

Inspection of a good school: The Ridge Academy

Clyde Crescent, Whaddon, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 5QH

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 June 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are clear that they are happy at The Ridge Academy. They trust adults and are confident they will be kept safe. Pupils feel cared for, especially in moments of stress, when they demonstrate anxious behaviours. They say adults are supportive during these times and do all they can to help them. Pupils show a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Therefore, they are typically respectful, well mannered and polite.

Pupils enjoy school, but this is not always reflected in their attendance. Some pupils do not attend regularly enough. As a result, they do not build the knowledge they need to achieve well. Pupils understand the importance of their education. However, leaders recognise that there is a lot more work to do with the curriculum to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can.

Pupils are eager to be involved with the wider responsibilities the school offers. These include the school council election process and the need to write manifestos to support their bid. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to make decisions, such as increasing the range of books for the school shop. These and other responsibilities help to develop pupils' social skills.

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

Leaders are ambitious for pupils to receive the very best quality of education and care. Under the leadership of the new principal, there is a shared determination to tackle the areas they have identified as needing improvement quickly. There is an early indication that changes already implemented are rapidly improving outcomes for pupils, for example in reading and mathematics. However, leaders are aware that there remains work to be

completed on the foundation subjects to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can across all the subjects they study.

Pupils love reading. They talk with enthusiasm about the books they read. Pupils in the early stages of reading get many opportunities to practise the sounds that they are learning. Books used to teach and practise reading closely match their phonic knowledge. This helps pupils to build their reading fluency and accuracy. Story time is a firm favourite with pupils. This enables them to encounter a wider range of authors and genres during their time in school.

Leaders have carefully planned and ordered the mathematics curriculum. This enables pupils to gain the mathematical knowledge they need. Pupils' recall of number is strong. They answer mathematical problems with confidence. For example, younger pupils use their knowledge of number and decimals to solve questions on money with accuracy.

Leaders have accurately identified that writing is not well developed across the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not demonstrate what they have learned in their written work. They have plans in place to improve this area, but they are in the early stages of development.

Leaders have given considerable thought to pupils' personal development. They carefully select visits and visitors to broaden pupils' knowledge of their community and the wider world. Through these activities, pupils learn about the importance of respect and acceptance of everyone, irrespective of their background. These include visitors sharing their experiences of living with a disability. This helps pupils understand that while everyone is different, all should be treated equally.

The interim standards board is integral to the work of the school. Its members are committed to working alongside leaders to improve the education the school offers. Parents have mixed views about the school. A very small minority of parents are unhappy with the education their child receives. However, other parents have confidence in the school and feel that their child is thriving and achieving well. For example, one parent's comment, that 'the school supports my child's emotional needs and adjusts the day to support them to be able to fulfil their lessons and be calm and happy', was typical of many.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders keep pupils safe at The Ridge Academy. They respond quickly to support pupils and their families in need of help and guidance. Staff are diligent in carrying out the checks required on the suitability of adults to work with pupils. Leaders provide guidance to pupils to help them understand risk, including keeping themselves safe in the community. Pupils say that adults will listen to them if they have any worries or concerns. They are confident that staff will take the appropriate action to minimise risk and keep them safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In the foundation subjects, leaders are not clear enough about the knowledge and skills they want pupils to know and remember. They have not designed learning well enough to enable pupils to gain the depth and fluency of knowledge they need. This means that pupils cannot remember the key knowledge taught across the curriculum. Leaders must ensure that all components are consistently in place so that the knowledge that pupils need is connected.
- Writing is not well developed across the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not demonstrate what they have learned in their written work. Leaders should ensure that pupils develop their writing across all areas of the curriculum.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. As a result, they do not build their knowledge well over time and have gaps in their learning. Leaders need to ensure that the attendance strategy and work with parents are effective in ensuring that pupils attend with more regularity so they learn more successfully over time.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2013.

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	138430
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10256794
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Hall
Principal	Liz Oakey
Website	www.theridgeacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	16 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Ridge Academy is a special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The academy is a member of the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- The academy uses two unregistered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders, school staff and four members of the interim standards board.
- The lead inspector met with directors from the trust and held a telephone call with the chief executive officer for the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject

leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector sampled work in other curriculum subjects, including modern foreign languages and art.
- The lead inspector listened to a selection of pupils in Years 3 to 6 read to an adult.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation, including the safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school. They considered how well the designated safeguarding leader acts on concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Inspectors talked to pupils, staff and governors about how the school keeps everyone safe.
- The lead inspector considered key documentation, including the academy improvement plan.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. An inspector met with leaders to discuss and scrutinise how they respond to behaviour incidents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and responses to the staff survey. The lead inspector spoke with a parent during the inspection.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gill Hickling

Ofsted Inspector

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