

The Ongar Academy

Fyfield Road, Ongar, Essex CM5 0AN

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the school opened, the headteacher, supported by trustees and governors, has successfully created a culture and ethos in which almost all pupils have positive attitudes to learning and want to achieve well.
- Teaching typically helps pupils to make good progress. Teaching in science is particularly effective in supporting pupils of different abilities to make good progress.
- Leaders have high expectations regarding behaviour and attendance. Pupils' behaviour and conduct in lessons and around the school are good. Pupils attend regularly. Rates of absence and persistent absence are lower than the most recent national figures.
- Leaders have carefully designed a curriculum that supports pupils' academic and personal development well. The variety of extra-curricular activities and planned opportunities that are woven through different subject areas strongly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Trustees are providing an appropriate balance of support and challenge to ensure that school leaders provide a good standard of education for pupils and make best use of additional funding.
- Middle leaders fully support the vision and values of leaders and governors. They are clear about how their actions contribute to achieving whole-school priorities. Nonetheless, less experienced leaders currently need support to evaluate the impact of their actions on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' achievement.
- Teachers have consistently high expectations of the most able pupils and ask them to complete challenging learning activities, which promote high levels of understanding. Some teachers are less successful in ensuring that activities challenge and support other pupils to make consistently good progress.
- Pupils have opportunities to use and develop their mathematical skills across a range of subjects. Leaders have strategies in place to develop pupils' communication skills. However, they acknowledge that there is more work to do to encourage all pupils to read widely and to support the development of reading for lower-attaining pupils.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. However, they need to evaluate more precisely some of their actions to ensure that they are producing rapid improvements in pupils' progress and are securing highly effective teaching across the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all leaders, including those new to leadership roles, evaluate the impact of their actions precisely to ensure that pupils' achievement is raised further and that actions secure consistently effective teaching, learning and assessment across the school
 - continuing to promote reading throughout the school, in order that pupils become enthusiastic readers and rapidly develop their communication and literacy skills.
- Improve outcomes and support all pupils to make rapid progress by:
 - ensuring that all teachers provide activities with appropriate levels of challenge that are well matched to all pupils' abilities
 - increasing rates of progress for those pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has played a pivotal role in establishing this growing and increasingly popular school. He and the senior leaders have created a culture of high aspirations for pupils. As a result, almost all pupils have developed positive attitudes to learning. Pupils understand that there is an expectation for them to fulfil the aim of the school's motto and 'aspire to greatness' in all that they do. They rise to this challenge and, consequently, almost all pupils make good progress in a range of subjects.
- Leaders have high expectations regarding the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have taken the opportunity to work with the lead school in the multi-academy trust and other schools to ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' learning are accurate. Teachers appreciate the support and opportunities for training that leaders provide to continually improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils, parents and carers fully understand their high expectations regarding behaviour and attendance. As a result, overall attendance has improved over the time that the school has been open, and it has been consistently above the national average. Leaders have successfully supported individuals to improve their attendance so that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced and is now better than in most secondary schools nationally.
- The curriculum supports pupils' academic and personal development well. Leaders have carefully considered how they can provide pupils with a range of experiences that prepare them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils show a good understanding of why they need to understand other cultures and beliefs and have opportunities to study and understand the democratic process. Leaders have been particularly successful in promoting pupils' respect for difference, for example in race, religion and sexuality.
- Leaders have ensured that clearly identified opportunities to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are woven through the curriculum. For example, pupils discuss the ethical implications of how human activity impacts on the environment in both geography and science. Pupils have opportunities to develop their interests through a range of clubs, sporting activities and visits.
- Leaders have made good use of external support and challenge from a local authority adviser to strengthen governance and leadership as the school has grown in size. The decision to join The Bridge Academy Trust has further strengthened areas of leaders' work, such as support for improving pupils' attendance and the systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This work is set to continue, and there are plans in place to support the recruitment and retention of additional teaching staff as the school grows in size.
- Leaders have used the additional funding the school receives for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities effectively. Pupils receive the help and support that they need to overcome their individual barriers to learning. As a result, there have been notable improvements in attendance, behaviour and achievement for these groups.

