

# Princes Risborough

Merton Road, Princes Risborough, HP27 0DT

## Inspection dates

8–9 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- In the academy's first GCSE examination results in 2012, too many students did not make the progress expected of them over time.
- Although there have been marked improvements this year, there remain shortcomings in some of the teaching, which limits the progress students make.
- Teachers' questioning of students and the tasks set in lessons are not always adapted well enough to match the range of abilities in the class, particularly in offering enough challenge to the more able.
- Teaching assistants do not consistently support the learning of those with specific needs or others in the class to best effect.
- In a small minority of weaker lessons, teachers' expectations for the pace of learning are too low, and students lose interest.
- The much sharper monitoring of strengths and weaknesses of the academy's performance has yet to lead to sufficiently detailed evaluations and plans for further improvement by individual subjects.

### The school has the following strengths:

- Leaders and managers, including governors, have responded with rigour and determination to the need to improve the academy's performance. Accountability for students' progress has strengthened significantly at all levels.
- Teaching has improved, and markedly so in English. Students' attainment and progress have strengthened as a consequence during the current academic year.
- A high priority is given to keeping pupils safe and promoting their well-being. The care, guidance and support provided for students are highly regarded by students, parents, carers and the local community.
- Most pupils behave well, and are able to develop a range of interests through the school's enrichment programme.
- The good sixth form provides students with effective support for their academic progress and personal development.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 teachers in 37 lessons. They carried out some joint observations with members of the academy's senior team. Observations of other aspects of the academy's work were also made, including those of activities in the 'Enrichment Period' which occurs for an hour on a Wednesday.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, governors and school staff, including senior and middle leaders. A discussion was also held with the head of the Wycombe Pupil Referral Unit, which works in partnership with the academy to support students who are disaffected or vulnerable to exclusion. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Questionnaire returns from 57 staff were analysed.
- Inspectors took account of 155 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire in carrying out the inspection, along with written and oral comments from a small number of parents and carers. Evidence from the academy's own survey of parents and carers was also considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the academy's self-evaluation and development plans, its safeguarding policies and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

## Inspection team

Ian Hodgkinson, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Elizabeth Bull	Additional Inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional Inspector
Roger Pope	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Princes Risborough is an average-sized secondary school. It has a non-selective admissions policy but is in a selective authority, where more-able pupils can choose to go to a grammar school if they pass the 11-plus examination.
- Princes Risborough converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was inspected in October 2009, it was judged to be good.
- The number on roll has increased since the academy opened, and it is oversubscribed for admission into Year 7. Mobility into and out of the academy in each subsequent year group is above average. This 'churn' is due to some students leaving to take places in local grammar schools and to in-year admissions, including of children of locally based service personnel and those who have been unsettled in other local schools.
- The academy incorporates a communications base to support students on the autistic spectrum. This is managed by the school but funded by the local authority.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A small number of students speak English as an additional language.
- A low proportion of students are eligible for support from the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government, for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children of service personnel and children looked after in public care).
- The academy exceeds the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students attend provision off site. Some in Key Stages 3 and 4 attend the Wycombe Pupil Referral Unit for individual support programmes, while in the sixth form a very small number of students travel to partner schools to study science and dance.
- The headteacher had been executive headteacher of Princes Risborough and a partner grammar school in the county for two years until September 2012. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2012.
- Princes Risborough has been a specialist technology school since 2001.

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

- Improve students' rates of progress to match or exceed those seen in schools nationally by:
  - further closing gaps in progress between students known to be eligible for free school meals and others
  - raising teachers' expectations and students' aspirations to ensure that more-able students make more rapid progress
  - securing consistently good or better learning and progress in lessons
  - developing the quality of action planning in subjects to enable departments to identify clear improvement strategies.
- Increase the amount of good or better teaching seen in lessons by ensuring that all teachers:
  - plan tasks which are well matched to students' capabilities, particularly in offering challenging work to more-able students
  - sustain the pace of learning for all students

