

Fir Tree Primary School and Nursery

Fir Tree Lane, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 2RA

Inspection dates 25–26 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Early years provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Since becoming an academy, achievement has improved and standards have now risen to at least national levels. From starting points which are below those expected for their age, pupils make good progress.
- The good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes prepares children well for more formal work in Key Stage 1.
- The academy has worked successfully to improve both attainment and progress for pupils who are disadvantaged and eligible for additional funding.
- The headteacher and senior leaders work well together and have improved the quality of teaching since opening as an academy.
- Subject leaders have a good knowledge of what needs to be done for pupils to achieve their full potential.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive good support so that they achieve well.
- Teaching is good. Teachers use the information they have about the pupils to plan work which challenges pupils well. Teachers have created good relationships for learning in their classrooms.
- Teachers manage their classes well and very good use is made of additional adults to help all pupils do their best work.
- The academy's inclusive culture promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is a happy and lively community.
- Behaviour is good and this is greatly valued by the pupils and their parents. Pupils say that they always feel safe.
- Effective support from the academy trust has been instrumental in improving achievement.
- The members of the governing body are highly ambitious for the academy and know it well. They check the academy's information and offer effective support.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Not enough teaching is outstanding to ensure all pupils make even better progress.
- Governors are developing an effective system for monitoring the quality of teaching. It is, however, too early to see the impact of this work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 21 lessons or parts of lessons. Seven of these were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and looked at samples of their work.
- Inspectors examined the 21 responses to the online Parent View survey as well as the academy's own survey of parents' and carers' views.
- A discussion was held with a member of the Newbury Academy Trust.
- A formal discussion was held with a group of pupils.
- Inspectors examined records of pupils' progress and other documentation including safeguarding information.
- The lead inspector held a discussion with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors held discussions with parents and carers of pupils at the academy and with members of the academy staff.

Inspection team

Tim McLoughlin, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lesley Voaden	Additional Inspector
Stuart Mansell	Seconded Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Fir Tree Primary School and Nursery converted to become an academy school on 1 March 2013. When its predecessor school, also called Fir Tree Primary School and Nursery, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- The academy is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school with a single form of entry in all year groups and two part-time Nursery classes.
- A new headteacher took up post soon after the academy, which is sponsored by the Newbury Academy Trust, opened.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. Those in the younger classes are at an early stage of speaking English.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals) provides support is above average.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is higher than average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding and pupils make even better progress by :
 - making sure that teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils in lessons
 - ensuring that marking and feedback are consistent across the academy
 - checking that pupils act on the advice given to them to improve their work.
- Ensure that effective use is made of new systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, so that governors are able to challenge and support the academy's leaders and assure themselves that recent progress is embedded.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- All staff and governors are strongly committed to the academy's caring vision which is now correctly focused on raising levels of achievement for all pupils. The headteacher is new to the role but has wasted no time in ensuring that effective systems have resulted in improvements in provision for pupils.
- The headteacher has high expectations of all staff. She has focused relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching so pupils make good progress. The academy evaluates its effectiveness accurately and now has an increased capacity to develop further due to the improvements made since becoming an academy.
- The headteacher manages teachers' performance well. Her support and challenge are greatly appreciated by staff. She provides clear guidance to the governing body to ensure the quality of teaching is linked to teacher's pay progression. Teachers have challenging targets and their progress towards achieving these is monitored thoroughly.
- Middle leaders effectively monitor the progress made by groups of pupils and hold teachers to account. This ensures that all have a clear focus on accelerating pupils' progress.
- The academy has used the pupil premium to fund teachers to work with small groups of pupils to help them achieve higher standards in English and mathematics. In these subjects the gap in achievement between pupils eligible for additional funding and other pupils has closed significantly since 2013 to a point where it is now not discernible.
- The curriculum is well planned and has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Leaders ensure that opportunities are available for all pupils to enjoy a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. As a result of good management, the academy offers a wide variety of subjects which pupils enjoy. This contributes to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which is a very strong feature of the school. Opportunities to make sure pupils gain a secure understanding of life in modern British society are well planned and managed to good effect.
- The learning environment is well managed. The academy is a tidy, well ordered place. Staff set a good example in the way they manage attractive displays of work around the school. These are clearly labelled to show pupils the links between different aspects of their work.
- The academy is making good use of additional funds to promote physical education and sport by using specialist coaches. This helps pupils develop their skills in areas such as basketball and supports their health and well-being.
- The good progress evident for all groups of pupils shows that the academy is very effective in promoting equality of opportunity.
- All statutory procedures for the safeguarding of children and the vetting of staff are fully in place and reviewed regularly.
- The academy trust has provided a very good level of support since sponsoring the school. This has included regular visits, meeting frequently with the headteacher and advising the school's 'local' governors on the headteacher's performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body fulfils all its statutory duties effectively. The budget is well managed. Governors have a good knowledge of strengths and areas for development. They know how well pupils are performing in relation to others nationally. Because of this, they offer a good level of support and challenge to the new headteacher. Governors have worked effectively to manage teachers' performance robustly and have a good understanding of what the academy is doing to reward good teaching. They have high aspirations for the future of the academy and they are now in a strong position to ensure it continues to improve. Governors pay frequent visits to the academy. They are developing a more systematic approach to checking the quality of teaching which is giving them a better view of strengths and areas for development.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils care for and are very respectful of one another. They are friendly, move about the academy quietly and are extremely polite. In turn, this has a positive impact on their learning and is helping them to achieve well in lessons. Playtimes are harmonious and this is helped by clubs and activities, which provide structured play for the pupils.
- Attitudes to learning are mostly positive, demonstrated by the pupils' good behaviour in lessons where

they are quick to settle and most are eager to learn. Pupils say that behaviour is typically like this and in most lessons they set high standards for one another. Pupils are proud to be members of the academy and of the progress they make.

