

Lark Rise Academy

Cartmel Drive, Dunstable, LU6 3PT

Inspection dates 17–18 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher is unswerving in her determination to ensure the very best for all the pupils. In a relatively short period of time, she has assembled a highly effective leadership team.
- Achievement is outstanding and by the end of Year 4, pupils reach high standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching is consistently at least good and much is outstanding. Teachers make sure the work in lessons is challenging but achievable for all ability groups. Marking is detailed but teachers do not always make sure pupils act on the guidance provided to help improve their work.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, good teaching and careful evaluation of children's progress ensure that they do well in their learning. They are not encouraged so effectively to investigate and to think for themselves.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They are motivated, determined and show a strong willingness to persevere when the learning becomes more challenging. They rise to every challenge very well and they believe that all the staff are keen for them to achieve highly.
- The standards of care and support are excellent. Pupils say how safe and happy they feel at the academy.
- Parents overwhelmingly support the academy. They believe that it provides a safe and caring place for their children to learn.
- The governing body works very effectively with the school's leaders and managers in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Governors fully contribute to the success of the academy and are rigorous in how they support and challenge the staff.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 18 lessons and one assembly. Five of the lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher or the deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body, and staff, including the headteacher, the senior leadership team and a consultant used by the academy.
- The inspection team heard some pupils read. They also looked at learning in pupils' books.
- The inspection team looked at a range of information, including data on pupils' achievement, planning and monitoring documentation used by class teachers, minutes from governing body meetings, records of behaviour and attendance, and documents related to safeguarding.
- An analysis was made of the 53 responses to the online survey, Parent View, which were made before and during the inspection. Also, the inspection team reviewed the 29 questionnaires completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

David Berry, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Vreta Bagilhole	Additional Inspector
Denise Bonnette-Anderson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lark Rise Lower School became an academy in October 2010. When the predecessor school of the same name was last inspected in 2007 it was graded as outstanding.
- The academy has plans to grow until it covers the full primary age range.
- This is a larger than average-sized school. Currently, all classes are vertically grouped with three Year 1 and 2 classes in Key Stage 1 and three Year 3 and 4 classes in Key Stage 2. All classes in both key stages are grouped according to pupils' ability in English and mathematics.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils of service families, is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below the national average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Up until this year, the pupils have moved on to various local middle schools at the end of Year 4. There are no Year 6 test results that can be compared with the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum levels expected for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The academy operates a breakfast club and an after-school club. Both clubs are managed by the governing body.
- The stability of the school population is well above the national average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to sustain the high levels of achievement and further raise standards by:
 - giving children in the Early Years Foundation Stage more opportunities to develop the skills of working without direct supervision and to use their initiative
 - ensuring that pupils respond to, and act upon, the guidance provided in teachers' marking in order to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge slightly above those expected for their age. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the children develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills rapidly so that almost all pupils begin Year 1 with attainment above that usually found for their age.
- Pupils make rapid and sustained progress. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment is significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Historically, the academy has sustained these above-average levels of attainment for a number of years. By the end of Year 4, pupils' attainment is high in reading, writing and mathematics compared with expectations for their age.
- In an outstandingly well-taught lesson in a Year 3 and 4 class, pupils were expected to manipulate numbers in order to solve a series of problems. All pupils rose to the challenge of the activity and showed a determination and a willingness to evaluate and improve their methods for solving each problem.
- In another example, Year 3 and 4 pupils were required to write a Christmas story. Through an exciting use of drama, they developed an excellent understanding of character, motivation and empathy. Pupils worked superbly well in small groups, discussing their respective characters which in turn led to the planning of a carefully constructed story.
- The academy has set high targets this year for all pupils. These demanding targets are indicative of the academy's continued drive to further improve the attainment of all pupils. The academy has high expectations of all groups of pupils. As a result, the most able do very well and reach high standards. Pupils of minority ethnic heritage also make rapid progress.
- Although small in number, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because the well-thought-out system of grouping pupils for English and mathematics ensures that teachers and teaching assistants track and evaluate the progress of pupils very thoroughly.
- The small numbers of pupils supported by the pupil premium do extremely well. The rigorous tracking of progress shows that these pupils perform just as well as their classmates in English and mathematics.
- The academy responded very promptly to below-average results in the 2012 phonics screening check (linking letters to sounds) and, as a result, achieved above-average outcomes in 2013. This was the result of excellent training for staff that now ensures that there is a highly systematic programme of teaching phonics. Pupils who read to the inspectors were enthusiastic and had excellent strategies for reading unfamiliar words.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers and teaching assistants are highly successful in targeting and improving pupils' progress. For example, in an outstandingly well-taught lesson in a Year 1 and 2 class, the teacher skilfully drew upon pupils' prior knowledge of verbs, adverbs and connectives in order to extend and enhance their skills in writing instructions.

