

Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	136731
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	385466
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,640
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Professor John Crewdson
Headteacher	Liz Nicholls
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2008
School address	Ashton Road Lancaster LA1 4RS
Telephone number	01524 64496
Fax number	01524847069
Email address	admin@ripley.lancs.sch.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 52 lessons taught by 51 teachers. They held meetings with the senior leaders, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, students and the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors observed the academy's work, and looked at documentation including data regarding students' progress, improvement plans, the academy's self-evaluation, monitoring records and procedures for safeguarding students. They analysed 642 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, as well as 113 completed by staff and 148 responses from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The consistency with which teaching promotes outstanding learning and progress across the curriculum.
- The impact of training school status and the academy's various specialisms on provision and outcomes in the main academy and in the sixth form.
- The success with which leaders and managers at all levels foster, share and celebrate best practice.

Information about the school

Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy converted to academy status on 1 May 2011, replacing Ripley St Thomas Church of England High School. It is much larger than the average sized secondary school. The large majority of students are White British, with a very small number from ethnic minority backgrounds. Almost all students speak English as their first language. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is much lower than average, although an average number have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. The academy is a specialist college for languages, technology, Leading Edge Partnerships and the rural dimension, as well as being a Training School, Gifted and Talented Lead School and Support School designated by the National College for School Leadership. It holds numerous awards, including Investor in People, Healthy School status, International School and the Cultural Diversity Quality Standard Gold award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school? **1**

The school's capacity for sustained improvement **1**

Main findings

Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy provides an outstanding education for its students and demonstrates excellence in all aspects of its work. Students' attainment is high and their achievement is outstanding, both in academic terms and in the way they develop into mature, confident, reflective and compassionate young people who enjoy learning and make a significant contribution to their community.

The academy combines proud traditions with innovative practice to provide its students with excellent teaching, a vibrant curriculum and highly effective care, guidance and support. It encourages all its students and staff to 'Believe.....' This concept underpins the academy's Christian foundation and also fosters the self-esteem, creativity and reflection that characterise teachers, leaders and students. As one student commented, 'the Ripley family is very special and we are proud to be part of it.' The academy is at the forefront of development in design and technology teaching and has made excellent use of its wide ranging-specialisms to create exceptional experiences for its students.

Incisive and continuous self-evaluation mean that the academy's many strengths are recognised, shared and celebrated; any underachievement is quickly identified and addressed. Increasingly outward-facing leadership has brought many benefits to the academy and its partners. As a Training School and Support School, the academy provides extensive and beneficial support to other schools, a process that has brought new dimensions to the academy's own work. Best practice is explored at national and international levels and provides a point of reference for the academy's ongoing improvement. The sixth form is outstanding and makes a major contribution to the ethos of the main academy. Attainment in the sixth form is above average and rising impressively in response to the same outstanding provision and leadership that are evident in Key Stages 3 and 4. The academy has built effectively on the outstanding outcomes noted at its previous inspection and has no major areas for improvement at this time. The academy's impressive trajectory of improvement, strong management systems and outstanding governance mean that it has outstanding capacity to improve and provides outstanding value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The academy's outstanding performance means there are no areas requiring substantial improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

From attainment which is variable but broadly above average when they join the academy in Year 7, students make outstanding progress to reach high standards. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make excellent progress. The academy's robust data indicate sustained high achievement that has improved year-on-year at a faster rate than is found nationally. Rates of progress in English and mathematics are significantly higher than average. Attainment in the school's specialist subjects is impressively high, with an increasing proportion of students achieving the best possible grades. Attendance is high for all groups.

Students demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. They are ambitious, independent and good-humoured, showing keenness to collaborate with each other both during and beyond lessons. The academy's palpable family ethos means that students are confident and resilient in problem-solving; they relish challenge. Students are considerate, polite, punctual and courteous. Their very well-developed skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) equip them effectively for further study, training or employment. Many make an outstanding contribution to the school and the local community, for instance, as subject prefects, buddies, councillors and sports leaders. They support a range of charities and are excellent ambassadors for the academy. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The academy's Christian foundation has a very positive impact on students' behaviour, and through a broad range of national and international links, they develop excellent relationships with people of different cultural backgrounds. Students make healthy choices, participate enthusiastically in a wide range of sports and take mature responsibility for their own and each other's safety.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Outstanding teaching underpins students' outstanding learning and progress. The academy has worked successfully to ensure that all teachers plan and deliver 'The Ripley Excellent Lesson.' These include structured opportunities for students to share their learning; teachers consistently demand and receive commitment, engagement and participation from students. Learning proceeds at a rapid pace because of teachers' high levels of expertise, excellent relationships with students, top quality resources and the outstanding provision made by support staff.

Teachers enthuse their students to achieve and enjoy. This was exemplified in an outstanding dance lesson in which students made exceptional progress in developing 'Bollywood-style' performances; they were successful because they felt able to take risks within a supportive environment. Resources, including ICT, are used imaginatively, as seen in a highly effective textiles lesson, in which students researched pop art themes and translated them into appliqué designs. Teachers consistently strive to develop approaches that motivate and inspire students; fast-paced modern foreign languages lessons include varied activities that continually build on and reinforce students' learning and enhance their communication skills. Through insightful questioning, teachers challenge students to deepen their understanding and articulate their ideas; this was powerfully demonstrated in the exploration of poetry in several English lessons.

Students are very clear as to their targets and the steps they should take to achieve them. Teacher's marking of students' work usually includes clear advice as well as praise for their achievements. Students are skilled in assessing their own work, and sensitive and perceptive in assessing that of their peers.

