

Biggleswade Academy

Mead End, Biggleswade, SG18 8JU

Inspection dates

10–11 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
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.

- Outstanding leadership and management have significantly improved the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in this rapidly expanding and improving academy.
- The principal provides strong leadership and is highly ambitious in his drive to provide the very best for all pupils. The impact of actions by senior leaders and governors to improve key areas over the past two years has been considerable.
- Senior leaders have clear expectations and robustly check teachers' work; this has a positive effect on teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The leadership of the early years is good. Children make good progress from their starting points. Their learning and personal development are managed well.
- Good progress continues throughout the academy. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 8, standards are better than those usually found at this age.
- Excellent care, support and guidance remove barriers to pupils' learning. As a result, pupils achieve well because they are kept very safe and feel very secure in school.
- Pupils take great pride in their school and their work. They enjoy their learning and behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the academy. Their attendance has improved and is above average.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Staff set high expectations and challenge pupils to improve. Learning is stimulating and challenging. Teachers make excellent use of a wide range of resources, including tablets and computers.
- Teaching assistants and those staff supporting pupils' emotional health and well-being make an excellent contribution to their achievement.
- Provision to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is excellent. They make rapid progress in developing their skills. The provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder is well managed.
- The academy has developed a rich and varied range of learning opportunities that contribute strongly to pupils' much-improved achievement and to their excellent personal development.
- Academy leaders and governors have secured a good quality of education across the amalgamated schools. They know what the academy does well and what needs to be done to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not yet lead to outstanding progress for all groups of pupils across the academy.
- The new marking policy is not consistently applied so pupils do not have clear understanding of how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 30 lessons, of which several were joint observations with the principal or the vice principal.
- The inspectors talked with three groups of pupils, as well as individual pupils during lessons and at playtimes, to find out their views about the academy.
- The team undertook a scrutiny of pupils' English and mathematics books to establish the quality of pupils' work. They heard three groups of pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the principal, other leaders, staff and several governors, including the Chair of the Board of Directors. A further discussion was held by telephone with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the academy's plans for improvement, records of lesson observations, and information on pupils' progress and the quality of mathematics in pupils' books.
- The inspectors also scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors looked at pupils' work on display throughout the academy.
- Inspectors took account of the 159 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and all written correspondence from parents. They also spoke to several parents on the telephone. They checked information on the academy's website, and took into consideration the 48 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Susan Thomas-Pounce, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Marita Hopkinson	Additional Inspector
John Ubsdell	Additional Inspector
James McVeigh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Biggleswade Academy converted to become an academy school in August 2012. When its predecessor school, Holmemead Middle School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall. In July 2013, Southlands Lower School also converted to become part of Biggleswade Academy. When that school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory overall.
- Biggleswade Academy Trust was set up in August 2012 and has responsibility for the academy.
- Since September 2013, Biggleswade Academy Trust provides education and wrap-around care for children aged 2 to 13. The academy provides a daily breakfast and after-school club which operates for 51 weeks of the year. This provision is included in this inspection.
- Biggleswade Academy is larger than the average-sized middle or primary school.
- All pupils are educated on the academy site. The academy does not make use of any alternative educational provision.
- The academy has specially resourced provision for eight pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.
- There is a well-established arrangement for pupils from a nearby special school to join in activities at Biggleswade Academy.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- Around 16%, a below-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in care.
- At less than 10%, the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics in Year 6.
- All children in the Early Years Foundation Stage attend the Reception class full time.
- Over half the pupils join the academy in Year 5 from other local lower schools.
- There is a pre-school group on the same site as the school, which is managed by the Biggleswade Academy Trust. It was inspected separately in September 2014.
- The principal is executive headteacher for the Lawns Nursery School and Children's Centre and also provides support to a number of other local schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching so that the rising trend of faster progress and higher achievement is sustained by ensuring that all pupils' work is marked regularly so that pupils know how to improve and teachers check that pupils follow the advice they are given.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The principal, other leaders and governors are relentless in their pursuit of excellence. Together, they have improved the way that the academy works. They have raised the academy's expectations of pupils. These high expectations have resulted in significant improvements in pupils' attitudes to learning, their achievement and in the quality of teaching. Since the lower school joined the academy in 2013, the provision in the early years and the lower school age group are good and rapidly improving.
- The management of teaching and learning is particularly successful. As a result, teaching has improved substantially since the school became an academy. In a relatively short time, inadequate teaching has been eliminated and all staff, including those newly appointed, have responded well to the academy's high expectations. Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and their management of the performance of staff are robust; teachers' pay progression is closely linked to their performance.
- Leaders and managers at all levels have a precise understanding of what the academy needs to do to improve even further. Clear plans for improvement ensure that actions are taken very swiftly to successfully raise standards. That has resulted, for example, in better teaching and effective subject management.
- Leaders below senior level, including those responsible for leading subjects and groups of pupils, such as disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, are particularly effective in their work. They lead staff training in their subjects and have introduced improvements. Pupils' achievement has improved as a result, especially in mathematics.
- The head of the autistic spectrum disorder provision leads the team well and the teachers in the resource base effectively share their knowledge, experience and skills across the academy.
- All leaders analyse and make full use of the detailed information they have on how well individual pupils and groups of pupils are doing. They use this information to pinpoint precisely where any pupils may be falling behind and ensure that they receive the support they need. This shows the academy's high level of commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for all of its pupils.
- The range of learning opportunities is well designed to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy in all subjects. Differences in achievement between boys and girls have closed. Excellent guidance and provision develop pupils' social and personal skills, which prepares them exceptionally well for the next stage of learning. Opportunities for learning are highly effective in promoting pupils' love of learning and strongly support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to engage in sporting and musical activities. For example, specialist musical experiences are routinely provided for all pupils. Pupils visit museums and theatres, and engage in fundraising and community projects. They are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern British democratic society and have a strong sense of belonging.
- Additional government funding has been used to increase the support available to disadvantaged pupils, including through one-to-one or small-group support. Not only has it been used to improve their academic achievement, but also to support pupils' emotional well-being and attendance. Consequently, the academy is successfully closing the gaps in attainment between the disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and pupils nationally.
- The primary sport funding is spent effectively on developing teachers' confidence and expertise in aspects of physical education and on enhancing pupils' competitive engagement in sports across schools in the partnership. As a result of improvements to the outside environment, pupils enjoy regular opportunities to be active and participate in games during break time.
- Since converting to become an academy in August 2012, the school has retained its link with the local

