

New Rickstones Academy

Conrad Road, Witham, Essex CM8 2SD

Inspection dates

16–17 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have brought about significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, pupils attending the school are making good progress and standards are rising quickly.
- Leaders demonstrate an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for development. Staff fully support their drive for improvement.
- Parents and carers are supportive of the improvements leaders have made, and the numbers of pupils attending the school are rising quickly.
- Teaching is good. Teachers' subject knowledge allows them to plan challenging work that supports the learning of pupils of different abilities.
- Subject leaders are effective and receive high-quality professional development. They work closely with senior leaders to drive up the quality of teaching and the curriculum.
- Provision in the sixth form is good and students currently attending make strong progress. This is a result of improvements made to the quality of teaching and curriculum offered.
- Arrangements for supporting disadvantaged pupils are effective and those currently attending the school make good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is good because all leaders and staff have taken effective steps to set and maintain higher expectations. Consequently, there has been a reduction in exclusions.
- Attendance has improved because leaders and staff have taken effective action to reduce persistent absence for all groups of pupils.
- Arrangements to support pupils who join the school at times other than the start of an academic year are effective, and these pupils make strong progress.
- Pupils are proud of their school's values, which make a very positive contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Trust officers and governors work together productively. They successfully steer the direction the school takes and hold leaders to account for improvements.
- In some lessons, teachers do not use assessment information precisely enough to help pupils overcome previous errors. This can slow down learning, especially in mathematics.
- Not all teachers promote the highest standards of written work. Consequently, in some examples of work, including geography, finance and computer science, pupils' written skills are not as thoroughly developed as they are across the wider curriculum.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils reach the highest standards expected for their different ages, by making sure that:
 - all teachers make thorough use of assessment information so that activities support pupils to close any previous gaps in subject knowledge
 - in mathematics, work for pupils with average or lower prior attainment helps them to overcome any misunderstandings about calculation methods, including number rules and multiplication, so that they can tackle problems and applications with full confidence
 - activities in all subjects, including geography, finance and business studies, support pupils to complete written work to the same skilled standard as they do in other subjects, including history and English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- This school is well led. The headteacher acts with clarity and determination. He is ably assisted by his capable senior team and subject leaders. Following the school's previous inspection, there was a decline in teaching quality, pupils' progress and behaviour. There was also a decline in the numbers of pupils attending the school and a large turnover in teaching staff. However, leaders, governors and trust officers have acted decisively to bring about significant improvements to the quality of education. As a result, pupils currently attending the school are well taught, make strong progress and demonstrate good behaviour.
- Staff and governors are united in their work and parents have also demonstrated their approval for leaders' work to improve the school. The numbers of pupils attending the school have increased and it now has a positive reputation for providing a caring and supportive environment.
- Leaders hold accurate views about the school's strengths and remaining areas for development. These are reflected in their strong priorities for pupils' personal development, teaching and the curriculum. Leaders promote strong progress so pupils can reach or exceed the standards expected for their different ages, particularly those with higher and average prior attainment. Improvement activities are well matched to these goals and monitoring arrangements are effective.
- Leaders' development of teaching is a strength. They combine perceptive observations of classroom teaching with analysis of assessment information and workbooks. Their selection of successful staff training and their monitoring of subsequent improvements have secured improvements in teaching. A few examples of inconsistency remain, but the overall improvement in teaching quality has been decisive in a relatively short time.
- Leaders' methods for improving teachers' performance are effective. Performance targets reflect the high expectations of leaders and their improvement goals. Staff approve of the support and training they receive and the balance of work they undertake. Consequently, few have left the school in the last year.
- Pupils' academic targets reflect leaders' high expectations, and are based on the highest national performance standards. Arrangements to check on pupils' progress are timely and accurate and subject leaders ensure that those in danger of falling behind are quickly given the right help so they can catch up.
- Subject leaders are effective. They are provided with high-quality training and support from senior leaders and cooperate with other leaders from schools in the academy trust. As a result, their subject knowledge and ability to drive improvements in teaching are strengths. Some, including those responsible for mathematics, are relatively new to their roles, but they have brought about significant improvements in a short time.
- Leaders' work to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. Their arrangements for the accurate identification and assessment of the pupils are well established, and planning for their care and teaching is effective. Checks on their progress involve the pupils and their parents. As a result, those currently attending the school are making good progress.

