

Maple Court Academy

Beverley Drive, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 0QD

Inspection dates 16–17 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement requires improvement because progress is too variable in some classes and year groups. Some pupils do not make enough progress.
- Attainment in mathematics is not high enough and progress is not fast enough.
- There is not enough good-quality teaching to ensure that most pupils make consistently good progress and achieve overall standards in line with the national average.
- Teachers do not always set high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially of the more-able pupils, for whom work is sometimes too easy.
- Although most pupils behave well, a minority sometimes disrupt the learning of other pupils.
- The leadership and management of the academy are in a period of transition. Recently developed systems for checking on the quality of teaching are not rigorous enough.
- The new governing body has ambitious plans but they are at a very early stage of being implemented and no impact can yet be measured.

The school has the following strengths

- Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They respond well to good leadership and teaching and make good progress, although their attainment remains well below the national expectation for their age.
- The teaching of reading is good in both key stages so that pupils make good progress to achieve average standards in reading by the end of Year 6.
- The academy takes good care of pupils. Most say that they feel safe and enjoy taking responsibility around the school. Most parents agree that their children are safe.
- Good-quality personal support and specialist teaching for; disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and children whose circumstances make them vulnerable, build the confidence of these pupils and help them to make the same progress as other groups of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Three inspectors visited 19 lessons and observed 16 teachers' lessons. Several of these were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited short sessions for small groups of pupils and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed playtime, lunchtime and two assemblies.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and other staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the sponsor academy.
- Documents, including academy records of pupils' progress, development planning, safeguarding policies and records relating to behaviour, safety and attendance, were inspected. A range of information on the performance of the academy in comparison to other schools was analysed. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books in different subjects.
- There were not enough responses to register on Parent View, the online questionnaire. Inspectors considered the views of many parents by talking to them as they brought their children to school.
- Inspectors received the views of staff through discussions and a review of the responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Blackburne

Additional Inspector

Marian Thomas

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Maple Court Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 June 2013. The academy sponsor is Stoke-on-Trent College. The academy is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is high and includes over three quarters of all pupils. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well above average at school action, and above average at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs.
- The number of pupils who join or leave the academy other than at the usual times is high and is steadily increasing.
- There is no information yet to indicate whether the academy meets the government's current floor standard, the expected minimum standards for attainment and progress.
- The headteacher will retire at the end of this academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently at least good, in order to raise pupils' achievement, by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils, particularly the more-able, are capable of achieving by providing more challenging work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to work independently and spend less time listening to teachers' lengthy introductions to lessons and activities
 - making sure that teachers check pupils' understanding in the course of lessons
 - when marking pupils' work, setting higher expectations for the quantity of work and the quality of presentation in books.
- Improve progress in mathematics in both key stages by:
 - increasing teachers' subject knowledge
 - strengthening pupils' problem-solving skills
 - reducing the number of worksheets so that pupils have more work in their books.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - improving the way a minority of teachers manage behaviour within their classrooms so that disruptions to learning are eradicated
 - improving the rigour of systems to check on the quality of teaching and learning
 - providing more opportunities for staff to observe good practice within and beyond the academy
 - ensuring that the governors devise systems to find out for themselves how well the academy is doing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment at the end of Year 6 is in line with the national average in reading, just below in writing and well below the expected standard in mathematics. Few pupils reach the higher Level 5 in any subject.
- Pupils make the slowest progress in mathematics. This is because many lack confidence in problem solving and some quickly give up when faced with more challenging questions. Sometimes the work given to more-able pupils is too easy for them.
- Pupils do best in the Early Years Foundation Stage where teaching is consistently good. Children enter the Reception class with skills well below what is expected for their age. Some children have no pre-school school experience before joining the Reception class. All children make good progress across the year, although their attainment is still well below expectations by the time they enter Year 1.
- Progress in reading is good because reading is well taught in all classes and the academy has improved the resources for reading. Many pupils say that they enjoy reading and are proud of their progress.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do as well as other pupils in their class. Where progress is good, because teaching is good, they also progress well.
- The achievement of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is in line with that of others in their class and sometimes they do better than other pupils in the academy. The academy provides additional help for these pupils by increasing their support in lessons, sometimes offering one-to-one sessions and providing emotional support where necessary.
- The pupils who join the academy in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 settle quickly and make progress in line with that of other pupils.
- The academy has its own resource, the Thinking Centre, for pupils who find school difficult and whose behaviour can sometimes be challenging. Records show that the behaviour of the small number of pupils who use the centre has improved significantly but their progress is slower than that of other pupils and some achieve less well. This is because the focus is on improving their behaviour rather than increasing their achievement.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because the pace of learning is slower and pupils do not always make as much progress as they should. Sometimes this is because teachers give too lengthy an introduction to the lesson or activity, leaving less time for pupils to learn actively. Sometimes in lessons teachers do not check work regularly to find where pupils are struggling and so miss opportunities to give clear guidance on how to overcome these difficulties.
- Teachers do not set high enough expectations for what the pupils can achieve so that some tasks are too easy. On other occasions, especially in mathematics lessons, the pupils are not clear about what they are learning and find the work difficult. A minority of teachers are less confident when teaching mathematics.
- Some teachers use too many worksheets, particularly in mathematics, so that pupils do not get into the habit of working in their books, improving the layout and presentation of their work and improving their basic skills.
- Where teaching is good, pupils relish the opportunity to complete tasks rapidly and successfully and celebrate their achievements. An example of this was seen in a Year 2 lesson in which quick-fire questions and answers to review work done the previous day soon led on to new challenges for pupils to set problem-solving questions for each other so that pace and progress were rapid.
- Teaching is consistently good in the Early Years Foundation Stage where all adults make a