authority. The local authority is very supportive of the academy. In turn, the principal has supported other local schools. The academy has good links with other schools through local clusters.

- Safeguarding arrangements meet all of the government's requirements. Leaders keep a close watch on attendance and punctuality to ensure that pupils' above-average attendance is maintained.
- The academy runs its own breakfast and after-school club. These are popular and well attended. Pupils are provided with high-quality activities which give them the opportunity to develop their social skills and creativity in a welcoming and caring atmosphere.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are highly committed to the academy and to the wider community. They were instrumental in the realisation of the multi-academy Trust vision of a single school providing wraparound care for children aged 2 to 13.
 - Outstanding work by governors has steered the academy successfully through significant changes in leadership, staffing and financial management. Governors bring a range of expertise, knowledge and commitment, which they have shared to good effect.
 - Governors are actively involved in the strategic direction of the academy and in assessing the quality of its work. They receive comprehensive and accurate reports from the principal and they also gather their own information, including through visits to lessons and by talking to pupils, parents and carers.
 - Governors oversee the systems for performance management well. They know how effective teaching is and how good performance is rewarded. They are fully committed to raising achievement still further and they ask probing questions to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of all aspects of the academy's work.
 - Statutory duties are carried out effectively, including checking on the impact of the use of the pupil premium and primary school sport funding to ensure that they secure equal opportunities for all pupils and tackle any potential discrimination.
 - Governors make sure that procedures to secure pupils' safety and well-being fully meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils have highly positive attitudes and an extremely strong desire to do well. Pupils work extremely well together and concentrate very well on their own.
- Pupils are polite, confident with visitors and keen to talk about all that the academy offers them. They have clear views on what is right and wrong in their dealings with others, and they respect others' cultural values and lifestyles. The process of pupils electing their school council representatives helps them to develop an understanding of democracy.
- Pupils move around the academy sensibly and safely, display excellent table manners in the dining room and behave impeccably in assemblies. Older pupils always look out for the younger ones. Their positive behaviour and considerate attitudes make a strong contribution to the effective social and learning opportunities during breakfast and after-school clubs.
- By the time pupils leave Year 8, they are confident, self-assured individuals who are extremely well prepared socially and academically for their move into secondary education.
- Pupils who have difficulty relating to others or those with challenging behaviours do not generally interrupt the learning of others. The encouragement that the staff give them to participate in learning is particularly successful. Staff devote a great deal of time to helping pupils to listen carefully to instructions and respond to the feelings of others. Teaching assistants contribute greatly to this.
- The arrangements for breakfast club and after-school care provide high-quality wraparound care. This is a