- The teaching in Early Years Foundation Stage makes effective use of a wide range of activities and resources to enhance children’s skills across the areas of learning. However, children are not helped so effectively to use their initiative to explore their environment, or to develop their skills in learning to work things out for themselves.
- Teachers plan a range of interesting and stimulating activities, which engages and challenges all pupils. The academy organises English and mathematics in ability groups. This strategy is used very well and ensures that pupils of all abilities have to think hard in all lessons. As a result, all groups of pupils are learning very effectively.
- Teaching assistants are used very effectively throughout the academy. For example, a lesson in a Year 1 and 2 class began with the teaching assistant working with a group of pupils who needed additional help based on the previous day’s learning. This enabled them to overcome their earlier misunderstanding and tackle new work enthusiastically.
- A strong feature of lessons is the very successful use of ‘talking partners’. This strategy is used carefully to build upon pupils’ learning. Not only are pupils encouraged to share their ideas but in a number of lessons, they are also encouraged to challenge each other’s ideas.
- Marking is both regular and accurate in pinpointing what pupils need to improve. Nevertheless, teachers do not consistently make sure that pupils act on any comments made to guide them in improving their work.
- The pace of learning is highly effective and activities are suitably challenging for pupils of all abilities in English and mathematics. Teachers weave together new challenges which build successfully on pupils’ prior learning, and constantly check their progress throughout each lesson. The learning environment is highly organised and promotes outstanding learning.
- Teachers have detailed subject knowledge and provide pupils in Years 1 to 4 with many opportunities to take responsibility for their own investigations of the relationships between numbers. For example, in a very well taught Year 1 and 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were expected to explore relationships between three-digit numbers at a rapid pace. The teacher was very adept at asking appropriate questions and made full use of information and communication technology to guide pupils through a series of increasingly challenging tasks.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The academy places a high emphasis on developing positive relationships and has high expectations of both pupils and staff. As a result, pupils’ behaviour is outstanding. There is a consistent approach to managing behaviour and a real strength of the academy lies in the quality of relationships, which are outstanding at all levels.
- Pupils display excellent attitudes to their learning. Perseverance, resilience and ambition are just some of the core values that are consistently fostered in lessons. Pupils are enthusiastic and want to do their best. The success of the academy is founded on the hard work and dedication of pupils as well as staff.
- The rich curriculum enables pupils to develop a range of positive attitudes, including respect for the environment and an appreciation and connection with the local, national and global communities. Moreover, the academy offers a breakfast club and a wide-range of after-school clubs which promote and enhance pupils’ learning further.

- Pupils are well informed about bullying and its different forms, including e-safety, cyber-bullying. Pupils confidently asserted in various discussions, that bullying incidents do not occur in their academy. They are clear that inappropriate behaviour or low-level disruption does not occur in lessons. Pupils say that the academy has a 'zero-tolerance' to bullying and if it did occur, it would be dealt with immediately.
- Pupils talked confidently about how safe and happy they feel in the academy. The pupils are provided with a wide range of support to ensure that they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Responses to the Parent View questionnaire show that parents are overwhelmingly positive about the academy and how it cares for their children. Their responses indicate that they believe pupils are safe, happy and well looked after and would recommend the academy to other parents without hesitation. The staff are equally positive about the behaviour of pupils. The attendance of pupils remains above the national average. Punctuality is excellent and there have been no exclusions.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher has galvanized the senior leadership team and governing body so that the academy has a strong vision and a clear drive to further improve standards. Teamwork is very effective in bringing improvement because all staff are committed to the core values of the academy.
- Highly effective systems are used by the senior leadership team for evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. All leaders respond well to this careful analysis by challenging and supporting teachers and teaching assistants to further improve. The academy is highly inclusive and fosters strong links with a range of schools. The leadership team strongly promotes equal opportunities and is robust in tackling all forms of discrimination.
- Subject and key stage leaders are highly effective and very involved in the use of data to assess pupils' progress. They respond quickly to any pupil whose progress is stalling and are determined that no pupil should be 'left behind'.
- The curriculum offers a diverse range of experiences, and the academy organises numerous educational trips, which include residential visits for pupils to France and Germany. Moreover, it offers a range of excellent extra-curricular opportunities which includes dance, music and art. The curriculum, assemblies and the various clubs that play an important part in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Although only a small number of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, the academy uses the funding extremely well by organising booster groups, one-to-one support and by offering financial support for the numerous after-school clubs. As a result of this additional support, all groups of pupils make at least good and often outstanding progress.
- Safeguarding meets statutory requirements. All staff are familiar with the child protection policy and clear about how to identify and respond to any potential concerns.
- The academy, based on the strong recommendation of the local authority, has submitted an application to become a 'teaching school'. The local authority has used the expertise of the staff, for example, by deploying the Early Years Leader to support another school. The academy itself has used external support to evaluate the accuracy of its self-evaluation and what it needs to do

to improve further.

- The recently appointed deputy headteacher has devised a plan for the use of the new primary sport funding which includes new training for staff, pupils from a local middle school assisting in the coaching of some activities and the expenditure on new resources for pupils. Pupils were able to talk about these improvements positively.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Two years ago, the governing body steered the academy skilfully through a number of significant changes of staff. Governors had a clear understanding of how the academy could further improve and were keen to appoint staff of the highest quality. Their commitment to the academy and every child within it is based on them having a thorough understanding of the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. Governors make sure that the pupil premium is used effectively.
- The governing body asks challenging questions of the leadership team. It is effectively organised with various committees which ensure that statutory duties are met.
- The governing body is fully involved in the academy development plan. Its members are well informed about how well the academy's finances are used and its staff deployed. They ensure that the appropriate systems are in place and that the monitoring of the performance of staff is effective and robust, so that the best teaching is rewarded.

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	136345
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	427212

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

Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Collette Emburey
Headteacher	Rebecca Baker
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01582 607852
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