- The academy places great importance on its values of teamwork, safety, respect, challenge, high expectations and creativity. This was seen clearly in an assembly looking at the nature of 'kindness' and how it can positively affect people around us. There is no evidence of discrimination.
- Well-trained teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils with their behaviour and social skills.
- Pupils at the academy undertake a range of responsibilities such as being a 'House Captain'. In this popular role they help at playtimes, assemblies and clubs.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that the academy's work to keep them safe is good. Pupils understand how to stay safe when using the internet.
- There is very little bullying. Pupils are aware of different types of bullying. The academy keeps careful records of the very few cases of bullying and suitable steps are taken to deal with these when they occur.
- Parents and carers have responded positively to the new attendance policy. Attendance has improved over the past year and is now above average. As a result, pupils make better progress because less learning time is lost.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved since the academy first opened. It is now consistently good. Lessons flow smoothly and learning takes place at a good rate because there are positive relationships between staff and pupils.
- Teachers plan lessons well, though work is not always set at the right level. This means that occasionally pupils find the work they are doing too difficult or too easy for them.
- Learning is rapid when teachers carefully check on pupils' understanding during lessons and adapt their planning when necessary. Reading is well taught throughout the school. The academy has placed a love of reading high on its list of priorities and has created a new and inviting library area. Pupils read a rich variety of books which keeps them enthused and interested.
- Teaching in mathematics and English is good, because teachers make the lessons challenging and interesting for pupils. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 4, pupils were learning how to subtract two-digit numbers. The teacher's careful planning ensured work was pitched at the right level for each group. As a result, all the pupils achieved success.
- Pupils are given frequent and effective feedback about how well they have done and how to improve their work. However, teachers do not always follow up on the advice given to check pupils are acting on it.
- Parents speak very positively about teaching, saying that the teachers know their pupils very well and often 'go the extra mile' to help them achieve well.
- Teachers manage their classes well. No time is wasted. Teachers make good use of various approaches to show pupils how to do their best work, for example by telling them what a good piece of work will look like. Pupils who need extra help are taught well through an effective mix of individual and class support. Adults who work closely with these pupils make an important contribution to their good learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since Fir Tree became an academy. Pupils are now making good progress and attain average results in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Year 6.
- Pupils develop a good understanding of the way letters link to the sounds they make (phonics) because this early reading skill is taught well. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the Year 1 national screening check is improving in line with national averages.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 work hard to improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills. The pitch of lessons is high and this means pupils have to work hard and pay close attention to lessons. For instance, Year 6 pupils were learning how to create a picture in the reader's mind. Building on the reading they had done in class the previous day they wrote evocatively about a tsunami.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress, particularly in learning to read and to express themselves, as a result of the targeted support they receive.

- The relatively small number of pupils who join the school speaking English as an additional language also receive good support. This is helping them to develop their English language skills well.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to provide extra support for their learning. For example, it is used to fund individual support to increase pupils' self-esteem and provide access to extra-curricular activities. As a result, eligible pupils have made the same amount of progress over the past year as their classmates with no discernible gap in attainment, including when compared with national figures.
- The most able pupils make good progress. From starting points which are above their peers they are given work which challenges them. They benefit from opportunities to write extended creative stories, research topic work and solve mathematical problems.

The early years provision

is good

- When children join the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage their levels of skills and knowledge are generally below those typical for their age. The activities and support provided from the adults help them make a good start to their learning and as a result they make good progress.
- Children get off to a good start in learning because of the strong relationships they form with the adults working with them. The children are enthusiastic and work well together, clearly enjoying the activities which take place both indoors and outside.
- Children are given many opportunities to learn what good behaviour looks like and how to play with one another co-operatively.
- Teaching in both the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Pupils' interests are followed. For example, in a mixed session, one group were painting with mud and sticks to develop fine motor skills while another group of pupils were re-enacting a dance sequence from a musical.
- The academy has developed effective partnerships with parents and carers. For example, when children join the academy teachers visit their homes to find out what children's interests and strengths are. Parents are very positive about the transition arrangements for the children and say that staff 'can't do enough for them'.
- Information from on-going assessments is used well. Teachers have a very detailed knowledge of each child's development, which they use to plan carefully what children will learn next.
- The learning environment is spacious, well used and well resourced. The headteacher and Early Years leader have identified scope in the outdoor areas to install an additional shelter and equipment that will support children's learning outside even better.

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	109872
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	447853

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	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nick Awbery
Headteacher	Laura Dove
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01635 42129
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