valuable resource for parents and provides an exceptionally good start to the day for pupils who attend. All age groups socialise very well together and this significantly contributes to their enjoyment of school life.

- Attendance has risen because of the academy's efforts to promote the importance of regular attendance with different groups of parents. It is above average.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Care guidance and support for all pupils is excellent because all adults in the academy know the pupils exceptionally well. They are quick to spot any changes in behaviour and are vigilant in the care they provide. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school.
- Pupils learn about keeping safe when using the internet and mobile devices and they know how to avoid risks. They have a strong understanding of potential hazards beyond school.
- Pupils understand the varied forms that bullying can take. They explain that bullying rarely happens in the academy. They are extremely confident that, if any unkind behaviour were reported, then it would be dealt with promptly. They say that they are very well cared for and can speak to their teachers if they have any concerns or worries.
- All parents, staff and pupils feel that the academy does its utmost to keep pupils safe and the inspection findings support this view.
- Policies and procedures for behaviour and safety meet all requirements as pupils' safety is given a high priority.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved over the past year. It is now good and some is outstanding. The principal, ably supported by a committed staff, has driven improvements in teaching to improve the quality of learning. Underperformance has been resolutely tackled. As a consequence, pupils' achievement has strongly improved.
- Most teaching builds effectively on what pupils already know and can do because teachers assess pupils' progress accurately. This secures a good pace in learning and progress. For example, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson on multiplication, assessment strategies were employed very effectively to secure progress. These included well-directed questions to clarify and extend understanding. This helped the pupils to learn quickly how to evaluate accurately their own work and that of others.
- There is a good focus on developing literacy skills. Ample emphasis is given to basic spelling, punctuation and grammar. Phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is taught effectively. Pupils achieve good reading levels overall and, throughout the academy, they increasingly write effectively for different purposes across a range of subjects.
- Mathematics is a recent focus for improvement and is taught well. Recent changes to the way mathematics is taught include the introduction of a calculation policy. This has enabled pupils to use a range of mathematical strategies in their work. Pupils are given challenges called 'mild', 'spicy' and 'hot', which give them opportunities to use their knowledge in different ways to solve problems.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they set high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. Work is pitched at the right level to challenge pupils' thinking and offer timely support whenever it is needed. As a result, all groups of pupils, including the most able, make at least good and, for some, rapid progress.
- The curriculum offers many opportunities for pupils to use basic skills in different contexts. Teachers use

resources that are stimulating and exciting. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used particularly well to enhance pupils' learning. The recent addition of tablet computers for pupils in Years 5 and 6 and the wide range of options Years 7 and 8 pupils can study has extended and enriched pupils' learning experiences. ICT is an integral learning tool in many lessons whether it be in designing apps, building mobile webs or gaining firsthand knowledge of computer programming. Pupils are exceptionally confident and capable in using ICT to undertake research and to record and present their ideas to others.