- The funding provided for those pupils who did not achieve the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 is used for a variety of activities. These include small-group and individual teaching, handwriting support and a phonics programme to support pupils' reading skills. Leaders acknowledge that, while these programmes have resulted in some improvements for individual pupils, these have not been rapid enough, particularly in reading.
- The strategies used to promote reading across the school have not had the impact that leaders intended. Leaders have not evaluated their actions sharply enough and therefore have not identified what works best to help pupils develop their reading skills and their ability to read a wide variety of increasingly challenging texts with enjoyment and resilience.
- Middle leaders and new senior leaders are clear about the whole-school priorities for improvement and the ways in which their actions contribute to achieving these. They are enthusiastic supporters of experienced senior leaders' and trustees' vision for the school. However, some leaders are not fully evaluating the impact of their actions on the quality of teaching and learning and are not holding colleagues stringently to account. As a result, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Governance of the school

- The Bridge Academy Trust has strengthened the already effective governance arrangements for the school. The trust has contributed to improvements in teaching, learning and assessment by working with the other schools in the trust to ensure that assessment procedures are rigorous and accurate. It has also provided expertise that has supported middle leaders in ensuring that pupils are being well prepared for the demands of learning in key stage 4. This approach is set to continue and there are clear plans in place to support further improvement.
- The local governing body (LGB) is effective and provides the appropriate balance of support and challenge to school leaders. Governors carefully check on leaders' actions to ensure that they are making a difference to pupils' learning and achievement. Governors have undertaken a skills audit and used this to ensure that they have a range of skills and expertise to be effective in their roles.
- Governors have ensured that leaders carefully target funds available for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, to provide the help that individual pupils need. They have a good understanding of the impact that this has had on improving attendance and progress for these groups of pupils.
- The chief executive officer of the trust and chair of the trust and LGB have an accurate view of the challenges faced by the school. They have a clear strategy and vision for the future development of the school that leaders and teachers share. School leaders and teachers are clear as to how the trust will contribute to further improvement in the quality of education provided.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, trustees and governors have successfully established a culture in which

keeping children safe has the highest priority. Staff members receive regular training and updates to ensure that they can identify pupils who are at risk of harm or radicalisation. Staff, including non-teaching staff, are confident in reporting concerns, and safeguarding leaders act on these swiftly. When necessary, leaders act promptly to refer concerns to external agencies so that pupils and their families receive the help and support that they need in a timely manner.

- Arrangements to carry out the checks required to ensure that all adults in the school are suitable to work with children and young people are very thorough. The records of these checks are accurately maintained. Trustees and governors regularly monitor leaders' work related to safeguarding to ensure that policies and practice reflect the latest statutory guidance.
- Pupils learn how to stay safe from risks, responsible use of mobile devices and social media, and how to stay safe online. Leaders' work in this area is particularly effective. Pupils are clear that teachers do not tolerate bullying. They are confident that teachers deal with the few incidents that do occur effectively. This accords with responses to Ofsted's online surveys from all staff and the large majority of parents.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high expectations regarding pupils' readiness to learn. This has resulted in almost all pupils having positive attitudes to learning. Relationships are respectful, and pupils respond to teachers' directions and are keen to contribute their ideas. This means that sequences of activities usually flow smoothly and that most teachers use time effectively to support pupils' learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is secure, even when they are teaching subjects that are not their specialism. They use their knowledge to plan sequences of learning that build on what pupils already know. Inspectors saw examples of this in history, science and physical education, where teachers had planned learning that engaged and interested pupils and, over time, had enabled them to make good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Pupils routinely improve their work in response to the guidance provided by their teachers. Most teachers apply the school's marking and assessment policy consistently and support pupils' learning through providing helpful and insightful advice.
- Teachers use homework effectively to regularly support pupils' learning. Tasks check pupils' understanding or encourage pupils to apply or extend their knowledge. Pupils and the large majority of parents agree that teachers set appropriate amounts of homework in line with the school's policy.
- Teachers know pupils' individual needs and current standards of attainment. They generally use this information to provide pupils with any additional help that they need. This results in most disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities making progress that is similar to that of other pupils who have similar starting points.
- The teaching of science is consistently effective. Pupils of all abilities develop their practical skills and ability to draw conclusions based on experimental evidence. Teachers encourage pupils to use scientific knowledge to justify their reasoning and ideas. As a result, pupils typically make good progress.

