

Inspection of a good school: New Rickstones Academy

Conrad Road, Witham, Essex CM8 2SD

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November 2023

Outcome

New Rickstones Academy continues to be a good school.

The principal of this school is Simon Gibbs. This school is part of Academies Enterprise Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rebecca Boomer-Clark, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Hall.

What is it like to attend this school?

At New Rickstones Academy, pupils display positive attitudes towards their education. They talk animatedly about how their school continues to improve. They enjoy their lessons and often feel challenged by their work. Pupils have lots of opportunities to develop their skills and interests outside of lessons. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics club and sports such as table tennis and football are particularly popular.

The atmosphere throughout the school is orderly. Pupils are polite and friendly. They move around the site in a calm and sensible manner. In lessons, they maintain high levels of concentration. Pupils very rarely disrupt each other's learning. They enjoy learning about diversity and differences and are very respectful of others. Pupils know that if anyone did or said anything inappropriate, adults would deal with it immediately. Pupils love that 'our school is somewhere that you can be yourself'.

Students in the sixth form are well supported by adults. They benefit from lessons that are well planned to help them do well. Students feel that the careers guidance they receive, both in sixth form and earlier, is very helpful in preparing them for their future. They particularly enjoyed their work experience opportunity in Year 12.

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

The school have worked effectively to ensure that pupils benefit from an ambitious curriculum across all key stages.

In the main, staff are skilled at delivering the intended curriculum, including in the sixth form. Adults provide pupils with appropriate work that supports them to achieve the aims of the curriculum. Activities are well planned to ensure pupils think deeply and embed the intended learning.

Teachers are skilled at using different techniques to remind pupils of what they already know or to see if there are any gaps in their knowledge or understanding. Staff use a range of strategies, such as questioning and modelling, to develop pupils' thinking and to help them achieve success. For example, in an English lesson, pupils were supported to analyse a model answer. This helped to give them the skills and confidence to successfully answer an essay question independently. Most pupils are well supported to achieve leaders' ambitious aims.

However, not all staff are consistently well trained to support all pupils to meet the ambition of the new key stage 3 curriculum. Sometimes, the work that is given to pupils lacks ambition for what they should achieve. In other instances, teachers check what pupils know, but they do not use this information to clarify pupils' misunderstandings. Where pupils have gaps in their knowledge or understanding, some teachers are not confident in how to adapt their teaching so these pupils can fully access the curriculum. This means some pupils do not achieve as highly as they should.

The school has effective processes in place for identifying and supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff know which pupils require extra support and are skilled at providing appropriate help where needed. A small group of pupils receive effective additional support to help them access the same curriculum as their peers. This targeted provision allows pupils to achieve well based on their starting points.

Leaders have ensured that reading is a priority. The school uses assessment information effectively to identify pupils who struggle with reading. Pupils who need extra support benefit from small group interventions. This enables them to become confident readers. Pupils also benefit from attending reading lessons in the library. They really enjoy these sessions, which allow them to quietly read and to discuss books that they enjoy.

Adults are consistent in ensuring that their high expectations for pupils' conduct are maintained. The school has ensured that most pupils' attendance is high. Pupils are safe and well looked after.

There are a broad range of extra-curricular activities on offer, and many pupils take up these opportunities. Pupils like developing their skills and hobbies. Clubs such as basketball, drama and a fantasy role-playing game are popular. Many sixth-form students enjoy the additional responsibility of supporting their younger peers in lessons.

School leaders and trust staff have appropriate systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe and receive a high-quality education. Leaders engage well with staff and the local community. Staff feel well supported. They are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A few teachers are not sufficiently well trained to deliver the ambition of the new key stage 3 curriculum. They do not always have the knowledge to plan and deliver lessons that are suitably ambitious for all pupils. Leaders need to ensure that all staff are appropriately supported and trained to deliver the full ambition of the curriculum, so all pupils achieve highly.
- A minority of teachers do not effectively adapt their teaching when gaps in pupils' knowledge or understanding have been identified. They do not provide pupils with targeted opportunities to get better in areas that they have struggled in. This means that, over time, some pupils do not meet the aims of the curriculum. The school needs to ensure that where gaps in knowledge or skills are identified, staff are skilled in providing pupils with appropriate activities to improve.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2018.

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	135651
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10295026
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	1,169
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	140
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Hall
CEO of the trust	Rebecca Boomer-Clark
Principal	Simon Gibbs
Website	www.newrickstonesacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered alternative provider and two unregistered alternative providers.
- 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

- 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, geography and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders and carried out lesson visits and work scrutiny in other subject areas.
- Inspectors met with the school special educational needs coordinator and scrutinised SEND support plans from a sample of pupils across different classes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors also reviewed documentation relating to governance.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and other trust staff who have delegated responsibility for governance.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's bullying and attendance records and met with leaders with responsibility for these areas.
- The lead inspector spoke to leaders with responsibility for pupils on alternative provision.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils from different classes across both days of inspection.
- The lead inspector considered 170 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as 168 free-text comments. The lead inspector also considered 68 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff and 158 pupil responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Brock

Ofsted Inspector

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