- Teaching assistants are deployed well to support pupils, including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils eligible for additional funding. Staff, including specialist teachers and teaching assistants, are very skilful in supporting the pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and those with emotional and behavioural difficulty. This is having a very positive impact on accelerating progress for all these pupils. Teaching assistants contribute effectively to pupils' progress, both in class and in the specialist provision.
- There is a new system for marking and for giving pupils feedback on their written work and ensuring they have a chance to respond. Where the system is properly implemented, pupils are clearly making faster progress. Occasionally, teachers' marking does not lead to prompt improvements in pupils' work because teachers do not check that pupils consistently follow the advice they have been given.

The achievement of pupils is good

- On entry to Reception and for those who join the academy in Year 5, pupils' experience and skills are broadly typical for their age.
- The principal's wide-ranging improvements to the quality of teaching have led to better progress and achievement. For example, in the national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2014, standards in all subjects were broadly average, an improvement on the previous year. There was also a significant improvement in the attainment of pupils in Year 2 in 2014, where standards in reading, writing and mathematics were above average.
- There was a significant increase in the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 in 2014. This stemmed from improved leadership and better teaching of phonics. Pupils read widely and confidently, with good fluency and understanding.
- As a result of the principal's drive, progress has accelerated for all pupils. Since the amalgamation, the proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected rates of progress by the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014 was close to the national average. This momentum has continued and, currently, standards in Year 6 and Year 8 are on track to be higher than in the previous year.
- The most-able pupils are expected to work hard and are challenged well. The proportions of pupils attaining Level 3 and above at the end of Year 2 are above the national average in reading and writing and not far behind in mathematics. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 and above has also increased. This represents an improvement over the results in 2013.
- By the end of Year 8 in 2014, standards were well above those often found in English and mathematics at this age. More pupils were exceeding expectations. These pupils make good and sometimes rapid progress because they are encouraged to learn and respond very well. Academy information confirmed by work scrutiny indicates that an increased proportion of pupils are working well above expectations for their age. Pupils of all abilities are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The academy is successfully narrowing the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others, both within the academy and with similar groups nationally. The progress from the starting points of disadvantaged pupils compares favourably with the percentage reaching expected levels and above in reading and writing.
- At the end of Year 6 in 2014, disadvantaged pupils were more than two terms behind their classmates in writing and mathematics. They were a term behind in reading. When compared with pupils nationally,

disadvantaged pupils were more than two terms behind in mathematics, around one and a half terms behind in writing but less than a term behind in reading. The academy's own records, confirmed by inspection evidence, show that current gaps are closing steadily.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including those who attend the specialist provision, make at least good progress. This is a result of very effective support for these pupils in meeting their emotional needs and helping with their academic work. Very effective use is made of assessment information and work is tailored to their individual learning needs.

The early years provision

is good

- The early year's provision is good. It secures a good start to children's education so they make good progress. Children start in Reception with levels of development broadly typical for their ages. Children are well prepared for their move into Year 1 with an above-average proportion having achieved a good level of development. Progress in literacy and numeracy, while good, are not as strong as other areas.
- Outstanding teaching in personal, social and emotional development is the basis for the excellent behaviour seen in the early years. Adults work closely with children to provide effective guidance and support. Activities are carefully designed to enable children to help each other in their learning. This results in strong social development.
- Staff know the individual needs and interests of the children. Assessments accurately reveal if any child is falling behind so that targeted support can be quickly provided. As a result, different groups of children, including disabled children, those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged children, all make similarly good progress.
- Activities are well planned to build on children's previous experience and to engage them in their learning. Children learn well through play activities, both indoors and outside, and through tasks that are teacher-led.
- The leadership of the early years is highly effective. Recent improvements include a sharper focus on checking children's attainment and a wider range of learning activities. The teaching of phonics has also improved and, consequently, children's early reading and writing skills have improved. Staff work closely with parents to ensure that children make a good start to their education. The pre-school and the strong links with other early years' providers ensure the smoothest possible transition into Reception for all children. Children settle quickly into routines and generally behave very well because they feel secure.
- Children are kept safe by caring and supportive staff, and safeguarding procedures comply with statutory requirements.

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	137947
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	447781

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	883
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gary Waghorn
Principal	Stephen Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01767 660515
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Email address	enquiries@biggleswade.org

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