

E-ACT Blackley Academy

Victoria Avenue, Blackley, Manchester, M9 0RD

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2014

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.

- Since the school reopened as an academy in January 2012 there has been a relentless and effective drive to eradicate a legacy of underperformance.
- Pupils achieve well and make at least good progress overall. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved each year since opening.
- Attainment is now above average in reading and writing and average in mathematics but showing clear signs of improvement.
- Teaching is mainly of good quality. Some teaching is outstanding and very little is less than good.
- Pupils’ good attitude to learning in lessons contributes well to their improved rates of progress. Pupils feel very safe in school and their behaviour around school is good.
- Leaders and managers are effective. They have fashioned a school which exudes high expectations in everything it does. Improvements already seen in the quality of teaching and pupils’ achievement are a direct result of leaders’ insistence that good is not good enough.
- Governors know the school well and use data on the school’s performance to hold leaders to account effectively.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement is not outstanding. More able pupils could reach higher standards than they already do, particularly in mathematics. Pupils could make better progress in early writing.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding. Not enough is done to ensure every opportunity is taken to stretch more able pupils.
- Leadership and management of the school is not outstanding. Leaders and governors do not analyse performance data with sufficient rigour to evaluate the impact of their actions on all groups of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 teachers in 18 part lessons, three of these were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work to evaluate the rate of progress over time.
- Meetings were conducted with senior and middle leaders and members of staff. In addition, telephone conversations were held with a representative of E-ACT and the Chair of Governors.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons and around school. Inspectors also held meetings with three groups of pupils and conducted a survey of their views on bullying in the school during two of these meetings.
- Information from the scrutiny of a range of documentation provided by the school was used to help form inspection judgments. These documents included the school self-evaluation, action plan, record of the management of teachers' performance, assessment information and information relating to safeguarding.
- The views of parents were gathered by talking to parents. Seven parents completed Parent View (the online questionnaire for parents); inspectors were not able to access the results of this survey because the number of responses was below the minimum number required.
- An analysis of 31 responses to the staff questionnaire, along with discussions with staff during the inspection, gave inspectors and insight into the views of the staff.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the academy's view of the impact and effectiveness of the multi-academy trust's services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess how well the support provided by the multi-academy trust is helping to improve the academies for which it is responsible.

Inspection team

Drew Crawshaw, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jane Holmes

Additional Inspector

Anthony Buckley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- E-ACT Blackley academy is a sponsored academy which opened in January 2012.
- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- At the time of the inspection there were 378 pupils on roll.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (pupil premium funding is an additional grant given by the government to schools for those children who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from armed services families and children looked after by the local authority) is well above average.
- A higher than average number of pupils have special educational needs. A higher than average number receive support at school action level while a lower than average number receive support at school action plus.
- The school provides a before-school breakfast club which can be accessed by all pupils. The number of pupils attending the breakfast club is increasing rapidly.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The Early Years Foundation Stage should ensure every opportunity is taken to encourage all pupils, especially boys, to write more often in order to better prepare them for Key Stage 1.
- Increase the level and frequency of challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able in mathematics so that more pupils attain at the higher levels by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Leaders should ensure they use data about pupils' progress to check that actions they take to improve performance, impact effectively on all groups of pupils.
- The governing body should explore more vigorously the impact of the school's actions on different groups of pupils so that all groups of pupils make the best possible progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress regardless of their starting points. Last year, almost all pupils made the progress expected of them. In general, they enter school working at levels well below that expected for their age and leave Key Stage 2 in line with their peers. In both reading and writing a high number of pupils make more progress than expected of them based on their starting points. However, the proportion of higher ability pupils who make more progress than expected of them is lower than that of their peers nationally.
- The proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics has increased year-on-year since the school opened and is now in line with other pupils nationally. Nevertheless, the proportion of higher ability pupils who attain Level 5 or above in reading, writing and mathematics, although improving rapidly is low compared to all pupils nationally.
- Children make good progress during the Early Years Foundation Stage. They enter Nursery with levels of development well below expectations for their age, particularly in their communication and language and personal and social skills. By the time pupils leave Reception the proportion working at a level expected for their age remains below average but nevertheless has improved markedly since the school opened. Pupils overall make good progress in developing their reading and mathematics skills with writing being the weakest area for many pupils.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1 are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' knowledge of the sounds letters make is very close to the average in the phonics check at the end of Year 1. There is a clear focus on learning to read: each classroom has a book corner; each class has a named author to focus on each half term; all pupils are members of the local library; parents are encouraged to read with their children at home. There is also an appropriate emphasis on understanding numbers and solving problems in mathematics.
- Pupils identified as having lower levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, along with those identified with disabilities and special educational needs, make good and often better progress in their reading and writing. These pupils are particularly well supported, often through additional lunchtime intervention classes. Accurate school data shows some improvements in levels of attainment in literacy, for example the gap in reading ability between those with and those without special educational needs has reduced from around 18 months in 2012 to around 10 months last year. Leaders have recognised the underperformance by this group of pupils in mathematics and have taken actions to improve rates of progress in mathematics. It is too early to measure the full impact of these actions.
- Pupils, for whom the school receives the pupil premium funding, attain levels below their peers but achieve well compared to their starting points. Typically, their attainment is around one year behind other pupils in the school by the end of Key Stage 2. However, last year the proportion of pupil premium pupils making better than expected progress outstripped that of all other pupils both in school and nationally in both reading and writing. The proportion of pupil premium pupils making expected progress in mathematics was also better than other pupils nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- There is no doubt that pupils enjoy their time at this school or of their willingness to work hard and improve. This is a direct result of the positive relationships between staff and pupils. Lessons are lively and interesting and above all encourage pupils to be active and involved in their learning. Year 1 pupils, for example, were seen working outside the classroom, solving mathematical problems and holding small group discussions in order to help each other understand the task set.
- The improvement of teaching as a means of raising standards has been the main focus of leaders since the school opened. There have been impressive gains in the quality of teaching throughout the school. Inspectors agree with leaders' accurate assessment of the quality of