- The very large majority of pupils spoken to during the inspection are positive about the teaching that they receive. The comments and responses received through Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, support this view. A small minority of parents and pupils expressed concerns about inconsistencies in the quality of teaching due to changes in staffing. Inspection evidence shows that school leaders have thoughtfully considered how they can overcome these difficulties through work with the trust.
- Teaching ensures that pupils can apply and develop their mathematical skills in a range of subjects including science, geography and design technology. Many teachers also support pupils' writing skills through providing opportunities to write for a variety of different purposes and through correcting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- On the whole, teachers ensure that they plan for different levels of challenge in their lessons. They routinely provide the most able pupils with tasks that make them think and challenge these pupils to achieve higher standards in their learning. The most able pupils rise to this challenge and make good progress as a result. Appropriate challenge for other abilities is less consistently evident from some teachers; work can be too easy and not stimulate pupils' interest. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress that they should.
- Although teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to read, this has not ensured that all pupils independently read widely and often. Teaching for those pupils who did not attain the expected standards in reading or writing at the end of key stage 2 has helped them to improve their skills, but their progress has not been rapid and they have not yet caught up with their classmates.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils said that they feel well cared for in school. All staff and almost all of those parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agree. One comment received from a parent that was typical of many others stated simply, 'My daughter is very happy here and enjoys going to school every day.'
- The school is a friendly, inclusive community. Pupils are highly respectful of difference. Incidents of racist, homophobic and derogatory language are rare. Pupils spoken to by inspectors were clear that teachers do not tolerate such incidents and deal with the few that do occur effectively. Leaders' work to promote equality is effective. Pupils have a good understanding of why they need to understand and respect the beliefs and views of others.
- Pupils learn about the skills required for future employment through the school's personal, social and health education programme, which includes independent careers information and guidance. Year 9 pupils feel that they received helpful information and advice that supported them to make informed choices regarding the subjects that they will study in key stage 4.
- Pupils respect their environment and appreciate the facilities provided by the new

school building. There is very little litter around the school site. Pupils are proud of their school, and the very large majority take pride in their appearance. The impact of the leaders' work in supporting pupils to develop positive attitudes to school life was evident in the comment of a Year 9 pupil who said, 'I used to dread going to my previous school, but I really enjoy it here.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well around the school and at informal times, such as breaks and lunchtimes. They socialise sensibly in mixed groups and work well with others when required to do so.
- Pupils' conduct in lessons and when moving around the school site is good. The school is a calm, orderly and purposeful learning environment. Pupils are polite and courteous to one another and to adults.
- Pupils said that behaviour in lessons is good. Teachers have high expectations regarding behaviour and these are consistently applied. Pupils said that, as a result, there are few occasions when the behaviour of others disturbs their learning and that teachers deal appropriately with those instances that do occur. The responses to Ofsted's online surveys show that the very large majority of parents and all staff confirm this view.
- Pupils value their education and understand the importance of attending school regularly. Overall attendance has been better than the national average since the school opened, and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced. Current attendance figures are better than the most recent national average, and the proportion of pupils who are persistent absentees is now below the national average. Leaders' actions have reduced rates of absence for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Consequently, improved attendance is resulting in better progress for these groups.
- Leaders use fixed-term exclusions appropriately, and information shows that the number of pupils excluded from school has reduced. Leaders have established an inclusive school and work hard to support pupils who have behavioural difficulties to meet the school's expectations regarding behaviour, both in and out of school. Where this has not been successful, the school has worked with other schools to avoid the need for permanent exclusion. The school has had to permanently exclude three pupils in the current academic year following a serious breach of its behaviour policy.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- As the school currently only has pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9, there is no external, published information available on the progress that pupils make or on their standards of attainment.
- Pupils join the school having typically attained standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. Pupils, overall, make good progress from their starting points in a range of subjects.

