

Richmond Park Academy

Park Avenue, East Sheen, London, SW14 8RG

Inspection dates

24–25 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher's lively and persuasive vision is raising the academy's standing locally. Senior leaders and the academy's sponsors are supporting the headteacher well in turning the vision into reality. Ambitious and rigorously checked targets, both for teachers and students, are pushing up standards.
- All groups of students, including disabled students, those needing additional help and those eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for specific groups of pupils, including those entitled to free school meals) now make good progress. Results exceed the government's national floor standards, the minimum level expected for students' attainment and progress. Results in mathematics are particularly strong.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 speak of 'inspirational and committed teachers' as the academy's key strength. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and plan lessons carefully. They use appropriate resources and manage behaviour calmly and effectively.
- Staff and students respect cultural, social and individual differences. This contributes to what a student described as 'a really warm atmosphere'. Students feel secure and are rightly confident that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure they are safe. Behaviour in and out of lessons is good.
- Choice of subjects is broad and balanced, with the flexibility to support individual needs and interests. After-school activities encourage students to pursue additional subjects, to attend revision and booster sessions and to participate in sports and the arts.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' writing, reading, communication and mathematical skills are not always given enough attention in lessons.
- Attendance is average for most groups, although improving.
- In lessons, teachers do not always check and respond to how students are learning, and able students are not always fully challenged.
- Marking does not consistently balance praise with specific guidance on how to improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons, looked at students' books and discussed work with students in each key stage and across a range of subjects.
- They discussed professional development and the quality of teaching and learning with teachers and academy leaders. The discussions also considered support for disabled students, those needing additional help and those eligible for the pupil premium.
- Inspectors reviewed documents relating to governance, academy improvement, organisation of subjects, checking of students' attainment and progress, reviewing of strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, and use of the pupil premium. .
- They met with the Chair and Vice Chairs of the academy's Governing Body, and held a conference call with the sponsor's Regional Director of Education and the academy's former Executive Principal, now National Director for the sponsor. The main focus for these conversations was how governors and the sponsors checked that the academy is providing a good quality of education for all its students. Inspectors took account of 30 responses entered on Parent View, the on-line questionnaire for parents.

Inspection team

Patricia Metham, Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Cox	Her Majesty's Inspector
Babrul Matin	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy opened in September 2010 and is sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). It is smaller than the average secondary school, with more boys than girls.
- A little over half of the students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest being of African and Caribbean heritage. Over a quarter of the students have English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is much higher than average, as are the proportions of students requiring additional help, those supported by the 'school action' and 'school action plus' programmes or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The academy has specialisms in English and business and in information and communication technology. It also holds the Artsmark within Arts Council England's programme to enable schools to strengthen their work in the arts.
- The academy belongs to the Richmond Teaching Schools Alliance, which includes 11 primary schools, eight secondary schools, two special schools and other education providers, such as the Central School of Speech and Drama. It is also an active participant in the Richmond Family of Schools, including joint planning for the academy's forthcoming sixth form.
- The standards achieved by students exceed the current government floor standards, the minimum expected levels for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve in lessons, including the more able
 - when marking work, balance encouragement with specific advice on how to improve, particularly for students needing extra help
 - challenge all students to be more imaginative and to raise the level of their thinking
 - pay close attention in all lessons to students' reading, writing and communication skills
 - pay close attention in all lessons to students' ability to use numbers and mathematics, when appropriate, to solve problems.
- Improve attendance further by:
 - reducing the number of students who are persistently absent, through extending and strengthening links with their parents and carers
 - applying rigorously the system of sanctions and rewards to ensure that students in all year groups attend regularly, particularly older students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most students enter the academy with lower-than-average academic standards. They make good progress across Years 7 to 11 and achieve results that are broadly average.
- The proportion of students making expected progress or better, especially in mathematics, has improved since the academy opened. Figures for the current year suggest that standards are rising.
- Learning in lessons and the work in students' books both reinforce the picture of sustained improvement. English work from Years 7, 9 and 11, for example, shows tasks matched to most abilities and students' writing becoming more accurate, substantial and organised.
- Although the assignments set for able students require them to use critical and analytical skills, these students are not always challenged to be more independent, enterprising and imaginative. The academy recognises the need to increase the proportion of A* and A grades achieved at GCSE.
- Early entry for GCSE has proved a successful option for able students in mathematics. While a proportion of students benefited from early entry for English GCSE, entry for the most able was delayed to increase their chances of achieving high grades in English Language and English Literature. Provisional results for 2012 show a sharp increase in the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent, including English and mathematics.
- Provisional results for 2012 show students supported by the pupil premium exceeding predictions based on their earlier work - sometimes by three or four GCSE grades - after individual tuition, mentoring, small-group teaching by senior staff and additional support in information and communication technology. Just under a third of students benefit from the pupil premium. Results achieved by these students taking GCSE or equivalent in 2012 were broadly in line with those achieved by other academy students and by all students nationally, closing the achievement gap that was apparent in 2011.
- An academy-wide campaign to promote reading is effective, especially with Years 7 and 8 and with boys. Students respond positively to activities such as 'Drop Everything And Read' (DEAR) and the accelerated reading programme.
- Disabled students, and those needing additional help, progress as well as others. All teachers have regularly updated information about the needs and learning styles of students in their classes and about the most appropriate strategies to use. Students also benefit from small-group teaching and in-class support from specialist teaching assistants.
- Most of the Parent View responses expressed confidence in students' progress and in the value of the homework set. These views echoed inspection findings.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teaching is good or better. Teachers have secure and enthusiastic subject knowledge; they plan carefully, pay attention to individual needs and learning styles, have productive questioning skills and use technology confidently. They are keen to share best practice and benefit from the academy's programme of professional development.
- In the outstanding lessons, teachers challenged students to 'dig deeper', to test their assumptions against the available evidence and to reflect on the progress they had made. Lessons were lively and students' interest was sustained through a variety of activities. In a Year 9 history lesson, for example, the teacher drew on old newsreels, poetry, interviews with those closely linked to the events being explored, and transcripts of a First World War court martial that led to the execution for cowardice of a young soldier suffering from shell-shock. Students considered the evidence and imagined the context in which the soldier was condemned – an approach that contributed significantly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- In the few less effective lessons seen, able pupils were not fully challenged and opportunities