teaching in that a large majority is good, some is outstanding and none is inadequate.

- Teachers' planning of lessons is good; it takes account of pupils of different abilities and with different learning needs and of teachers' on-going assessment of progress. However, although the individual learning needs of higher ability pupils are identified; higher ability pupils are not always given tasks which stretch them enough to ensure they reach the levels they are capable of.
- The quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children make good progress because they enjoy being given the responsibility of carrying out small tasks on their own or with others along with the freedom to choose from an array of learning opportunities. Activities are interesting and have a good balance of adult led and pupil choice; consequently, pupils experience a learning opportunity at every turn they take.
- Although teachers' expectations of pupils are high, on occasions, teachers miss the opportunity to stretch the thinking of some pupils, particularly the more able. Teachers' marking of pupils' work, while very effective in giving pupils a clear direction on how to improve, is not always acted on by pupils and therefore is not fully effective in increasing the rate of progress. Also, teachers were seen in some lessons to miss opportunities to build on pupils' answers by asking additional questions. On these occasions pupils were not encouraged to think more deeply about their answers and therefore did not add to their understanding.
- Leaders have recently introduced a theme-based approach to teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2. This has added an international dimension to the curriculum and has also provided an opportunity for pupils to practice effectively their core skills across different subjects. Examples of pupils' high quality writing can be seen on the walls of every classroom and down almost every corridor and is a record, not only of the pupils' progress, but also of the multitude of topics covered across the school.
- Good quality teaching supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. This is seen particularly well in art lessons and in the numerous displays of pupils' high quality art work around the school. In one art lesson children were observed sharing their ideas with one another and giving their opinion on why another pupils' work was 'good'. Displays of pupils' art work are linked to topics covered in other lessons and give a comprehensive record of experiences of different cultures from around the world. Consequently, pupils at the school are broadening their experience and knowledge of the world around them.
- Parents' involvement in the school is rapidly becoming a strength of the school. Parents spoken to by inspectors value the efforts taken by leaders and staff to make parents an integral part of their child's learning. Parents are encouraged to spend time in school so that they can better understand how their child is progressing and so they are well placed to support learning at home. As a result, parents are right to point out that the reading skills of younger pupils are improving rapidly.
- Inspectors spoke to several parents who could not praise enough the support received by pupils in the school. The school tailors its support to the individual needs of pupils. Should a pupil fall behind with their learning, they are given additional support firstly in groups and then, if need be, on a one-to-one basis. The effectiveness of these programmes makes a considerable contribution to the overall quality of teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The attitude of pupils to learning in lessons is excellent and very rarely do pupils become disengaged. In a small number of lessons teachers do not manage effectively pupils' enthusiasm or their eagerness to answer questions. This sometimes results in the calling out of answers by pupils which in turn hinders the learning of others because it stops them from having to think for themselves.
- Behaviour management is good due to most staff dealing with minor issues early and effectively. In a small minority of lessons when teaching is not good, pupils can show a lack of concentration because the teacher does not provide challenge throughout the whole lesson.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe and the parents spoken to said they believe pupils to be safe in school. Parents in particular have noticed significant improvements in site security and the presence of staff around school since it reopened as an academy. The views of parents and pupils are well founded. Leaders ensure pupils are supervised effectively at all times and as a result, for example, pupils play safely on outdoor play equipment; this also contributes to improving both pupils' physical well-being and their social skills. All staff have received training in child protection procedures along with how to meet specific medical needs, such as diabetes and epilepsy. A high number of staff are qualified in first aid.
- Bullying is rare in school because leaders take effective action to prevent minor incidents escalating to higher levels of significance. Pupils spoken to could recall instances of name-calling and teasing, in one instance this was racist comments, but were adamant that these issues were dealt with swiftly by members of staff. Pupils are aware of the risk of bullying while they are using the internet or their mobile phones and know what steps to take to reduce that risk due to information given to them in assemblies and during some lessons. However, the pupils spoken to were less aware of the potential for other form of bullying, for instance homophobic or transgender bullying.
- School records show the number of serious incidents is low and reducing further compared to previous years. However, records are not always detailed enough and do not always include all the actions the school has taken along with the outcome.
- The school's curriculum makes an effective contribution to improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Assemblies are used effectively to promote friendship and high moral standards. During the inspection one assembly was led by a local vicar who gave a lesson in the difference between right and wrong.
- The school's own data shows that attendance has improved from being in the bottom ten per cent of primary schools nationally to average. Children now want to attend school because they enjoy it so much. One parent said that her child cried when she could not come to school because she was ill. Leaders have used pupil premium funds to employ a family support worker to work closely with parents who have difficulty in getting their children to school. This has improved the attendance of an identified group of pupils and as a result, the number of pupils with very high levels of absence is now reducing.

