rickstones Academy, Witham, CM8 2SD

Earlier this week, we visited your academy and found that it provides you with a satisfactory education. Thank you for engaging with us, we found you to be good ambassadors for the academy. We also met with your senior teachers, members of the board of governors and read questionnaires from you and some of your parents or carers.

We were pleased to see that you enjoy the academy and attend well. You told us it is a friendly place to be, that you are kept safe and are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. We noted that an increasing number of students achieve five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, but last year some students under-achieved because staff did not regularly check to see how they were doing. We also found that you do not pay enough attention to presenting your work neatly, accurately and making sure it is finished. These are essential skills needed for further study or the work-place.

We have asked your senior leaders to make the following improvements.

Regularly check how well you are progressing in both Key Stages, and offer support to those of you at risk of not achieving your targets, and providing regular opportunities in all lessons to promote your literacy and numeracy skills.

Ask teachers to plan interesting, challenging and enjoyable activities that help you to succeed, and let you use computers in lessons more often.

Check the quality of your written work, insist on high standards of presentation and reward you when it is good or when you work hard.

Strengthen the leadership of some subjects and develop the academy's specialisms in mathematics and the arts to build links with the local community.

Your new headteacher is making lots of improvements. You can help her by improving your presentation and by sharing your views with her about other improvements you would like to see.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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