The outstanding curriculum is kept under constant review to ensure that it meets students' needs. A wide variety of academic subjects is offered, including several languages and technology options. Agriculture and horticulture are included in the curriculum; the academy's farm enables students to learn about sustainability within a unique context. The academy has ensured that students' basic skills acquisition is everyone's business; literacy skills are explicitly taught across the curriculum, with additional support provided for those students who require it. Extra-curricular provision is a major strength of the academy, encompassing a wide range of sporting, cultural and social activities.

Students receive outstanding care, guidance and support. An excellent transition programme means that students are ready to learn on arrival at the academy. Pastoral support is very strongly focused on the 'Ripley family' and students speak of being confident in having someone to ask if they need help. The support provided by teachers and assistants is complemented by that of the chaplain and is greatly valued. Staff are committed to removing any barriers to achievement that students might face and have made a remarkable difference to the achievements of students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
--------------------------------	----------

Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Under the tenacious and dynamic leadership of the Principal, the academy has maintained a strong trajectory of improvement. Detailed planning, assiduous monitoring and honest self-evaluation typify all aspects of the academy's life. The academy is outward-facing and has established strong partnerships with a range of schools and universities to ensure that it can develop best practice and also share its own expertise and resources. As a National Leader of Education, the Principal has had significant involvement in school-to-school support, as have many of the staff. The impact of their work in partner schools has been extremely positive and has not detracted from performance at the academy, where standards have continued to rise. The Principal articulates a powerful vision for the future development of Ripley St Thomas, which is subscribed to by the academy's community. The morale of staff and students is high and new challenges are enthusiastically explored, including through high level research projects undertaken by a various teachers.

The academy functions smoothly as an inclusive and harmonious community, which promotes equality of opportunity and does not tolerate any form of discrimination or harassment. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary; child protection is everyone's responsibility and a proportionate approach has been taken with regard to maintaining the safety of the academy's large and complex site. Community cohesion is effectively promoted. Strong links have been forged with diverse communities at national and international levels. Students also support cohesion within the more immediate community, including through the Duke of Edinburgh scheme which is supported very well. The skilled and experienced governing body plays a significant role in the life of the academy, both in shaping its strategic priorities and in supporting staff and students in a variety of ways. Leaders at all levels are passionate about their work, and willingly seek out opportunities to make a difference. A well-established coaching programme enables teachers to learn from each other. The academy has a strong commitment to teacher training and has proved to be highly successful in nurturing talent. Self-evaluation is rigorous, accurate and regular, forming an effective base for improvement planning.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1

The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Attainment is high at A level and improving rapidly at AS level. Students' achievements are particularly impressive in psychology, sociology and technology qualifications. The academy has worked hard to raise standards in all subjects, with the result that progress has accelerated and outcomes for all groups of students are outstanding. Sixth form students make a major contribution to the life of the academy, for instance by leading thought-provoking assemblies. They are well-regarded as role models by younger students. The new sixth form centre, with its excellent facilities, is greatly appreciated by students. Provision in the sixth form matches that in the main academy because the 'Ripley family' principles continue to inform teaching and support. Students are self-motivated, creative and determined to do well; there is a high rate of progression to university. Teachers skilfully develop students' higher order thinking skills through carefully planned courses. They provide valuable feedback and consistently promote high standards. The sixth form curriculum is essentially academic, complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for students to find their talents and research career paths, for example, students who aspire to become teachers shadow an initial teacher training course. Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding in its ambition and rigour.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was much higher than average. Their responses to virtually all questions were more positive than found nationally. A small number expressed concerns about the academy's guidance to help them support their children's learning. Inspectors took note of this view in considering the range of advice available to parents and carers in different media, and the opportunities available to them to speak with staff. Inspectors concluded that the academy engages very effectively with parents and carers and provides them with high quality information and guidance. A few parents and carers raised specific issues regarding their own children's learning. There was no pattern to these concerns, which inspectors shared with senior leaders, without compromising confidentiality.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ripley St Thomas Church of England High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 642 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,640 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	290	45	311	48	29	5	5	1
The school keeps my child safe	330	51	297	46	6	1	3	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	181	28	377	59	59	9	9	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	221	34	344	54	42	7	7	1
The teaching is good at this school	246	38	353	55	14	2	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	160	25	361	56	75	12	10	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	186	29	387	60	37	6	6	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	205	32	329	51	40	6	7	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	202	31	378	59	26	4	7	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	223	35	337	52	34	5	11	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	147	23	362	56	53	8	14	2
The school is led and managed effectively	258	40	323	50	19	3	9	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	308	48	289	45	26	4	6	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy, Lancaster LA1 4RS

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your academy recently. Particular thanks to those students who gave up their time to speak with inspectors and those who completed the questionnaire. Your views helped us to reach our judgement that all aspects of your academy are outstanding.

We found Ripley St Thomas to be a friendly and exciting place that inspires you to do, and be, your very best. Many of you told us how being part of the 'Ripley Family' makes you feel safe, supported and valued. In return, you make a huge contribution to your academy and wider community through your excellent behaviour and willingness to take on significant responsibility. Your teachers work extremely hard to ensure that all of you make rapid progress and acquire the skills that will help you to be successful and happy in your future lives. You respond to the academy's continual encouragement to 'believe' and through this you develop talents and aspirations in many ways.

The academy provides you with many special experiences that you clearly appreciate, as indicated by your high levels of attendance. You were keen to tell us about the impact of the academy's specialisms on your learning, particularly in technology and modern foreign languages. Many of you explained to us how much you enjoy the academy's farm and value the peace of the chapel. You take part enthusiastically in a vast range of extra-curricular activities and willingly volunteer your time and energy to making the academy even better.

We hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy your education, and wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.