- Leaders make effective use of the pupil premium funding. They accurately identify the obstacles faced by pupils. Support plans reflect the same high expectations and targets set for other pupils. Arrangements to check on pupils' progress, attendance and punctuality are effective. As a result of these approaches, the progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is good.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding to support Year 7 pupils whose previous progress in reading and mathematics was slower in primary school. They are quickly identified, accurately assessed and well supported to help them overcome previous difficulties. As a result of this work, pupils in current Year 7 and Year 8 are making strong progress in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum is effective, broad and balanced. Senior leaders have brought about improvements so that pupils' academic achievement and personal development are well supported. Pupils are provided with suitably challenging programmes of study for their different ages and are entered for examinations that reflect their capabilities. One good example is the development of the science curriculum. Although pupils' acquisition of knowledge is effective across the curriculum, the development of written skills is not as secure in some subjects.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' preparation for their life in modern Britain and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a clear understanding of their school's values, which include to, 'make their best better, broaden horizons and lead prosperous lives.' They further demonstrate their citizenship skills in their understanding of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, personal freedoms and respect for differences. Importantly, they are able to recognise and reject extremist ideas.
- Leaders work effectively with local schools and schools across the academy trust to which the school belongs, in order to share expertise and improve the quality of teaching and subject leadership. They use, but are not dependent upon, the advice of the local authority, while also working in a highly productive relationship with the nearby Maltings Academy in order to share practice and drive improvement.

Governance of the school

- Trust officers and governors work together productively in order to set the strategic priorities for the school and hold leaders to account for its performance. They have a valuable range of experience and knowledge of educational leadership. Their attention is focused precisely on the core business of the school and the quality of education provided. They have adjusted their work in order to provide sufficient attention to those areas that have needed most improvement. As a result, their oversight of leaders' work to improve teaching, and pupils' progress and behaviour has been effective in steering the school forward.
- Trust officers and the local governing body (LGB) take account of parental and staff opinion, as part of their strategic work. This has secured the confidence of staff and parents and has enabled school leaders to successfully steer changes in staffing and leadership since the previous inspection.
- Members of the trust and LGB carefully fulfil their responsibilities to safeguard pupils

and regularly check on this area of the school's work.

- Trust officers and the LGB closely monitor leaders' use of the pupil premium and additional funding that support younger pupils' literacy and numeracy progress. As a result, they are able to successfully hold leaders to account for the progress of these pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff and leaders maintain a vigilant culture of safeguarding where children are protected from harm and risk is reduced. Staff and leaders, including the LGB, are trained effectively in order to fulfil their safeguarding roles. Consequently, all staff are aware of potential risks to children, including radicalisation, abuse and communication technologies. Staff are also confident about knowing what to do and whom to tell in the event of any concerns arising.
- Staff report safeguarding concerns quickly and leaders use efficient systems for managing information and communicating with local authorities or other appropriate agencies. Within school, leaders review safeguarding information regularly and are able to act quickly to intervene and protect children should conditions change.
- Leaders' arrangements for checking on staff suitability to work with children are effective, and appropriate checks are undertaken on all visitors. Access to the school site is secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. As a result, pupils who currently attend the school are making good progress.
- Previous significant changes in staffing have been reduced. Teachers currently in the school are now established and relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and productive. As a result of these improvements, teachers are able to secure the interest of pupils and their commitment to learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is effective and they set high expectations for pupils' learning. Teachers use assessment information effectively and plan challenging activities for pupils of different abilities. One good example was in a Year 10 physics lesson, where higher ability pupils were required to use their knowledge of trigonometry to solve difficult equations about resistant force. As a result of effective teaching and use of assessment, pupils who had initially struggled to tackle the work were able to apply their knowledge confidently and achieve success.
- Teachers introduce new work and knowledge effectively and are skilled in explaining difficult vocabulary and concepts. This deepens' pupils' understanding and improves their literacy standards. One good example was in a Year 8 history lesson, where pupils were learning about government racism and prejudice in 1930s Germany. As a result of the teacher's effective explanations of difficult vocabulary, pupils of all abilities were able to articulate the meaning and impact of Nazi policies on different groups of people.

