

Ridgeway School

Moorland Road, Plympton, Plymouth PL7 2RS

Inspection dates 13–14 January 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good academy

- The new Principal is providing dynamic leadership focused on rapid but sustainable improvement in all aspects of the academy's life.
- Subject and year leaders are a strength of the academy. They work very well together as a group and are having a positive impact on improving outcomes across the academy.
- Outcomes for pupils are now good, especially in the newly redesigned two-year Key Stage 3. In mathematics and modern foreign languages, outcomes are particularly strong across the academy.
- Teaching is good overall and is characterised by effective planning, high levels of challenge and useful feedback to pupils.
- Pupils are courteous and friendly and conduct themselves well around the academy. Behaviour in lessons is also good and pupils generally display positive attitudes to their learning.
- Pupils are well cared for by the academy and they learn how to lead safe and healthy lives.
- Governors are committed to improving the academy further and have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and what it needs to do next. They provide a good level of support and challenge to the senior leaders of the academy.

It is not yet an outstanding academy because

- The sixth form requires improvement. In particular, the study programmes followed by learners need to improve quickly by providing more substantial and meaningful work experience.
- There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in some subjects. Teachers do not always use questioning and marking as effective tools to help pupils make progress. Sometimes most-able pupils are not challenged enough.
- The numbers of learners in the sixth form who successfully move on from Year 12 to Year 13 are too low.
- Teaching does not always stimulate pupils' enthusiasm and as a result they become disengaged.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the academy no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that all teachers consistently:
 - use questioning to assess, probe and develop pupils' understanding
 - plan activities which stimulate pupils' love of learning and thirst for knowledge
 - use written and oral feedback to help pupils to improve their work
 - set a level of challenge in lessons that is appropriate to the abilities of all pupils, especially the most able.
- Improve the quality of education provided in the sixth form by ensuring that all learners are on appropriate study programmes. These programmes should include substantial and meaningful non-qualification activity, including work experience, that is tailored to their individual needs, interests and aspirations and prepares them well for the next stage of their education, training, apprenticeship or employment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is good

- The newly appointed Principal has already had a positive impact on the academy, as she did in her previous role as a deputy principal. She has a very clear understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses, and the academy's own self-evaluation was confirmed by the evidence gathered by the inspection team. She has made some strong appointments to key roles within the academy and these are already beginning to have an impact on improving the academy's performance. Staff morale is high and the vast majority of those who responded to the online staff survey said they were proud to work in the academy and that it is well managed.
- The Principal is ably supported by a strong team of senior leaders who also know the academy well. They monitor and evaluate academy performance well. Moreover, information about how current pupils are performing is forensically analysed and used successfully to drive the academy's work to improve outcomes for pupils. Leaders have developed a robust system for tracking pupils' academic performance and are well ahead of most schools in making the transition away from National Curriculum levels.
- Middle leaders, both those responsible for individual subjects and for progress in particular year groups, are an emerging strength in the academy. They meet regularly as a group and this collegiate approach is having a demonstrable impact on the sharing of good practice across departments and, consequently, on improving outcomes for pupils. These middle leaders, many relatively new in post, are bringing an energy to their roles which makes them an asset to the academy. They like the fact that they have been empowered by the senior leaders to innovate, but also clearly recognise their accountability for pupils' progress.
- Leadership of teaching is strong. A dual-track approach of monitoring and evaluation which is linked to focused training for teachers lies behind recent improvements in the quality of teaching. Moreover, the academy has a strong record of successfully working with teachers in order to improve their performance. Leaders make clear and appropriate links between teachers' performance and pay awards.
- Senior leaders recognise that the sixth form requires improvement and are addressing this. A new sixth form leader is now in post and is beginning to improve the quality of education on offer, but some of the initiatives have not yet had time to reveal their full impact.
- The curriculum has undergone recent redesign, with Key Stage 3 reduced to two years and pupils studying GCSEs or their equivalents over three years starting in Year 9. The academy has successfully used this process to rewrite all its overall plans for learning to ensure that pupils' progress is at the heart of the design of the curriculum. This process is one of the underlying reasons behind the recent improvements in outcomes for pupils. The curriculum in the sixth form offers a range of opportunities for learners to study both academic and vocational programmes, but the low retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13 demonstrates that some learners are not on the right courses.
- A range of opportunities exists for pupils to undertake sporting, musical or artistic activities outside lessons but results from the online survey of pupils indicate that less than half of pupils take up these opportunities on a regular basis.
- Academy leaders are beginning to analyse more effectively the pupil premium, the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils, but deeper analysis is still required in order to ensure that this funding is used to maximum effect. Funding provided for those pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up with other pupils is well used to provide extra opportunities for them to develop their reading and mathematical skills.
- The academy is developing a strong programme to ensure that new pupils in Year 7 successfully make the transition from primary to secondary school. Teachers from the academy visit local primary schools and pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 visit Ridgeway. This helps teachers to have a more accurate view of the abilities of pupils when they arrive in the academy, and to plan teaching more effectively.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is promoted well across the curriculum. Pupils display tolerance for people with different backgrounds and lifestyles, and can talk with maturity about related issues. Broadly speaking, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain although their knowledge of the dangers of radicalisation by extremist political ideologies is underdeveloped.

