

Tree Tops Academy

Brishing Lane, Park Wood, Maidstone, ME15 9EZ

Inspection dates

4-5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Pupils' attainment is low because they make inadequate progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. Pupils' reading skills are weak throughout the school. Significant groups of pupils do not make adequate progress in mathematics during Key Stage 2, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Teachers and teaching assistants do not expect enough of pupils and work in lessons is neither sufficiently challenging nor carefully matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers do not ask pupils enough challenging questions or regularly check on pupils' progress during lessons.
- Many pupils rely too much on the support of adults in lessons.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning require improvement. In the weaker lessons, too many pupils either stop paying attention or are slow to start work. When this happens, pupils make slow progress.
- Recent instability in the leadership of the school has hindered improvement. New arrangements for the leadership and governance of the academy have not been in place long enough to have sufficient impact on improving standards or the quality of teaching.
- Subject leaders have not yet been successful in improving provision in the subjects they are responsible for.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The school is a safe environment and provides good pastoral care for pupils.
- The newly-appointed principal is ambitious for the school and, together with the interim management board, has a clear understanding of what needs to be done.
- Work in pupils' books shows some pupils are beginning to do better, especially in writing.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons, ten of which were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors examined pupils' work, talked to a group of pupils and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with key leaders and three members of the school's interim management board. An inspector also held a meeting with a representative of the sponsor, Academies Enterprise Trust.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation including records relating to pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the ten responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and analysed 18 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Gianni Bianchi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Carol Vant

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, with a number of other ethnic backgrounds represented in low numbers. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below that found nationally but rising.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, children with parents serving in the armed forces and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There are nine classes in total, a Nursery, one Reception and Year 1 class, two Year 2 classes and one of each of the Key Stage 2 classes.
- The school runs a breakfast club each morning.
- Tree Tops Academy converted to become an academy on 1 April 2012 as part of the Academies Enterprise Trust. When its predecessor school, Bell Wood Community Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be inadequate and issued a notice to improve.
- A monitoring inspection in December 2012 recommended a review of the arrangements for leadership and governance. Following this and after a period of uncertainty, a new principal was appointed in June 2013 and an interim management board began to operate in September 2013.
- A new deputy vice-principal will start in January 2014.
- The school is currently receiving a high level of support from the Academies Enterprise Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good and improve pupils' attitudes to learning by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should attain by challenging pupils to work harder in lessons
 - making sure teachers use information about pupils' progress to plan lessons which meet the individual needs of all pupils
 - enabling pupils to be less reliant on adult support
 - asking pupils more challenging and probing questions
 - ensuring teachers check the progress that pupils are making during lessons, spotting mistakes that pupils are making and adapting their teaching accordingly.
- Raise achievement in reading and mathematics by:
 - making sure that all teachers plan and teach phonics at the right level for pupils so that they

can apply this knowledge with confidence

- ensuring that the teaching of reading to older pupils places more emphasis on understanding the meaning of new words, whole sentences and the text as a whole.
- providing pupils with more opportunities to develop and apply their reading skills across all subjects
- making better use of resources to support pupils' mathematical skills, particularly for less able pupils in Key Stage 2
- improving teachers' planning so that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills.

■ Improve leadership and management by:

- ensuring that teachers whose practice is not good enough receive high quality support to help them improve rapidly
- analysing information about pupils' attainment and progress more rigorously, taking action when appropriate to ensure pupils in every class are making at least good progress
- developing the skills of all leaders so that they can fully contribute to improving the school
- making sure that the interim management board holds school leaders robustly accountable for improvements in pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Pupils' attainment in the 2013 tests was low at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's most recent achievement data show that too many pupils have made inadequate progress since the academy opened, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in reading is slow because the teaching of reading, including phonics (the sounds that letters make) is weak throughout the school. Too few pupils in Years 1 and 2 are able to sound out words, make sense of unfamiliar ones and apply this knowledge in their writing. In 2013 the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level in the Year 1 national phonics screening check was well below the national expectation.
- Older pupils are unable to sustain reading for long periods of time and have difficulties in understanding the meaning of what they are reading. Consequently, they cannot apply their reading skills in other subjects, including mathematics.
- Work in pupils' books shows that activities in mathematics do not extend learning well enough or provide enough challenge. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop different problem-solving strategies or apply their mathematical skills.
- Generally, pupils make better progress in writing than they do in reading and mathematics. Work in books shows that older pupils are given more opportunities to write at length and respond to teachers' marking.
- In 2013, Year 6 pupils eligible for pupil premium funding attained better than other pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics, but this attainment was well below the level expected of Year 6 pupils nationally. Currently, pupils eligible for extra funding, continue to lag well behind others nationally in their English and mathematics, often by three terms. A recently introduced reading recovery programme and new 'learning mentor' are starting to help reduce these wide gaps, but these improvements are at an early stage.
- In Years 1 to 6, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do not make enough progress, particularly in mathematics. Pupils in Year 3 to Year 6 do not have access to an appropriate range of resources to support their learning and accelerate progress in mathematics. This is similarly true for pupils who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Pupils are not well prepared for their next stage of education because standards in English and mathematics are too low.
- Pupils enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge, skills and understanding well below those expected for their age. Effective teaching ensures they make good progress but pupils enter Year 1 with levels of attainment still below those typical for their age.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Teaching is inadequate because pupils do not make enough progress or achieve as well as they should, especially in reading and mathematics. This has been a consistent picture since the academy opened. Recent training and support for teachers have not had enough impact on tackling the weaknesses seen in lessons.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. Teachers do not use information about pupils' progress to plan activities that are closely matched to the individual needs of all pupils. As a result, teachers do not give pupils work that is sufficiently challenging.
- Sometimes pupils are slow to start their work. This is because teachers do not explain clearly to pupils at the beginning of lessons what they need to do.
- Some groups of pupils are over reliant on adult support, which contributes to their slow progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants do not check carefully how well all groups of pupils are learning during lessons to move them on or to give them extra help quickly. Errors such as the

incorrect ordering of a sequence of numbers are not spotted and corrected.

- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills in real-life contexts; this is especially the case for less able pupils.
- Pupils learn best when teachers ask challenging questions that extend their thinking. In one lesson where pupils were learning how to judge the value of larger numbers, a pupil was questioned and asked to re-think her answers to clarify her thinking. When the learning was achieved the whole class cheered. However, this kind of probing questioning is not common enough practice.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, following recently agreed guidelines. This is helping pupils to know what they have done well and what they need to learn next.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- When teaching is not challenging them, pupils find it difficult to sustain concentration and work independently. When this happens some pupils are slow to start their work or stop paying attention and as a result, pupils' rate of progress slows.
- Pupils are polite and say that they feel safe at school. They say that bullying and children expressing anger do occur but they are confident that if they tell an adult it will be taken seriously and dealt with. They understand the dangers of different types of bullying including those linked to the internet.
- A minority of staff and parents, through questionnaires and Parent View, expressed concerns about behaviour at the school. Inspectors did find evidence of bullying and racial incidents by checking the relevant documentation. However, such incidents are dealt with appropriately, and the number of incidents is reducing. It is clear that pupils' behaviour has improved significantly since the academy opened and that discrimination is not tolerated at all.
- The good quality of pastoral care is a strength of the school and helps to promote positive relationships. For example, a resident artist works with all pupils, some of whom may be experiencing difficulties in their home life.
- Attendance is below average but improving. The family liaison officer works closely with families where children's attendance is poor. Exclusions have reduced over time and are now rare.
- Pupils move around the school in a calm and orderly manner and are responding to the increased responsibilities given to them. They are very proud to be traffic control monitors and older pupils enjoy looking after and reading with younger pupils.
- A new 'assertive discipline' approach to improving behaviour is having a positive impact because staff consistently implement it. Older pupils say that behaviour has improved whilst they have been at school.

The leadership and management

are inadequate

- Since the academy opened, improvements have been too slow and senior leaders have not been successful in raising standards and tackling weaknesses in teaching.
- Members of the recently appointed interim management board, senior leaders and the new principal work well together and have a clear understanding that the performance of the academy is not good enough. However these changes are recent and the leadership team are not able to show that they have made enough impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. Leaders acknowledge that they could not sustain recent improvements without the support they receive from the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- Senior leaders have nevertheless made some progress. Pupils' behaviour is improving, although it is not yet good. Pupils' mathematics and writing books are now regularly checked by school leaders and this is making teachers' more accountable for their pupils' progress. Work in children's books is indicating that some pupils are beginning to make better progress.
- Further appropriate measures have been taken to improve the school, including support for

teachers whose practice is not good enough, focused support for staff with leadership roles and simplified systems to help them know whether pupils are making enough progress. However, these measures have not been in place long enough to have a strong impact on raising pupils' achievement.

- The impact of the school's work to promote equal opportunities is limited because too many pupils are underachieving. Senior leaders and the interim management board recognise that they need to analyse information about pupils' attainment and progress more rigorously to ensure all pupils make at least good progress.
- The curriculum meets statutory guidelines and had recently been redesigned to make links between different subjects. This is beginning to have an impact on pupils' writing and older pupils now have more opportunities to write at length in subjects such as history. A good personal, social and health education curriculum and trips, including one to a local museum, helps promote adequate levels of pupils' moral, social and cultural development. A wide range of clubs including well-attended breakfast and homework clubs significantly contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. The pupils' spiritual development is not well developed as opportunities to weave this aspect within lessons and wider the curriculum are too few.
- The academy utilises the sports funding to employ sports coaches who teach physical education. This has not had sufficient impact on professional development for staff.
- The Academies Enterprise Trust identified concerns about the school and has provided support for the subject leaders of mathematics and English, secured an acting vice-principal and the help of external consultants. This support, although positive, has been too recent to have had a significant impact on the pupils' low levels of achievement.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

The governance of the school:

- Since this school opened, there have been changes in the arrangements for governance. An external review found shortcomings in the original governing body's ability to hold the academy to account for its performance. Following this, an interim management board was set up and began work in September 2013. The interim management board has a realistic view that pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are inadequate. Together with the Principal they are determined to make this a good academy and are confident in their ability to challenge senior leaders, to use information on pupils' progress more rigorously and make them accountable for pupils' achievement. They have a good understanding of the school's finances and understand how the pupil premium money is being spent. They recognise that teaching requires closer monitoring and that more needs to be done to secure rapid improvement and ensure all pupils make at least good progress. They understand the procedures for linking pay awards to the quality of teachers' work and they have recently set suitably demanding targets for the new Principal. Safeguarding requirements are fully met.

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	137882
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	399915

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	250
Appropriate authority	Interim Management Board
Chair	Frank Eagles
Headteacher	Libby Fidock
Date of previous school inspection	Academy First Section 5
Telephone number	01622 754888
Fax number	01622 683542
Email address	lfidock@treetopsacademy.org

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