- question students deeply to develop and extend their thinking and ideas
- make full and effective use of teaching assistants to support students' learning throughout lessons.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students join the academy with attainment that is broadly average, although in most years there are fewer higher attainers than is typical in most schools.
- Attainment in GCSE examinations in 2012 was below average, and represented generally weak progress for students given their starting points. Students who had been at the school from Year 7 did much better on average than those who joined later, but still too many students, particularly though not exclusively in the middle- and higher-ability groups, did not make the progress expected of them. There were wide gaps between the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium and others; overall the difference in average GCSE points score between these groups was slightly wider than the national average. Students for whom English is an additional language made better progress than others. Students did relatively well in the specialist technology subjects.
- Students' attainment and progress have strengthened markedly during the course of this academic year. Students' progress has been tracked more regularly this year, at half-termly rather than termly intervals, allowing leaders to intervene quickly where the achievement of individuals or groups falters. A much sharper focus has been given to ensuring that students in all years reach or exceed targets linked to nationally expected rates of progress.
- Currently, students in Year 11 are on course to attain overall GCSE results at least line with the national average. The academy's performance data and inspection observations show that English has been particularly successful in raising attainment and improving students' progress.
- In the past, early entry for GCSE in mathematics restricted students' progress by not always challenging them to reach the highest grades. Higher expectations this year, however, have resulted in much stronger progress, evident in those GCSE results already achieved in mathematics by more-able students. Gaps between the attainment and progress of students supported by the pupil premium are closing, but more rapidly in English than in mathematics.
- Students arrive punctually to lessons and ready to learn. They have a good capacity for independent learning and for working collaboratively in solving problems. Students make rapid progress when they have a clear understanding of the aims and purposes of tasks and what they need to do to improve their knowledge and skills to higher levels; features all evident in outstanding Year 9 lessons seen in English and in art. However, in the minority of lessons where students are unclear about the task, and spend too long listening to the teacher or answering overly simplistic questions, they become disengaged. The quality of learning is therefore variable, and linked in part to a relatively high turnover of temporary or supply teachers which have been required to cover for staff illness or maternity leave in some subjects.
- The academy has comprehensive systems in place to test students' skills on arrival in Year 7 and to put in place programmes to address weaknesses in reading and writing in particular. As a result, students now eligible for support through the government's Year 7 catch-up premium have made good progress in developing their basic literacy. Across the academy and all subjects, a high profile is given to developing students' literacy and language skills, and as a consequence students are confident in articulating their views and ideas. Students have fewer opportunities to develop and apply their numeracy skills across subjects.
- Students with special educational needs, including those in the communications base, receive good and well-managed programmes of out-of-class support for their progress, including through the expertise of a range of external agencies. In class, their progress varies along with their peers, depending on how well tasks have been adapted for them and how effective teaching assistants are in ensuring adequate support while promoting the students' independence and involvement.
- Students join the sixth form with GCSE attainment which is lower than that found in sixth forms nationally. While overall attainment at A level is below average because a minority reach the higher A to B grades, pass rates are in line with those nationally. Across most of the academic and vocational courses offered, including A level, students make generally good progress.

**The quality of teaching****requires improvement**

- There are wide variations in the quality of teaching which mean that students do not learn consistently well in lessons in all subjects. Teaching in the majority of lessons observed was good, with some that was outstanding, but in around a third teaching was less than good. At its weakest, teaching lacked pace and purpose, and students became restless and disengaged. At its best, for example in a number of English and drama lessons, the teacher captured students' imaginations from the start and constantly challenged students of all abilities to deepen and extend their thinking and responses.
- Academy leaders have been successful in driving improvements in a number of key aspects of teaching, and in spreading good practice. Assessment criteria are shared with students and often used effectively by them to assess their own performance and that of others. Teachers' marking is regular and frequently offers helpful comments to show students how to improve: teachers in design and technology are particularly rigorous in ensuring that students systematically respond to teachers' marking by improving their work.
- Teachers consistently plan opportunities to develop students' literacy skills as a means of improving the overall quality of written and oral work.
- Assessment information is, however, not always used well enough to adapt the challenge of the tasks set for students in lessons or to adjust the level of questioning of different groups of students. Too often, more-able students have to complete the same work as others. In some instances teachers talk to the class for long periods and their questioning of students demands only limited or superficial responses.
- In a number of lessons observed, teaching assistants and technicians deployed themselves very effectively to help students to move ahead in their learning. Teaching assistants are, however, sometimes uncertain of the role they should play in supporting individuals or groups in a class, and there are times during some lessons where they make only limited contributions.
- Instances of inadequate teaching were seen during the inspection; these were mostly linked with temporary staffing arrangements set in place to cover long-term staff absence. Students and parents and carers expressed concerns about the impact of frequent changes of teachers in some subjects, and particularly science.
- Teachers offer good support for learning outside the classroom through extra sessions in break or after school. They make wide use of information and communication technology to provide students with homework, sometimes backed up with on-line tutorials.

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

- The academy has a strong ethos for promoting constructive and supportive relationships between students and staff. This is reinforced by many of the structures in place. For example, 'vertical' tutor groups and the mixing of age groups on the enrichment programme promotes the friendships across year groups which are evident in the playground and social areas.
- Most students and their parents and carers are strongly of the opinion that they feel safe in the academy. There is a high regard for the school's pastoral care systems, and especially the accessibility of the mentors and support staff in 'the House', which students feel they can visit 'whenever we have a problem'.
- Persistent bullying is said by students to be rare. It is taken seriously and most feel it is dealt with promptly and effectively. Students are made aware of different forms of bullying and how to take action to prevent it. In response to a perceived need to tackle underlying racial prejudices in the school and wider community, the school has established a 'diversity group' of staff, parents, carers and governors which has initiated actions, including a 'diversity day' in school to promote better cultural awareness.
- Most students have positive attitudes to school and to learning. Attendance has improved to a

broadly average level and rates of persistent absence have declined.