■ The governance of the academy

- Governance is good. Although small in size, the governing body is carrying out its role of strategic oversight of the academy very effectively. Governors provide the right balance of support and challenge and can talk clearly about how they have done this in particular instances, such as in the academy's drive to improve attendance.
- Governors are clearly committed to their work with the academy and make effective use of the information provided by the academy to identify areas of strength and weakness. They also have a clear insight into what governors themselves need to do to improve their own effectiveness. They have undertaken a skills audit to identify areas where governance needs strengthening, and have just begun to work with a national leader of governance. All this indicates a governing body that does not rest on its laurels but continually strives to make the academy better.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are regularly trained in child protection and safeguarding. The academy makes thorough checks on staff and these are recorded in line with current requirements. The link governor for safeguarding provides strong and effective monitoring of the academy's safeguarding arrangements. Key staff and governors are trained in safer recruiting. In short, the academy has a clear culture of safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- The best teaching, including that in the sixth form, is characterised by a high level of challenge and expectation. In English and mathematics, teachers' high expectations are evident across year groups and the ability range. Pupils thrive on the challenges they are set, for example, in lessons on percentages in mathematics in Year 7 and Year 9. Pupils with low literacy levels in Year 7 grappled enthusiastically with complex vocabulary relating to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, while high-ability pupils in Year 11 were able to think sophisticatedly about Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*. In some instances, however, teachers do not get the level of challenge correct and this impedes pupils' progress.
- When it is done well, as it is in modern foreign languages, questioning by teachers is used to probe, assess and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. This is not universal, however, and instances of less effective questioning do sometimes occur; this is the case in some science lessons.
- Teachers typically mark work and give feedback in line with the academy's policy. Most of this feedback gives pupils the necessary information and advice to help them improve their work, and the impact of this is evident in pupils' work. Pupils talk about how good feedback from teachers is very useful. The marking policy is not always followed, however, and this inconsistency means that on some occasions pupils are unclear about what they need to do next.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan teaching effectively and pupils say they experience a range of stimulating activities in lessons. Nonetheless, some teaching fails to engage and inspire pupils.
- Classroom routines are well established and pupils typically adapt themselves well to the different activities they undertake. No time is wasted in lessons.
- Many teachers are clearly planning well for the needs of disadvantaged pupils by targeting their teaching at the progress of these pupils.
- Homework is set in line with the academy's policy and is almost always used well to reinforce the progress that pupils make in lessons.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning and they are well trained, especially in the Enhanced Specialist Provision unit for pupils with autism.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils often demonstrate self-motivation and self-reliance. Many of them have clearly developed the habits of a successful learner. This is not universal, however, and there are rare instances of pupils switching off, especially when presented with uninspiring teaching.

