

Inspection of Rickmansworth School

Scots Hill, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire WD3 3AQ

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 September 2023

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

The headteacher of this school is Matthew Fletcher. This school is a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Anthony Walker.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, experience a high quality of education at Rickmansworth School. Leaders set exceptionally high expectations for pupils' work, personal development and behaviour. Pupils are very happy and highly enthusiastic about attending school.

The broad curriculum engages all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils demonstrate mature attitudes to learning. Classrooms are strong learning communities. While pupils develop independence, they also support each other to learn the important information they need to know and remember.

The six 'Ricky Rs' form the backbone of the school's culture. Staff reward pupils when they demonstrate these values. This results in pupils becoming resourceful and resilient individuals.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They clearly understand the expectations and conduct themselves responsibly. Pupils are safe. They develop strong friendships with each other and very positive relationships with teachers.

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, strongly value the range of activities that support their learning. Trips, both in the UK and overseas, visitors to school and a wide range of enrichment activities in school all help pupils to apply their learning in the world around them.

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

A highly ambitious curriculum is in place for all pupils, including those pupils with SEND. A broad and rich curriculum prepares pupils exceptionally well for the next steps in their education. As a result, they achieve exceptional outcomes throughout the school up to the end of key stage 4.

Students can study a wide range of courses in the sixth form. However, more recently introduced curriculum areas are not taught with the high levels of consistency seen elsewhere in the school. As a result, students do not currently perform as highly in this small number of subjects.

Subject leaders have consistently set out the most important information that they want pupils to learn. Expert teachers break learning into small steps, which helps pupils to become self-reliant. This creates a buzz in classrooms, where pupils learn for themselves and with each other. Teachers regularly check what pupils know. Pupils act on teachers' feedback, and this helps them to improve. Leaders use effective checks to identify where pupils have not learned as well and make changes to improve future teaching.

There is a strong culture of reading in the school. Pupils read a wide variety of texts. Those pupils who struggle to read fluently when they join the school receive the right support to help them build their confidence. This includes help from sixth-form students, who volunteer time to support lessons. Those who struggle to read fluently catch up quickly.

Pupils with SEND benefit from expert teaching and resources that securely match their individual needs. Staff are well trained to support pupils with SEND extremely well. They successfully help these pupils to develop their resilience and independence. As a result, these pupils access the same ambitious curriculum and achieve as highly as their peers.

A purposeful atmosphere permeates all areas of the school. For the small number of pupils who do struggle with their behaviour, there is strong pastoral support, which helps them to make changes for the better. Low-level disruption is very rare. Pupils and sixth-form students display a strong commitment to their learning, and they take pride in their work.

The school provides exceptional support for pupils' personal development. Pupils develop self-confidence and a secure understanding of the world around them. For example, a high number of pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils embrace the chance to take on leadership responsibilities. Their work helps the school to achieve awards. Pupils choose and raise money for local charities that help people with cancer, and they support people with disabilities to access the performing arts.

Pupils have a secure knowledge of equality, diversity and tolerance. One pupil captured this by saying, 'This is a place where you can be yourself.' Pupils are ambitious about their future. They access a programme of careers information and guidance that prepares pupils of all abilities and interests very well for their next steps.

The school constantly strives to ensure that all pupils in all lessons receive the highest possible quality teaching. Governors provide a balance of support and challenge that helps leaders to evaluate the curriculum well. This ensures that the provision for pupils is outstanding. Staff feel highly valued. In particular, they have high praise for how leaders look after their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136606
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255101
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	1,529
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	304
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Anthony Walker
Headteacher	Matthew Fletcher
Website	www.rickmansworth.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 October 2017 under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The current headteacher took up post in September 2019.
- The number on roll has increased since the previous inspection. There has been an increase in the number of students on roll in the sixth form.
- The school currently makes use of three registered alternative provisions for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, computer science, history, German and physical education. For each deep dive, 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.
- Inspectors reviewed curriculum documentation in other subjects and visited a range of lessons in science, French, art and geography.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke to the staff with responsibility for SEND, behaviour, attendance, personal development, sixth-form provision and careers. They also reviewed a range of documentation in these areas, including bullying and behaviour logs.
- The lead inspector held meetings with early career teachers. He also met with the mentors to discuss how early career teachers are supported in the school.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors held formal and informal discussions with pupils from different year groups. Inspectors held formal meetings with staff, including the librarian and other support staff, and visited tutor time and an assembly. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from one of the alternative provisions used by the school.
- The lead inspector met with four representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke by phone to a representative from Herts for Learning, which has provided support and guidance for the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; reviewed records relating to safeguarding; discussed how allegations against staff are managed; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector considered the 277 responses and 182 free-text responses received during the inspection to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. He also considered the 78 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 512 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Wayne Jarvis, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Cathy Barr	Ofsted Inspector
Fiona Webb	Ofsted Inspector
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