- School leaders have ensured that teachers' assessments of pupils' learning are accurate through work with other schools, including the lead school in the trust. Leaders' analysis of assessment information indicates that, in the majority of subjects, most pupils are achieving or exceeding the standards expected for their age.
- Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work and observations of learning found that most pupils are making good progress across a range of subjects. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils, who routinely experience high levels of challenge from teachers. Some pupils make less progress because their teachers do not provide levels of challenge that are well matched to pupils' abilities and tasks are not demanding enough.
- Disadvantaged pupils typically make good progress from their starting points, but there are some small variations between subjects and year groups. Disadvantaged pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are generally lower than those of their peers and of other pupils are nationally.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive effective support that enables most to make good progress from their individual starting points. One parent reflected a number of comments from parents with children who have SEN when they commented that they were fully appreciative of the steps in place to support their child in all subjects.
- Leaders have recognised that boys enter the school with lower attainment than girls and that, in the past, they have made less progress than girls. The increased focus on monitoring boys' progress is having a positive impact, and there is some evidence that the differences in achievement are reducing. However, some teachers are not providing sufficiently challenging tasks to further accelerate boys' progress, and leaders cannot always explain which of their actions have made the biggest difference to raising boys' achievement.
- Pupils who entered the school with levels of literacy below those expected for their age have made modest gains in their reading age and have developed their knowledge of letters and the sounds that they make. However, they have made little or no improvement in their spelling age. A small group of Year 7 readers who had received support through the Year 7 catch-up funding read to an inspector. They did not demonstrate the ability to apply their phonic skills to read unfamiliar words, and some were reading books that were not appropriate for their current level of attainment. Consequently, they were not demonstrating that they had made strong progress in their language and communication skills.

School details

Unique reference number	141947
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10046602

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 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	344
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Stephen Bennett
Chief executive officer	Mark Farmer
Chair of the local governing body	Blane Judd
Headteacher	David Grant
Telephone number	01277 500990
Website	www.theongaracademy.org
Email address	admin@theongaracademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Ongar Academy opened as an academy free school in September 2015. In September 2017, the school moved into purpose-built accommodation on its current site. The Bridge Academy Trust has sponsored the school since October 2017. The board of trustees and local governing body are responsible for the governance of the school.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. At the time of the inspection, the school was providing an education for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. Trustees and governors intend to open sixth-form provision in September 2020.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average.
- The school does not have any pupils who attend alternative provision.
- The headteacher was appointed by the original trustees in October 2014. He worked with trustees to set the vision and values of the school and to ensure that it was appropriately staffed and able to meet the standards expected by the Department for Education.
- The Bridge Academy Trust provides support for the school. This includes support for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through collaborative working with the lead secondary school in the trust. The school has also received support from a local authority school improvement adviser.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school. Many of these observations took place with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also listened to a small group of Year 7 pupils reading and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, representatives of the board of trustees and local governing body, the chief executive of the trust and a school effectiveness adviser from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the self-evaluation summary, the school's improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body, safeguarding records, school assessment information, attendance and behaviour records and school policies and procedures.
- Formal discussions were held with groups of pupils from each year group and a small group of pupils who had received additional support to discuss their experiences of school. Inspectors also spoke to pupils in lessons and at break and lunchtimes. There was only one response to the online pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work across different key stages.
- Inspectors analysed the 153 responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, including the free-text commentary provided by 97 parents.
- Inspectors also considered the 26 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. Formal and informal discussions also took place with staff members to gather their views about the work of the school.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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