- Pupils talk coherently about how the academy helps them to live healthy lives and to maintain physical and emotional well-being. They are also able to explain how they have learnt to stay safe, including when they are online.
- Pupils report little or no bullying but are confident that the academy would deal with it effectively should it occur.
- Most pupils take pride in their work but there are occasional examples of poor presentation and incomplete work. Academy leaders are addressing this issue by focusing on it as pupils join the academy, but it is too early to assess the impact of this work.
- Pupils respect those from different backgrounds and with different lifestyles, and as such are well-prepared for life in modern Britain. They say that they do not witness any racism or homophobia in the academy.
- The Enhanced Specialist Provision unit, which caters for the needs of pupils with autism, makes a good contribution to the personal development of the pupils it supports by helping them to access the full range of opportunities the academy offers.
- Sixth formers' personal development is well promoted by a range of extra-curricular activities, although there are insufficient opportunities for some of them to undertake meaningful work experience. Sixth formers' personal development is also helped by the leadership roles they undertake in the academy, including helping younger pupils with their learning.
- A number of sixth formers receive part or all of their education off site and their personal development, behaviour and welfare are on a par with those who stay on site.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are courteous and friendly and they conduct themselves well. Pupils wear their uniform well and move round the site in an orderly and cheerful manner. When asked to help other pupils or adults, they do so readily.
- Most pupils and virtually all staff believe that behaviour in the academy is at least good, and observations in lessons and around the academy confirm this. The few instances of poor behaviour are effectively dealt with by teachers and are not allowed to interrupt learning significantly.
- The academy environment is rich in its displays of pupils' work, particularly their art, and the pupils treat this environment with respect.
- Attendance is improving but there is still room for further improvement, especially in disadvantaged pupils' attendance. Persistent absence is also reducing.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Outcomes for pupils are improving. Across all year groups, including the sixth form but especially in Key Stage 3, pupils' work and the academy's analysis of its information on current pupils' performance show that pupils are generally making better progress than in the past. The rate of this progress is somewhat variable across subjects. For example, it is particularly strong in modern foreign languages and also good in mathematics. English is also showing signs of steady improvement. In science, however, inspectors found progress to be slower, often as a result of less effective teaching.
- Measured in terms of pupils' progress, the GCSE results in 2015 are the best for a number of years and show a particularly marked increase on the results in 2014. In most subject areas progress is now above average or improving. This was accompanied by an eight percentage point rise in the proportion of pupils getting five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics.
- From their different starting points, the proportion of pupils who make the progress expected of them in English and mathematics is broadly in line with national figures. In the case of disadvantaged pupils, this has not been true in the past, especially in English, but current disadvantaged pupils are now making good progress.
- Pupils with disabilities or with special educational needs make good progress in the academy. In the 2015 GCSE results, those with either a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan did well compared with national figures.
- In Year 10 and Year 11 there are some gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding; this impedes progress and is a result of poorer-quality teaching in the past. The academy is working to address these gaps and has a clear long-term plan to ensure that no such shortfalls exist in the future.