- Students generally behave well in lessons and around the school site. Where teaching is mundane, students' behaviour can become distracted and occasionally disruptive. Students respond well, however, to the academy's systems of rewards and sanctions. Rates of exclusion have fallen to low levels, with marked reductions in exclusions of students known to be eligible for free school meals as a result of more focused support for students and their families.
- The academy works closely with other agencies, including a partner pupil referral unit, to design effective bespoke programmes which avoid exclusion and keep students learning and in education. The progress and well-being of students who go off site for these programmes and other work, such as to study in consortium partner schools in the sixth form, are regularly checked.
- Students are consulted regularly on the quality of the education they receive, and feel that they can make their voices heard on the working of the academy through house- and school-councils and the surveys they complete.

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

- The academy's leadership has taken determined action during the course of the current academic year to address weaknesses in students' progress, evident in recent GCSE results. As result, teaching and students' progress has improved demonstrably.
- Early in the academic year, governors commissioned a detailed external review of academy performance by a team of consultants which has contributed to the design of more thorough systems of evaluation and review of academy performance across all subjects and years. Middle leaders have found the resultant system of year group reviews particularly helpful, particularly in working with senior leaders to hone their skills of evaluating the quality of teaching and students' progress.
- Throughout the academy, targets for students' progress are now clearly related to nationally expected rates, which allow leaders at all levels to take a clear view about how performance compares with that in other schools and to take action where there are shortcomings. Previously, a range of comparative indicators were used, and so the academy's evaluation of its own performance had lacked sharpness and clarity.
- The capacity of the senior team has been strengthened to give a much sharper focus on ensuring that students make at least the progress expected of them. Systems of line management have been markedly strengthened. For example, the deputy headteacher meets regularly with the leaders of English, mathematics and science collectively to review evidence from the increased flow of assessment data and classroom visits. This helps to ensure that school policies are being implemented more consistently and that subjects are increasingly on course to meet their targets. This increasingly sharp monitoring of subject performance has, however, yet to yield detailed evaluations and action plans setting out how subjects will address weaknesses and take forward improvements into the future.
- The academy's system for the management of the performance of teachers has also been strengthened to incorporate clear expectations for students' progress as well as the quality of lessons observed by managers. Weaker teaching is addressed through programmes of coaching and support, and action is taken to remove teachers whose performance fails to improve. School records show and inspection evidence confirms that there have been substantial improvements in the quality of teaching in English since the academy opened. Mathematics teaching has also improved, but there remains some unevenness.
- The support for their professional development and opportunities for sharing good practice are highly regarded by teachers. Responses to the staff questionnaire were highly positive, as were those of parents and carers on Parent View, indicating a very cohesive school community.
- The curriculum is imaginatively planned to develop students' literacy and study skills in Key Stage 3 and to offer a broad range of academic and vocational or applied options across a Key



Stage 4 which begins in Year 9. The much valued 'enrichment period' further allows students to develop a wide range of interests in a host of cultural, artistic, sporting, craft and land-based activities including bee-keeping. Together with activity days focused on aspects of students' personal development, this makes a very positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The curriculum is planned for review in the coming year to determine how it can better accelerate students' progress while retaining these unique features and key strengths.

#### ■ The governance of the school:

Governors have a passionate commitment to the success of the academy. Thoroughly minuted meetings of the well-attended full governing body and its key committees show that governors are well informed about all aspects of performance, and have well-developed systems for finding out more, including through effective link roles with subjects and aspects of the academy's work. While there has been a tendency in the past to seek answers to weaknesses in performance in contextual factors affecting the academy, governors have during the past year been asking increasingly challenging questions of school leaders about the progress of students, including through the findings of an external review of academy performance. Governors have a good balance of skills and take regular training through the local authority. They manage resources well, and have moved the academy into a financial surplus. They play a full role in scrutinising the academy's performance management arrangements, ensuring that teachers only move to upper pay scales where their teaching has been good. The impact of spending of the pupil premium is becoming sharper as school data systems have improved across the year; the school website now includes some early detailed analysis of this aspect of performance. Governors ensure that arrangements for safeguarding the welfare and well-being of students fully meet requirements.



## 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>	137372
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	412745

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>	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>	1,024
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	126
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Marylin Antrobus
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Rowe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01844 345496
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