

Inspection of Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy

Ashton Road, Lancaster, Lancashire LA1 4RS

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 December 2022

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected since December 2011.

What is it like to attend this school?

At Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy, leaders and staff have created an inspirational environment. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), flourish academically, personally and spiritually.

Pupils and students are highly articulate, self-motivated and determined to succeed. They try their very best. Pupils and students leave the school confident and exceptionally well prepared to take their place in a modern society.

Pupils and students told inspectors that they feel safe and happy in school. They are prepared to be advocates for their peers and they know that leaders listen to and act upon their views. Pupils and students told inspectors that the very rare incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

The behaviour of pupils and students is exemplary. The quality of pastoral support that staff provide for pupils and students is a key strength of the school.

Leaders and staff have very high expectations of pupils' and students' achievement. Pupils and students admirably rise to these expectations. They also appreciate the wide range of activities provided for them, both in school and beyond the school gates. For example, they spoke with enthusiasm about the clubs that they attend, such as dance club, farm club and the Combined Cadet Force, as well as extensive opportunities to get involved in sports and music.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils and students benefit from an extremely high-quality education, including an aspirational curriculum. This prepares them well to play their part as responsible and active citizens in modern Britain.

Leaders and governors are fully committed that all pupils and students will thrive, irrespective of their background or ability. Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum that motivates and enthuses pupils. Pupils and students enjoy a broad range of academic and vocational subjects to foster their talents and interests. For example, all pupils in key stage 3 study agriculture and horticulture. All pupils in key stage 4, including pupils with SEND, can choose to study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. Pupils and students in the sixth form achieve exceptionally well.

Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subjects that they deliver. Leaders' assessment strategies enable staff to successfully identify any gaps in pupils' learning. Teachers deliver subject content with precision. For instance, they ensure that links between current learning and previous topics are clear. Teachers encourage pupils and students to become resilient and reflective learners. Pupils and students learn the curriculum well.

Leaders ensure that the needs of pupils and students with SEND are identified swiftly and accurately. Pupils and students with SEND study the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Staff complete regular and bespoke training to ensure that they are suitably equipped to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' and students' additional needs. Pupils and students with SEND excel. They take full part in all that leaders and staff have to offer.

Pupils and students manage their own behaviour exceptionally well. They are attentive in lessons and are eager to learn. They show a great deal of maturity and responsibility towards their learning and they strive for excellence. This is accomplished in an atmosphere of care and consideration for the welfare of others. Sixth-form students and Year 11 pupils willingly help younger pupils with their learning.

Leaders have put dedicated support in place to help those pupils who have fallen behind with their reading knowledge. Well-trained staff expertly deliver programmes to help these pupils to catch up in a timely way. The support that these pupils receive develops their confidence and ability with reading and enables them to access the wider curriculum.

Leaders have ensured that there is a well-designed personal development curriculum in place for pupils. This extends seamlessly into the sixth form. Leaders provide pupils and students with regular opportunities to debate ethical and topical issues and to recognise the importance of democracy and diversity.

Many pupils and students participate in voluntary work, both within the school and the local community. For example, pupils readily assume roles, such as mental health ambassadors. All Year 7 pupils take part in a community action project as part of the Archbishop of York Award. Pupils and students benefit from high-quality and impartial careers advice and guidance.

The local governing board and the board of trustees provide an appropriate level of challenge and support for leaders. Those responsible for governance are well informed about leaders' priorities and they are mindful of their responsibilities to support staff well-being.

Staff are extremely proud to work at the school. They appreciate the efforts of school leaders to address workload issues. Staff reported that leaders listen to and act upon their suggestions, where possible. They welcome leaders' initiatives to benefit their well-being, such as ballroom dancing workshops, running club and Pilates.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders know pupils, students and their families well. Leaders provide regular and up-to-date safeguarding training, so that staff know how to identify if a pupil may be vulnerable. Staff know how to report any safeguarding concerns and do so diligently.

Leaders work closely with external agencies to access timely support for pupils, students and their families. Leaders are well informed about local and national issues. They ensure that learning for staff in this area is relevant and current.

Pupils and students learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, they understand the consequences of internet hacking and the importance of keeping their passwords safe.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136731
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10242461
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1702
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	304
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Crewdson
Principal	Catherine Walmsley
Website	http://ripleystthomas.com/
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 December 2011

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Bay Learning Trust and the Diocese of Blackburn. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in June 2017.
- Leaders currently use five registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This is the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- As part of this graded inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: art and design, English, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, visited some lessons, spoke with pupils, students and teachers. They looked at samples of pupils' and students' work. Inspectors also reviewed aspects of the curriculums in other subjects. They also met with the subject leaders in these subjects.
- Inspectors met with the principal, vice principals and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the board of trustees and the local governing board. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors checked on leaders' safeguarding procedures, including the recruitment checks made on staff and governors. Inspectors met with leaders, those responsible for governance, staff, pupils and students to discuss the wider aspects of safeguarding. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation pertaining to safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' and students' behaviour around school, at breaktimes and at lunchtimes. They spoke with them about behaviour and bullying.

Inspection team

Niamh Howlett, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Andy Cunningham	His Majesty's Inspector
Kelly Leonard	Ofsted inspector
Sanjay Patel	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Gibbs	Ofsted Inspector

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