- Questioning is a strength of teaching across the school. Teachers use questioning to assess pupils' understanding and challenge them to use their knowledge. One good example was in a Year 7 science lesson, where effective questioning helped pupils with lower prior attainment to quickly understand the difference between heat and temperature and the way in which they are measured.
- Reading is promoted well. All pupils are provided with routine opportunities to read suitably challenging texts during curriculum time. Around school, teachers actively model positive reading habits and, in lessons, they frequently check on pupils' skills while reading texts and resources.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils' learning. Teachers provide them with useful guidance and information about the pupils they support, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities. They are skilled in reassuring the pupils they support and checking on their understanding as they work. As a result, the pupils they support are making good progress.
- Writing is taught well in most subjects and work is planned to support pupils to write for different purposes. Written tasks are challenging in all subjects. However, in some subjects, including geography, computer science and finance, expectations for the quality of pupils' written work are not maintained consistently by all teachers. Consequently, pupils' written skills in these subjects are not developed as thoroughly as they are in subjects such as history and English.
- Most mathematics teaching is effective; teachers have secure subject knowledge and activities are suitably planned to help pupils make good progress. However, in some instances, work in mathematics does not address the previous misunderstandings pupils have experienced in calculation and, consequently, their progress is slowed when they are less sure about how to apply their number skills to problems.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders, the LGB and all staff place a high priority on the welfare of each pupil. Senior leaders and others responsible for systems of care demonstrate a close knowledge of the pupils attending the school. Consequently, pupils feel safe and report that they are well looked after and can raise any concerns with adults appointed to look after them.
- Leaders responsible for welfare and pastoral support have offered precise support to the large numbers of pupils who have joined the school at times other than the start of the academic year or key stage, some of whom have experienced serious personal difficulties. As a result, these pupils have succeeded at school. Their attendance has improved, they have been provided with suitable programmes of study and they are working well with their classmates and teachers.
- Parents are positive about the care for their children offered by the school and how safe their children feel. As a result, the numbers of parents applying for school places for their children are increasing quickly.
- Pupils demonstrate sensitivity and respect for the feelings of others, including adults

who work at the school. They believe relationship skills are taught well and that bullying is rare. When reported, they believe that bullying is tackled quickly and they can distinguish between the different forms it can take.

- Pupils are committed to the school and serving others. They fulfil important school leadership roles as prefects, councillors and buddies, and also serve as the head boy and head girl. The pupil advisory council provides feedback to leaders about pupils' experiences in lessons. In addition, they organise support for charitable causes including female cancers, Down's syndrome and the development of laparoscopic surgery.
- Leaders and staff follow effective arrangements to keep pupils safe from risk when using communication technology. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the potential risks and benefits when using such technology, including their mobile phones.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There has been a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour and conduct. Following the previous inspection, there was a decline in behaviour, which leaders and staff have addressed successfully.
- Leaders and staff promote the school's expectations for behaviour consistently. As a result, pupils across the school understand how they should apply themselves to work and respect one another. They are also able to make sensible choices in order to resolve personal challenges or relationship difficulties.
- Pupils' attitudes towards learning are well developed because of the encouraging relationships they enjoy with their teachers and other staff. They cooperate with one another well, and they understand that they can overcome obstacles to learning by being resilient, as well as seeking help from their teachers.
- Pupils' conduct around school reflects the high expectations of staff. Pupils are sensible as they move between lessons and they conduct themselves well at lunchtimes and breaktimes, and when dining in the lunch hall.
- Pupils' attendance further reflects the improvement in their attitudes towards school. Leaders have paid close attention to explaining the importance of attendance to all pupils, and systems for monitoring and improving attendance are effective. As a result, overall absence has reduced and pupils' attendance is similar to average. Equally, the numbers who are routinely and persistently absent have reduced significantly, particularly among those who are disadvantaged.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions has been high in recent years. However, the number of exclusions has fallen and instances of poor behaviour or removal from lessons have also been significantly reduced. Consequently, the school is a calm and orderly environment.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The progress of pupils currently attending the school is good. Following leaders' identification of weaknesses in pupils' learning and subsequent improvements made to teaching, their progress has significantly improved in the different year groups and across the subjects of the curriculum. This represents an important success, following a decline in pupils' achievement after the previous inspection.
- Pupils enter the school with standards in literacy and numeracy below average for their age. However, they are set demanding targets, and arrangements for checking on their progress to help them achieve are effective. As a result, standards are rising quickly towards the national average in different subjects. Recent test results, pupils' workbooks, visits to lessons and the school's accurate assessment records all demonstrate that progress has accelerated. This improvement is seen in English, mathematics, sciences, humanities, languages and across other subjects of the wider curriculum.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their different starting points, including those with high prior attainment and others who have SEN and/or disabilities. This is because they are assessed accurately and receive effective support, and their attendance has improved. Consequently, the differences between their progress and that of other pupils nationally are being reduced quickly.
- Pupils who enter the school in Year 7 having previously made slower progress in reading and mathematics make good progress. They are taught well and provided with carefully planned support so that they can overcome previous difficulties and catch up.
- The progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is good across the school. Accurate identification of their needs and thoughtful planning ensure that they receive effective support and work that is sufficiently challenging.
- The most able pupils make good progress. The teaching they receive is suitably demanding and they are reaching higher standards as a result. In addition, improvements made to the curriculum are ensuring that they complete programmes of study that help them achieve qualifications that accurately reflect their capabilities.
- The progress of pupils who join the school at non-standard times is good, including those who arrive later in key stage 4. They arrive with many different academic starting points and ages. However, they are accurately assessed on entry and arrangements to support them to succeed are effective. Consequently, they make a good start and achieve well.
- The progress of pupils who are educated off site in alternative forms of provision is good. They receive suitable placements that help them to follow useful career routes after Year 11, and they are also supported to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Following the previous inspection, the overall progress made by pupils by the end of Year 11 improved in 2015, and was above average in 2016, including in English and mathematics.
- However, in 2017, pupils' progress was below average in most subjects, including English, mathematics, science and the humanities. The progress of pupils with average

and higher prior attainment was below average. In addition, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities was weaker.

