

Inspection of Riverside Meadows Academy

Almond Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 1DZ

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Riverside Meadows is one school that operates on two sites. Most pupils only have experience of the site they attend. The current leaders have raised expectations, both about what pupils are capable of and how they should behave.

There have been a lot of changes of teaching and support staff. Most staff left at the end of the previous academic year. Some pupils found this difficult and upsetting. Some also found it difficult to let go of the previous 'youth club' feel and to accept the raised expectations around learning.

Most pupils are now much better focused and starting to learn well. The teaching team has been in place for two terms and pupils have got used to the new staff. Pupils are developing strong relationships with staff and this is having a positive impact on their learning.

Some pupils also found the raised expectations about behaviour difficult. However, most of them have already risen to the challenge and others are starting to follow suit. This has made the school a calmer and more settled place to learn. Pupils feel safe at school and are not worried about bullying.

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

The school has been through turbulent times since the previous inspection. This has resulted in a decline in the quality of provision. Almost everything has changed, including the multi-academy trust, leaders and staff. However, this decline has now been halted and the overall effectiveness of the school has started to improve.

Leaders have ensured that a curriculum is now in place across a range of subjects. This was not the case previously. Some subjects are better developed than others. For example, the science curriculum identifies clearly what pupils are to learn and when. It also identifies the key vocabulary that pupils need to learn and understand. This helps pupils to achieve well.

In some areas, the knowledge and skills pupils need to be successful across the curriculum are less well developed. For example, pupils are not taught about handwriting, spelling and punctuation systematically enough. Leaders have not identified precisely the knowledge they want pupils to learn in each subject. Expectations of how well pupils achieve is not high enough. Delivery of some aspects of the curriculum is not routinely well matched to pupils' individual needs. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Teachers know their subjects well. Most are qualified teachers who are subject specialists. Relationships between staff and pupils are developing. In many cases, they are already strong. This is helping pupils to make better progress.

Leaders are in the process of changing the school's approach to assessment. They recognised that the existing way of checking pupils' learning was not fully effective. Firm plans are in place to change the system so that it has a direct impact on how well the curriculum is delivered.

Expectations around pupils' behaviour are now higher. Approaches to behaviour management are more consistent. Although some challenging behaviour remains, it is diminishing. There has been a significant drop in the number and frequency of pupil suspensions from school over the last two years.

Some pupils do not attend school often enough. A group of pupils attend school part-time, for a variety of reasons. In many cases, these arrangements have gone on for long periods of time. Leaders now expect all pupils to attend school full time. They have taken effective action to increase the amount of time pupils on part-time timetables spend in school.

Personal development is threaded through the school's work. Pupils are taught about equality and the diverse nature of modern society. Careers education is developing well and becoming increasingly effective. Pupils learn about the different work and training opportunities that are available to them as they start to prepare for adulthood. However, there are limited opportunities for them to follow their own interests by, for example, attending clubs.

Some parents told inspectors, either in person or through Ofsted Parent View, that they are unhappy with a range of aspects of the school, for example communication between school and home. Leaders have more to do to restore some parents' confidence in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Horizons Education Trust commissioned an external review of safeguarding shortly after taking over the school. The review identified a wide range of weaknesses, which leaders have worked conscientiously to address. However, there is more to do to improve the detail and quality of child protection records.

Staff are well trained to spot possible safeguarding concerns. They report concerns promptly. The school now has a fully trained safeguarding leadership team, with representatives on both school sites. The increasingly strong relationships between pupils and staff help to keep pupils safe. Procedures for the safer recruitment of staff are robust.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not identified the specific knowledge and skills to be taught in some subjects. For example, handwriting, grammar and spelling are not taught systematically. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Pedagogy does not always meet pupils' individual needs fully. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should take action to ensure that:
 - in all subjects, the most important knowledge and skills are identified, and sequenced so that they are built on systematically
 - delivery of the curriculum is closely matched to pupils' individual needs
 - expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough and a notable proportion of pupils attend school part time. Where this is the case, pupils are not accessing the full-time education that they are entitled to. Leaders should take further action to increase the attendance of those pupils who frequently miss school. They should also ensure that part-time timetables are only used in exceptional circumstances and for the shortest possible length of time.
- Some parents have concerns about a range of aspects of the school. For example, some parents feel that communication is not good enough. As a result, for some pupils, relationships between home and school are not as strong as they should be. Leaders should take action to improve communication and restore the confidence of those parents who have concerns about the school.
- Records about safeguarding concerns are not sufficiently well kept. Some entries do not contain enough detail, and related documents are not always kept within the agreed system. This means that some pupils' safeguarding records do not contain all the information they should. Leaders should take action to ensure that all safeguarding records contain sufficient detail and that related documents are always stored within pupils' individual online files.

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	142932
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10268332
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	84
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sue Bailey
Headteacher	Andrew Armstrong and Chris Carey
Website	www.riversidemeadows.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 and 5 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- When the previous inspection took place, the school was part of the TBAP multi-academy trust and was known as TBAP Unity Academy.
- A financial warning notice was issued to TBAP Trust in January 2018, followed by a written notice to improve in August 2018. TBAP subsequently relinquished control of its schools. It stepped down as sponsor of this school on 3 May 2021.
- Horizons Education Trust took over sponsorship of the school on 4 May 2021. The school's name was changed to Riverside Meadows Academy.
- The school operates on two sites that are around 40 miles apart. The address of the second site is: Wisbech Green, 2 Algores Way, PE13 2TQ. Currently, around two-thirds of pupils are based at the St Neots site.

- The previous head of school left the school in August 2022 and an interim headteacher led the school during the summer term. One of the current headteachers joined the school in September 2022 and the other in January 2023.
- The two current headteachers are both full time. One is based on the St Neots site and the other on the Wisbech site. They operate as co-headteachers, sharing the responsibilities of the role.
- A very high proportion of teaching and support staff left the school at the end of the previous academic year. A new teaching team took up their posts in September 2022. There are no current vacancies.
- A completely new school is currently being built in a location close to the existing Wisbech site. It is anticipated that the Wisbech branch of the school will move to the new school building in time for the start of the next academic year.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered to admit pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years. However, no current pupils are aged over 16 years or will become so before the end of the academic year. There have been no 17- or 18-year-old pupils at the school in recent years. The school's leaders intend to rescind this aspect of its registration so that the school will only cater for pupils aged between 11 and 16 years.
- The school uses one unregistered and two registered alternative providers.
- 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.

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 met with the co-headteachers, other leaders, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, members of staff and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector met with a group of trustees, including the chair, and spoke with the chair of the local governing body on the telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, drama, science and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about other aspects of the curriculum, including assessment. Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documents. The lead inspector visited both school sites during the inspection.
- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at records of child protection concerns and spoke with parents, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 21 responses to Ofsted Parent View and three free-text comments. Inspectors spoke with parents during the school's 'enterprise afternoon' on the first day of the inspection. An inspector spoke with a parent on the telephone.
- Inspectors also took account of 20 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors spoke with pupils, individually and in groups, during the inspection.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Helen Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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