

# Inspection of Ridgeway Academy

Herns Lane, Welwyn Garden City AL7 2AF

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Inspection dates: 11 and 12 January 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Sixth-form provision

**Requires improvement**

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5  
of the Education Act 2005

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils develop responsibility and positive relationships through a rich character development offer linked to the school's values. For example, to support the development of responsibility, pupils can achieve their adventure certificate through participation in trips, visits and schemes, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils find this motivating and rewarding.

Pupils experience a supportive environment, with trusted adults who care about their welfare. This helps pupils to feel happy and safe. When pupils experience issues, there is a broad range of support on offer. This includes access to services such as counselling and mental health support.

A minority of pupils worry about the behaviour and attitudes of others. They often wait until these issues become more serious before reporting them. Staff follow up on these instances, but potential bullying is not always dealt with at an early enough stage.

Some pupils fall behind in their learning, as teaching is not always well adapted to meet their needs. Pupils have not achieved as well as they should at the end of Year 11, but leaders have now raised expectations of achievement. Older pupils who are behind are now supported to catch up. This is helping to better prepare them for their next steps.

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

Pupils study a broad curriculum that enables them to pursue their interests, including pupils in sixth form, for whom a consortium arrangement across a group of schools supports their education. Only a small number of pupils enter the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc provides a foundation for the knowledge needed for a wide range of further study and employment. Not enough pupils have gained qualifications in these subjects. Leaders are acting to increase uptake.

Leaders have identified the important knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn in each subject. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They understand the curriculum they teach, as they participated in its development. However, not all teachers deliver the curriculum consistently well. This is because there is inconsistency in how well teachers assess what pupils know and then adapt their teaching to help pupils remember important subject knowledge. This is also the case in the sixth form. Over time, this has led to pupils not having a secure enough understanding or producing work of high enough quality. This has resulted in pupils in key stage 4 underachieving.

Reading is a priority for leaders. Leaders identify pupils who are at the early stages of reading and provide effective support to help them catch up. This includes effective reading support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils read with increasing accuracy and understanding as a result of the targeted phonics and fluency programmes they undertake.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils with SEND, who have their needs accurately identified. Leaders ensure that strategies to support these needs are clearly recorded in learning plans so that pupils with SEND can access the same curriculum. However, although parent views are sought, they are not recorded explicitly enough. Some teachers do not consistently follow these plans, so learning is not always adapted successfully. As a result, pupils with SEND do not always get the adaptations they need. Therefore, their learning is inconsistent.

Leaders have introduced a new system for managing behaviour. Behavioural expectations are now much clearer to pupils. This has helped to ensure that lessons are largely free of disruption. However, a small number of staff do not implement the new system consistently. Leaders do not always record or analyse low-level behaviour issues precisely enough. Leaders do not address some issues that occur at an early stage. A small number of pupils' attitudes and behaviour is of concern to others. These factors lead some pupils and parents to have frustrations about how well behaviour issues are resolved.

Leaders have ensured there is a well-planned programme of personal development. Pupils value the range of leadership opportunities. This includes participation in charity work and trips that extend their learning. Pupil groups, such as those for diversity, have played an active role in promoting tolerant attitudes. As a result, pupils treat each other with increasing levels of tolerance and respect.

There is a coherent and well-planned programme of careers education from Year 7 to Year 13. This is enhanced by specific career days and work experience placements. Students benefit from careers appointments and mentoring but would like these to be even more personalised.

Leaders engage effectively with staff. Staff state that there are pressure points for workload, but they comment that leaders listen and respond to their views. The trust has supported leaders effectively to make improvements. Leaders have suitable plans in place to ensure that this trajectory of improvement continues.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained to be able to identify safeguarding concerns. Form tutors build appropriate relationships so that pupils feel comfortable to talk to them. Any concerns that pupils raise are acted on promptly.

Leaders work effectively with external agencies, such as social workers, to secure the support pupils and their families need. A suitable programme of education is in place so that pupils understand issues such as sexual harassment and misogyny.

The single central record of pre-employment checks is diligently maintained. Effective safer recruitment procedures are in place alongside effective procedures for dealing with any allegations against staff.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Although leaders have focused on developing the curriculum, some subjects are more established in their implementation than others. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. This is because teachers do not adapt their teaching well enough or meet pupils' needs. Leaders should ensure that all subjects are implemented consistently well and that teachers adapt their teaching effectively to meet pupils needs. This should support all pupils to develop detailed knowledge, deepen their understanding and achieve as well as they should.
- Leaders have not ensured that the behaviour system is implemented consistently well. Follow-up actions are not systematically recorded and connected. As a result, a small number of pupils do not behave well enough. Leaders need to ensure that all instances of behaviour are appropriately recorded, connected and followed up robustly and that pupils are confident to report concerns at an early stage.
- Leaders are developing a culture of tolerance and respect. However, a small number of pupils are not respectful of others. This leads some pupils to worry about how others treat them. Leaders should build on the work done to develop the school value of respect so that all pupils demonstrate an understanding of how they should treat others and ensure that there is a positive culture of respect across the school.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	146305
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10254980
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy special sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	909
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	84
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Lin Keen
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sarah Mitcherson
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ridgeway.herts.sch.uk">www.ridgeway.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education, qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers.
- The school has been part of the Alban Academies Trust since it opened in September 2018.

## Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, science, business studies, history and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors conducted meetings with the CEO of the trust and director of school improvement (secondary), trustees, representatives of the local governing body, a representative of the local authority and leaders of provision for pupils with SEND, behaviour and attendance, personal development and safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors met with the deputy headteacher regarding the use of alternative provision and the small number of pupils on part-time timetables. An inspector spoke to a parent on the telephone.
- Inspectors explored the school's safeguarding culture through viewing safeguarding records and procedures, meeting with a range of pupils and staff and talking to safeguarding leaders.
- Inspectors considered the 268 responses and 193 free-text responses made by parents to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered 50 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 95 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

## Inspection team

James Chester, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Carrie McMorn	Ofsted Inspector
Jess Pearce	Ofsted Inspector
Katherine Douglas	His Majesty's Inspector

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