- The proportion of Year 11 pupils now sustaining their participation in the sixth form, further education or work-with-training is higher. This is a result of effective preparation for the next steps in their educational or career development and impartial careers advice and guidance.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The small sixth form is well led and is growing in size. The leaders responsible for this area of the school's work accurately evaluate performance and the quality of provision. Working in partnership with the larger Maltings Academy sixth form, leaders have secured a viable sixth-form experience for students with a relevant curriculum, effective teaching and higher success rates. Students currently attending the sixth form are making strong progress, completing their courses and moving on to secure destinations including work, further training or university.
- The quality of teaching is good and reflects the positive profile seen in other year groups and key stages of the school. Consequently, progress is strong for students currently studying in the school. Current, accurate assessment records, students' work and visits to lessons all demonstrate that students are achieving well across the different programmes of study, including A-level and applied qualifications.
- Taking account of their prior attainment, students achieve well in a number of subjects, including art, business, English, mathematics, geography and the BTEC qualifications. Students who study for vocational courses also make strong progress from their starting points. Students' progress across the different subjects demonstrates that their programmes of study are carefully planned to provide them with a suitable curriculum and effective teaching. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, work or training.
- Student numbers entering the sixth form are rising. They are provided with impartial, relevant and effective advice and guidance, so that they select programmes of study that support their aspirations. Their progress and welfare are carefully monitored, to ensure they are able to succeed and manage the higher level of demands following key stage 4. As a result, more students are finishing their studies properly and with a plan for the future.
- Students are able to participate in carefully developed activities that extend their learning beyond normal classroom work and studies. These include community service, work-related experiences and significant contributions to school leadership and development. They also provide support to younger pupils in positions of responsibility. These experiences provide them with opportunities for strong personal development and insights into the world of work.
- Those students who have not achieved the minimum expected GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics make strong progress towards achieving them by the time they leave the sixth form. This includes those with the lowest prior attainment who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Students feel safe in the sixth form and are

confident that staff are vigilant and caring. In the event of their reporting a concern to staff, they report their full confidence in the school's capacity to help them and keep them safe.

- The sixth form meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes and students have achieved the minimum standards established by the government.
- In 2016 and 2017, the very small numbers of students on different courses make it difficult to comment meaningfully on students' progress in relation to national results. However, results were less consistently strong in a number of subjects by 2017.

School details

Unique reference number	135651
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10046093

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	578
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	53
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of local governing board	John King
Headteacher	Damian Lee
Telephone number	01376 515756
Website	www.newrickstonesacademy.org
Email address	dlee@newrickstonesacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2015

Information about this school

- New Rickstones Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust. An executive principal has oversight of both New Rickstones Academy and the nearby Maltings Academy.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- In recent years, the numbers of pupils who have joined the school at non-standard times have been high.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11.
- The academy's sixth form works in partnership with the sixth form of Maltings Academy. Courses for students from both academies are offered in a study centre on the academy campus.
- Alternative provision for a few students is provided at Heybridge Alternative Provision School and the Construction Training Partnership Academy, Witham.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes of staff.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection gathered evidence from 42 lessons in all year groups across the school, including some jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons across all year groups and a sample of pupils' books and folders.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, curriculum information, records about the attainment and progress of pupils, and pupils' behaviour and attendance, checks on the quality of teaching, and the work of governors and trust officers.
- Inspectors checked the school's single central record and scrutinised the school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors held a range of meetings with the school's leaders including: the headteacher; leaders responsible for safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, teaching and learning, the curriculum, sixth form, and the use of the pupil premium; various subject leaders, and the coordinator for provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Meetings were held with the chair and other members of the governing board.
- Meetings were held with 75 pupils from key stage 3, key stage 4 and the sixth form. Inspectors also met with pupils who receive additional support. Throughout the two days, inspectors spoke informally with pupils about their experiences, their learning and their safety. Inspectors also observed pupils during lunchtime and around school.
- Inspectors evaluated 59 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including five free-text responses. Inspectors also analysed the views of 37 respondents to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the single response to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

David Turner, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Dominey	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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