strong contribution to learning and progress. Children work well together in a stimulating and interesting environment.

- In lessons teachers often use questioning well and useful opportunities are provided for pupils to discuss their answers and other ideas with one another. This has a positive effect on developing their speaking and listening skills.
- Teaching assistants are usually effective in supporting the learning of individuals or small groups of pupils who need extra help. There is a good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants.
- Reading is given a high priority. The well-organised programme helps pupils to enjoy reading and make good progress.
- Teachers mark books regularly but sometimes pupils do not complete their work, the presentation of work is untidy and not enough advice is given to tell pupils how to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- In some classes, where teachers expect too little, there are minor behaviour problems among a minority of pupils whose lack of concentration slows the progress of the other pupils.
- Pupils expressed few concerns about bullying; most feel safe in school and say that adults deal with any issues quickly. They show an understanding of different kinds of bullying and are able to think about how bullying can be avoided.
- Good systems have been established for managing behaviour around the academy and at playtime and lunchtime. Few parents raised concerns and few incidents are recorded in the behaviour records. The introduction of the Thinking Centre for pupils whose behaviour falls below the expected standards has been helpful in supporting these pupils.
- Pupils are friendly and show good manners in making visitors welcome. They interact well with one another.
- Pupils have a clear idea about how to keep safe and are aware of the hazards relating to riding bikes, talking to strangers and use of the internet.
- Attendance is below the national average. The academy is working hard to improve attendance so that it is slowly increasing. Attendance is given a high priority and the academy rewards those pupils who attend regularly.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders have an established programme to observe teaching and usually know how well each teacher is doing. However, some of the judgements about teaching have been over generous. The quality of teaching overall has been affected by the unavoidable absence of some of the academy's strongest teachers. Staff training is a priority and the headteacher has ensured that all staff know they are accountable for the progress their pupils make. Pay and performance measures are securely linked to the achievement of the pupils.
- The deputy headteacher has developed an effective system for checking on the progress of every pupil. This has recently been strengthened by making more frequent checks. Nevertheless, the full impact has yet to be seen in improving progress and the achievement of pupils. Where leaders see the need for stronger action, pupil progress meetings will be held every half term, for example in the current drive to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. Nevertheless, there is more to be done to make the pace of learning quicker for some classes.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear and accurate understanding of what needs to improve. The headteacher has provided strong and committed leadership and has worked hard to lay a secure foundation upon which the academy can build. The deputy headteacher has shown that she is capable of continuing to make improvements in her role as acting headteacher next term.
- The skills of middle leaders and subject leaders to manage their areas of responsibility well are

fostered and developed by senior leaders; consequently staff morale is high. Middle leaders are increasingly helping the academy to improve by checking on the quality of work done by pupils and supporting other staff in their different subject areas. However, there is little opportunity for them to observe good practice elsewhere.

- The academy has an interesting and creative curriculum which supports pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Lessons are enriched by many opportunities to visit places of interest and enlivened by a wide range of visitors into school.
- The academy works hard to help parents support their children's education. Most parents are pleased with the education provided.
- Safeguarding matters are robustly managed and fully meet statutory requirements.
- The academy is working hard to make sure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed, but leaders are aware that there is more to be done to ensure that all pupils achieve equally well. Discrimination is not tolerated.
- Pupil premium funding is invested in providing a range of specialist support to ensure pupils' well-being and better progress in English and mathematics.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The academy came into being on 1 June 2013 and all members of the governing body are new to the school. Their systems for understanding what is working well and what is less effective are not yet fully established. Governors have already undertaken some training to assist them in developing the academy and are aware that their key focus must be on improving the progress and attainment of pupils. Governors have ambitious plans to improve the academy but these plans are still in their infancy.

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139228
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	428171

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	425
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Townsend
Headteacher	Gail Beech
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01782 235095
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