

Mercer's Wood Academy

Ropery Road, Gainsborough, DN21 2PD

Inspection dates 17–18 September 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Inspirational leadership by the executive principal and senior leaders, a very effective governing body and all staff working together as a team ensure that pupils receive an excellent education.
- Senior leaders know the school very well and have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement.
- Senior leaders set very high expectations. Consequently, teaching is continually improving. Much of the teaching over time is outstanding.
- Leaders and staff ensure that all pupils are making excellent progress. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are high.
- Teachers plan work to challenge pupils of all abilities including the most able. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Teachers use information about pupils' progress very well to identify those in danger of falling behind and give extra support when it is needed.
- Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly and give pupils clear advice on how to improve it. They do not consistently check that all pupils have acted on that advice and improved their next pieces of work as directed.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to check their own and each other's work.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and take a pride in their work and want to do well. Their behaviour is exemplary because teachers have very high expectations of how they should conduct themselves in and around the school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy taking on extra responsibilities in school. Their attendance is above average.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well through the broad and balanced range of subjects taught. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Children get off to a very strong start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make rapid progress because they experience a wide range of exciting and enjoyable learning activities.
- Governors are highly committed and contribute well to the school's values and aims. They challenge the school about its performance.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons, of which three were observed jointly with the executive principal and leaders of school. In addition, the inspectors made a number of shorter visits to lessons, walked around the school with senior leaders and attended two assemblies.
- Inspectors talked to pupils in all classes, held a formal meeting with the school council and met informally with other pupils in the playground. They held discussions with the Executive Principal, the leaders of school, senior and middle managers and other staff. They met with a director of the academy trust and Chair of the Governing Body and had a telephone conversation with the school's external consultant.
- Samples of pupils' work were examined. Some pupils read books with the inspectors.
- Inspectors looked at a variety of documents, including the school's own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, the school development plan, checks on pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour records, attendance data, details of the monitoring of teachers' performance, and policies aimed at keeping pupils safe.
- There were too few responses to the questionnaire on Ofsted's Parent View website for inspectors to gain a representation of parents' and carers' views, so inspectors talked informally to them at the start and end of the school day to find out what they thought about the school. Inspectors also took account of results of the school's survey of parents' views at recent parents' meetings.
- The views expressed by the 20 staff who returned questionnaires were also considered.