The leadership and management are good

- Blackley Academy is well led by a Principal who is driving the school along a path of rapid improvement. The Principal is supported effectively by a new senior leadership team. Together they have united the staff team and created an exceptional ethos based on care for the pupils and a commitment to raising standards.
- Leadership is not outstanding because many actions are not proven and have not had time to impact fully on improving pupils' attainment and their rate of progress. Furthermore, although leaders have an accurate picture of how well pupils are making progress overall, leaders do not check rigorously the impact of their actions on the attainment of different groups of pupils.
- Since the school opened there has been an unremitting focus on improving teaching and learning. Leaders have left no stone unturned in identifying what needs to be done to improve the school. A link has been established with an outstanding school so that teachers can benefit from sharing outstanding practice. This link has already been used to verify teachers' assessment of pupils' progress, for example, in writing. Subsequently, teachers' planning for lessons is more focused on the individual learning needs of pupils which in turn has contributed to the improvements in the rate of progress seen in writing. Plans, although new, are in place to improve the way teachers stretch more able pupils to attain the highest levels.
- Improvements in the curriculum have been a major factor in building a learning environment which fosters the pupils' love of learning. Adding an international dimension to the primary curriculum, supplemented by visits to the local library, the employment of an artist in residence and taking part in the Forest School, has promoted excitement in the pupils' learning. Leaders

are developing the curriculum creatively and this has been effective in making learning interesting and relevant.

- Leaders have made effective use of primary sports funding to engage as many pupils as possible in some form of physical activity. By employing a sports coach leaders have ensured that they get the best possible value out of the sports equipment already purchased and pupils get the best possible opportunity to participate. Pupils have opportunities on a weekly basis to participate in multi-sports training, dance and swimming led by the sports coach.
- Leaders have also made effective use of the pupil premium funding. By introducing interventions such as the 'Better Reading Partnership' and the 'Rapid Writing' programmes they have ensured disadvantaged pupils make at least good progress in their reading and writing.
- Leaders promote equality, including gender equality, by valuing the contribution of all staff and pupils, for example through the use of 'pupil voice', and as a result, are effective in being an inclusive school. The school is increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural and pupils are taught to value differences. Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is embedded in the ethos of the school.
- Leaders have already embarked on plans to strengthen leadership further by ensuring middle leaders and class teachers with wider responsibilities are given the opportunity to develop. Middle leaders routinely produce action plans, support other colleagues and monitor teachers' progress towards set targets and as result, improve pupils' rate of progress. Consequently, there is good capacity for sustained improvement of the school.
- The school makes effective arrangements for the safeguarding of all its pupils.
- Leaders make effective use of the support and challenge given by E-ACT, the multi academy trust which sponsors the school. E-ACT representatives visit the school each half term to monitor the school's progress towards challenging targets set at the previous visit. A 'score card' system, with clear success criteria, is used to hold leaders to account and is effective in challenging leaders to improve the school rapidly. As a result, leaders are focused on their goal of making this the best possible school with the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors have a clear vision for the school and are providing strategic direction for leaders. Governors know the school well because many of them spend time talking to pupils and staff. They use this knowledge to check the validity of information about improvements in pupils' progress. Governors are involved in the day to day life of school as each governor is attached to a class group. Many of the governors are linked directly to E-ACT, as a result, they make good use of performance data provided by E-ACT to hold leaders to account. Records of governing body meetings show that governors have a good understanding of how pupil premium money is spent. However, questioning about the progress of some groups of pupils is not followed up rigorously enough to ascertain the true impact of spending. A robust performance management system has been put in place with which teachers can be held to account about their performance and their impact on their pupils' progress. It is too early to determine the effectiveness of this system on improvements in the school. Performance management of the Principal is managed directly by E-ACT.

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	137689
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	399890

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	378
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Jefferson
Principal	Kathy Allen
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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