- In some subjects, such as mathematics and modern foreign languages, most-able pupils do well and attain the proportion of A* and A grades that would be expected from pupils of their ability. This is not consistently the case, however, across all subject areas.
- Pupils read widely and this is encouraged by the academy's effective use of a targeted reading programme. More books are also being borrowed from the school library by pupils. Pupils' reading ages are improving and, for example, in one Year 7 class of pupils with low literacy levels, a majority have improved their reading ages by one year or more in the space of only one term.
- Historic underachievement has meant that in the past pupils have not been well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. As the progress of pupils improves, however, so do their opportunities to achieve relevant qualifications and to go on to realise their ambitions.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- Senior leaders acknowledge that the sixth form requires improvement, particularly in terms of greater consistency in the outcomes for learners. They have a clear understanding of the next steps that need to be taken to improve the quality of education provided in the sixth form. A new sixth form leader has been in post since the beginning of the year and better systems to track learners' attendance and performance are now in place. These are beginning to have an impact on learners' progress and personal development.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes offered by the academy are not good enough as they do not provide sufficient opportunities for learners to undertake purposeful work experience tailored to their interests and aspirations. This is particularly true of those learners who follow study programmes that only involve A levels. As a result, learners are not as well prepared for the next stage of their education, training, employment or apprenticeship as they could be, particularly in terms of their employability skills.
- Too few learners successfully make the transition from Year 12 to Year 13 and go on to complete two years in the sixth form. This indicates that a significant minority of learners in Year 12 are not having their needs correctly identified or met, and that the quality of careers advice and guidance for those entering the sixth form is not good enough.
- Teaching in the sixth form is typically good and often characterised by high expectations. In one Spanish lesson, for example, learners were expected to talk to each other with a high degree of fluency and were able to do this. Nonetheless, in some other lessons there is also a degree of inconsistency in terms of the level of challenge, the quality of planning and the usefulness of marking and feedback in helping learners to make progress.
- Outcomes for learners in public examinations are broadly in line with the national average but within subjects there is a great deal of variation in outcomes for individual learners. Learners who start the same courses with the same GCSE results sometimes attain widely different final grades.
- Learners on vocational courses currently make slightly better progress than those on academic courses.
- Of those who enter the sixth form without a grade C in English and mathematics, an increasing number are improving their grades when they retake these subjects. Nonetheless, there are still too many pupils completing their sixth form education without a good pass in English or mathematics.
- Those learners who undertake part or all of their education at other schools or training providers make progress at broadly the same rate as others. The academy monitors their attendance and performance effectively in collaboration with these other providers.
- Many learners take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities that the academy offers and this makes a good contribution to their personal development, although poor-quality work experience hinders the personal development of some learners. Some sixth formers were observed effectively supporting catch-up lessons for Year 7 pupils in English and mathematics.

School details

Unique reference number	136556
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10008913

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	852
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Hutchings
Principal	Lisa Boorman
Telephone number	01752 338373
Website	www.ridgeway.plymouth.sch.uk
Email address	principal@ridgeway.plymouth.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 April 2014

Information about this academy

- Ridgeway School is a secondary school of below average size.
- Nearly all pupils are of White British ethnicity and very few have a first language that is not English.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is slightly below average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided to the academy to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is higher than the national average.
- The academy has a unit, known as Enhanced Specialist Provision, which supports pupils with autism.
- The academy meets the government’s current floor standards. These set the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 4.
- The academy is a member of the post-16 Plym Consortium along with three other schools: Coombe Dean, Hele’s School and Plymstock School. Some learners in the sixth form attend courses at these partner schools.
- Some learners in the sixth form are educated offsite at Achievement Training, Bickleigh Stables, Construction Training South West, Leap, South West Art Warehouse, Discovery College, Norpro Training, Venus Training, Cornwall College Saltash, City College Plymouth or GHQ Training.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook observations in 38 lessons across all year groups and a range of subjects. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with members of the academy's senior leadership team. Pupils' work was also examined during the time spent observing in lessons.
- Inspectors had discussions with the Principal, leaders at all levels and other members of staff. The lead inspector also met with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Discussions with pupils from all year groups also took place.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including the academy's own self-evaluation, governors' minutes, and information about pupils' progress. Documentation relating to safeguarding and child protection was closely examined, as were the records of the checks that the academy makes on teachers.
- There were two responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and inspectors also looked closely at the responses to the online surveys of pupils and staff at the academy.

Inspection team

Stephen Lee, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Iain Freeland	Ofsted Inspector
Neville Coles	Ofsted Inspector

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