Inspection team

Frances Le Pla, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David West

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mercer's Wood Academy is smaller than the average-sized primary school. It opened as an academy on 1 March 2013, sponsored by the nearby White's Wood Academy. Together, the two schools comprise the Tall Oaks Academy Trust.
- The Executive Principal has overall responsibility for the schools in the Trust and provides strategic direction for them. A leader of school is responsible for the day-to-day leadership of Mercer's Wood Academy.
- Children begin the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception class.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by pupil premium funding is much higher than the national average. This funding is provided for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, or are in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported by school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
 - checking carefully to make sure pupils act on the advice given when their work is marked and improve their next pieces of work
 - giving pupils more opportunities to check their own and each other's work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school is extremely well led by the Executive Principal and her leadership team. She is very well supported by the entire staff and governors, who share and promote her drive to improve outcomes for all pupils in the school. She has established a culture of teamwork, collaboration and high expectations. Nothing but the best is acceptable and, as a result, staff 'go the extra mile' to help pupils overcome any difficulties with learning that they may have. Staff are very proud to be members of the school community as shown in a comment written on a staff questionnaire: 'It is an honour and a pleasure to work as part of the Tall Oaks Academy Trust team.'
- The Executive Principal provides a very clear strategic direction for the two schools in the Tall Oaks Academy Trust. This involves sharing best educational practice and deploying specialist teachers to support and mentor less-experienced teachers. As a result, teaching is outstanding.
- Senior leaders know the school well. Through detailed self-evaluation, they have correctly identified the school's strengths and key areas for development. As a result, the school development plan focuses well on the most important areas for improvement, and progress towards achieving the objectives is regularly checked.
- There is a relentless focus on improving and sustaining excellent teaching that results in pupils achieving high standards and making very good progress. The quality of teaching is checked regularly through a rigorous and wide-ranging programme of monitoring activities. Aspects that need improvement are identified and further training is provided utilising the expertise across the trust. For example, work is under way to improve the quality of marking after checks on pupils' books showed some inconsistencies.
- The performance of all staff is evaluated annually and they are set meaningful targets linked to the national *Teachers' Standards* and the school improvement plan. Teachers' efforts to meet these targets are making a strong contribution to the rapid improvements in pupils' achievement.
- Subject leaders manage areas of responsibility effectively. They benefit from the frequent opportunities to meet with their colleagues within the trust. This means that they can work with other subject specialists to plan learning and examine work from each school to check that their judgements about standards are accurate.
- There are many opportunities for teachers to broaden their experience and develop their capacity to become leaders in the future by taking part in whole-school projects. For example, several teachers joined the 'change team' set up across the two schools in the trust to develop a new system of assessment, and another teacher has taken responsibility for leading a project on developing international links.
- The range of subjects taught and the effective way they are organised and assessed result in outstanding academic outcomes and excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The many opportunities to take on responsibility, consider other points of view, get involved in the community and learn about other cultures prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupil premium funding is spent wisely to ensure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed. The appointment of a pastoral care officer has led to very close working with families who do not engage easily with the school and very effective support for the more vulnerable pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress during their time at the school.
- The primary school sports funding is used effectively. The school provides a good range of sports, including after-school clubs, and staff have improved their expertise. All pupils are involved in sporting activities, with the consequent benefits for their health and fitness.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors provide a good level of support and challenge to the Executive Principal and her senior leaders. They subscribe fully to her vision and the direction in which she and her staff are taking the school while rigorously holding her to account for her performance.
- Governors have a secure understanding of performance data and are able to compare the school's results with national data. They monitor the school's finances well. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent and ask searching questions to check the impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors visit the school regularly and are involved in monitoring activities. As a result, they have a good overview of the quality of teaching, including strengths and areas for improvement. They understand the link between increases in pay and teachers' achievement of annual targets.
- Members of the governing body check to make certain that procedures to keep pupils safe are followed and the school meets the requirements for safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and have very positive attitudes to learning. As one pupil said, 'I like school and have a brilliant time.' Pupils know that their teachers expect nothing but the very best from them and, as a result, they want to please their teachers by behaving and working well. They take pride in their work, and their books are neat and well presented. Their positive attitudes contribute considerably to their rapid progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding because teachers are very consistent in their expectations of how pupils should conduct themselves in school. Staff, pupils and parents agree that standards of behaviour are high. Pupils show consideration and respect in the classrooms, during assemblies, in the outside learning areas and the playgrounds. Playtimes are harmonious events because pupils get on well together. Older pupils enjoy helping the younger ones; for example, pupils in Year 5 often hear pupils in Year 1 read.
- Teachers are able to use time to maximum effect because pupils concentrate on learning together, do not waste time and know the classroom routines. In a lesson in Year 5, pupils' sensible and respectful attitudes during a group activity led to rapid gains in learning about what it means to be a good citizen because they listened to and discussed each other's ideas about the picture they were studying.
- Pupils enjoy being given responsibilities such as membership of the school council or becoming junior road safety officers. The 'Foodies' group elected by their classmates recently surveyed the pupils in the school about the tuck shop and school dinners and then met with kitchen staff to talk about improvements they wanted to see. Older pupils enjoyed the opportunity to present their ideas about improving a local park to the Gainsborough Council.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Leaders make sure the building is secure, and staff are rigorously checked for their suitability prior to appointment. Pupils have a very clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including how to keep safe when using the internet. They say bullying is rare and school records support this view. Pupils know to whom they should turn if they are worried about bullying and are confident they will be listened to.
- Absences are followed up very promptly and, as a result, attendance has improved markedly over the last year. It is now above average.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is of a consistently high quality. As one parent commented, 'I am pleased with the progress my children are making and this is down to the fantastic teaching.' Teachers make sure that pupils build on their earlier learning. As a result, all groups of pupils are making rapid and sustained progress.
- Expectations for what pupils can achieve are high. Teachers know their classes very well and, as a result, learning is well planned and work is pitched at just the right level for all pupils. Teachers check carefully

and regularly that pupils understand the work they are given and can make the progress intended.