were missed for them to strengthen their own learning and skills by taking the lead in group activities. In these lessons, teachers did not regularly take stock of and respond to what and how students were learning. On occasion, they spent too long explaining, so the lesson was slow, or gave students tasks which were too difficult, so they gained little from the activity.

- On the whole, marking is regular and constructive, with students responding to teachers' corrections and questions. Too often, however, teachers offer encouragement without providing specific guidance on how to improve or without challenging students to be more ambitious and enterprising. Lack of such guidance slows the progress of students who need additional help and lack of challenge slows down the most able.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Students treat each other and adults with cheerful courtesy. Differences of culture, lifestyle, ethnic background and upbringing are accepted as natural in this diverse and cohesive community. Students are keen to succeed and take pride in the academy's rising reputation.
- Students understand the forms bullying can take, including cyber-bullying, and are clear about how to respond. Older students explain that incidents are symptoms of immaturity rather than engrained prejudice and are dealt with promptly and effectively. Students feel safe.
- The academy's code of behaviour and its sanctions and rewards are well understood. Firm and consistent action is taken when students step over clearly defined boundaries. Fixed-term exclusions have been high but the numbers are now reducing as these expectations and responses become well-established. Most parents justifiably feel that behaviour is well managed.
- Persistent absence by a small number of students and a more casual attitude to attendance by some older students present a challenge which the academy is tackling vigorously. More insistent contact with previously unsupportive families, the visible presence of senior staff at the start of each day, and a prompt and firm response to unauthorised absence are improving overall attendance and punctuality. Current attendance is stronger than at the same point in the previous year.

The leadership and management

are good

- Leaders and managers share a commitment to drive up standards, provide a broad and sturdy foundation for students' future well-being and establish the academy as the school of choice within its locality. These priorities are backed by well-directed investment in resources and staffing and are enthusiastically communicated within and beyond the academy by the headteacher and her leadership team. The growing support for the academy locally and rising numbers into Year 7 show that this combination is working.
- Individual members of staff have clear roles and responsibilities. How well these are being carried out is checked rigorously through formal and informal observations of teaching, scrutiny of students' work and analysis of the progress and standards achieved by different groups. Whole-staff and individual professional development is shaped by information gathered from these checks. The impact can be seen in the increasing amount of teaching that is good or better and in students' improving results.
- Senior leaders are aware that sometimes teachers' expectations are not high enough and that the quality of written and spoken feedback to students is variable and does not always help students to set their own ambitious targets. These issues are being tackled through coaching and mentoring, and good practice is becoming more widely embedded.
- Equality of opportunity and respect are woven into all aspects of the academy's life. Gaps in the standards reached and progress made by different groups are small and are steadily narrowing as a result of well-targeted support.
- Students describe Year 7 as 'a stepping stone from primary to secondary', with teaching groups and schemes of work well matched to differing abilities and previous learning. Short courses in Year 9 enable students to sample a range of subjects so that their choices in Years 10 and 11

are confident and appropriate. Academic and vocational options successfully meet all needs and interests.

- The academy's specialisms in English and business and in information and communication technology do not currently make a significant impact on the way in which other subjects are taught or on the choices students make.
- Through after-hours courses, clubs and activities students can take up minority subjects such as classical civilisation, reinforce their learning through revision sessions and participate in sports and the arts. These opportunities are well-supported.
- Leaders and managers ensure that students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is strongly promoted through different subjects and through encouragement to debate complex issues with maturity and sensitivity – the ethics of war, for example. Students are encouraged to take on leadership roles within and beyond the academy and to practise team-building and collaboration.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Leadership of the governing body is strong and well-informed. Committees that deal specifically with students' results and with the quality of teaching examine closely whether teaching is improving students' progress and standards. Governors are knowledgeable and analyse carefully information about different groups. This includes feedback from annual faculty reviews, which they discuss with members of the senior leadership team. When necessary, they ask for more detailed reports and checks.
- Governors have very clear expectations of those teachers and subject leaders who are on the upper pay scales. Governors analyse in detail the progress and standards of students taught by these teachers. Where there is evidence that aspects of subject leadership or the performance of particular groups are falling below expectations then governors quickly trigger a review.
- Governors keep a watchful eye on how the pupil premium is spent. They require the headteacher and her senior team to demonstrate that it is having a positive impact. Information about the progress of eligible students and their successes at GCSE and equivalent indicate that the pupil premium is closing gaps between these students and others.
- Safeguarding arrangements are thorough, including: safe recruitment procedures; regularly updated child protection training; health and safety checks; and risk assessment.
- While continuing to oversee the academy's development, the Academies Enterprise Trust has stepped back from close involvement in day-to-day leadership and management. Checks and support are provided by the AET's Regional Director for Education. The AET also provides management systems and resources and support from subject specialists who advise on schemes of work, assist in planning, coach staff and demonstrate good practice.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.

School details

Unique reference number	136208
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	399816

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	505
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Danciger
Headteacher	Ms Lesley Kirby
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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