- Teachers establish very good relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour very well. Consequently, pupils share their ideas confidently with each other and with the adults. This, coupled with good-quality questioning and time for discussion in pairs or small groups, provides opportunities for pupils to develop their communication and language skills.
- Teachers encourage pupils to learn from each other and continually think about different ways to tackle their work. For example, in Year 6, pupils were encouraged to 'magpie' by sharing their ideas with each other and noting down those that might be useful to them another time. In another class, a group of more able pupils enjoyed coming out of their lesson for a 'thinking skills' session which challenged their problem-solving skills.
- Classrooms are stimulating workplaces and feature bright displays of information and pupils' work from a range of subjects which are used as a starting point for future learning. For example, in a lesson on citizenship, pupils were able to use the comments on 'post-it notes' on pictures around the room from a previous activity to develop their own ideas of what values were important to them.
- Teachers regularly and rigorously review pupils' progress, and any in danger of falling behind are quickly identified and given additional support to help them catch up. Teachers deploy teaching assistants and additional teachers in the class very well so that the pupils who need extra help or more challenging work are able to make the progress of which they are capable. In an English lesson in Year 4, the additional teacher got the more able pupils to use the thesaurus so that they could include more adventurous adjectives in their descriptions of a film scene.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and usually give pupils useful feedback about what they have done well and what they need to improve. However, this is not yet consistent across all classes, and teachers do not always check that pupils have acted on their advice and improved their work. There are too few opportunities for pupils to assess their own and each other's learning.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Almost all children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are well below those expected at their age. They settle very quickly and form excellent relationships with their classmates and adults. All children make rapid progress so that almost half of them achieve a good level of development by the end of the year.
- In Years 1 to 6, pupils continue to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and standards are rising year on year. By the end of Year 2, standards are close to average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- This year, more pupils are achieving well in using the sounds that letters make to read. The proportion of pupils reaching the national standard in the 2013 phonics check at the end of Year 1 was close to average. Provisional data indicate that, in 2014, the proportion reaching the national standard is above average. Pupils, including those who are not yet fluent readers, apply this knowledge accurately when they tackle unfamiliar words in their reading books.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They work hard and want to do well. In 2013, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 was above the national average. School data indicate that these high standards have been maintained in 2014 and that there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels. These results represent excellent progress for all groups of pupils. The proportion of pupils exceeding expected progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 was well above average.
- The most able pupils achieve well. In 2013 the proportion of pupils who attained the highest levels in mathematics rose to close to the national average. This year there has been a substantial increase in the

number of pupils reaching the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics, and the number of pupils achieving the higher Level 6 in mathematics has also increased. These results are a testament to teachers' success in supporting and encouraging pupils to always do their best.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make excellent progress because of the early identification of their learning needs and carefully planned support they receive from additional teachers and well-trained teaching assistants. The progress made by these pupils is regularly reviewed to ensure that any additional help has the maximum impact on raising their achievement.
- The school has been highly successful in reducing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. In 2013, these pupils were over two terms behind their peers in writing and a term and a half in reading. In mathematics they did as well as other pupils nationally. The school's information shows that they are now doing better than other pupils nationally in mathematics and reading and as well as them in writing.
- Pupils across the school achieve equally well in subjects other than English and mathematics as a consequence of the way the different subjects are organised around a theme that excites and interests them. For example, pupils in Year 6 produced some high-quality art work after looking at abstract art created by a local artist.
- Pupils enjoy sport and are enthusiastic about physical education. The additional sports funding is used very effectively to develop staff expertise. Pupils reach good standards in gymnastics and their skills are further enhanced in after-school activities and clubs. Pupils' experiences in physical education and sport also contribute to the development of their social skills, health and well-being.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- As a result of consistently outstanding teaching during their time in the Reception class, all groups of children make rapid progress from very low starting points and leave it well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Children settle into the Reception class very well because staff get to know them quickly and establish very clear routines for learning. As a result, behaviour is excellent and children get on well together.
- Teachers organise a range of exciting activities that interest the children, make learning fun and help them develop their skills. In one session, children were completely captivated in a singing activity about five speckled frogs and enjoyed moving the frogs into the pond and at the same time made rapid progress in their counting skills.
- A highly effective balance of well-planned adult-led and child-selected activities both inside and outside helps the children to develop their physical, social and communication skills and also find out things for themselves. For example, a group of children playing outside made good progress in their speaking skills as they 'sold' cakes in the shop and took turns to be the shopkeeper. Others learned to work together and steer carefully as they took each other for rides on the trikes.
- Excellent leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage has ensured that there are robust systems for recording children's progress and, as a result, learning activities are well matched to their needs. Relationships with parents are very strong. They enjoy coming to look at their children's 'special books' and finding out what they have learned.

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	139332
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	447860

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vaughan-Luke Clarke
Principal	Sharron Close (Executive Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01427 612572
Fax number	01427 614249
Email address	enquiries@talloaksacademy.co.uk

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