

# Tree Tops Primary Academy

Brishing Lane, Park Wood, Maidstone, ME15 9EZ

**Inspection dates** 17–18 March 2015

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Inadequate                  | 4        |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Good                        | 2        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Early years provision          |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are improving but poor provision in the past means that there is still some ground to make up, particularly in writing.
- Pupils' spelling and handwriting skills are weak.
- Disadvantaged pupils, particularly the oldest, are not catching up as quickly as their classmates.
- The quality of teaching in all key stages, including in the early years, is not all consistently good and pupils make more rapid progress in some lessons than in others.
- Teachers do not always expect pupils to complete enough work, explain the learning clearly enough or move the pupils on to new learning when they are ready.
- Many pupils are reluctant to persevere without a lot of prompting and encouragement. They have too few opportunities to use their initiative or make decisions about their learning.

### The school has the following strengths:

- As a result of the senior leaders' determination and attention to detail, the quality of education has improved, aspirations have been raised and staff morale is high.
- Senior leaders, middle leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the academy very well. They check carefully and provide rapid support and challenge when necessary to ensure that improvements happen.
- As a result, the quality of teaching is improving and standards in reading, writing and mathematics, although still below average, are rising across the school, including in the early years.
- Attendance has improved and is about average. Far fewer pupils regularly take days off than was the case last year.
- There are very few incidents of poor behaviour now and the number of exclusions has fallen sharply.
- Systems to keep pupils safe are rigorous. They feel safer because behaviour has improved and there are good opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons and visited all of the classes. They also visited an assembly and the breakfast club. Three of the visits to lessons were carried out jointly with the Principal.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books to check the quality of the work and the progress made this year. Inspectors listened to pupils read during lessons and observed the teaching of early reading.
- Inspectors met with pupils, formally and informally. Meetings were held with representatives of the management board which is responsible for governance, academy leaders and subject leaders. Meetings were also held with representatives of Leigh Academy Trust.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire Parent View for these to be analysed. Inspectors took account of 76 responses to the academy's recent parent survey and 25 responses to a staff questionnaire.
- The academy's records of the attainment and progress that pupils are making in reading, writing and mathematics so far this year were scrutinised, as well as published information about the last academic results in national tests. Other documents were examined including improvement plans, curriculum plans, checks on the quality of teaching and learning, records of staff training, development and performance management, behaviour and safety logs, safeguarding information and records of the work of the development board.

## Inspection team

Sheena MacDonald, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Graham Pirt

Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.*

### Information about this school

- The academy is similar in size to most other primary schools. The early years education is provided in a Nursery and a Reception class. Children attend the Nursery for part of the week and attend full time in Reception.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support from the pupil premium funding (extra money provided by the government for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority) is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average. These pupils represent many different nationalities and most are from a range of European and Eastern European countries. The proportion at the early stages of learning English is also below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The academy does not meet the current floor standards, which are the minimum standards for attainment and progress expected by the government.
- The academy provides and manages a breakfast club.
- Until the end of February 2015 the academy was sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust and from the beginning of March it became a member of Leigh Academy Trust. The academy is now a member of a local cluster of three of the Trust's academies. Oversight of this group is provided by a Lead Principal who is also the Principal of Oaks Academy.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in reading, mathematics, and particularly in writing, so that increasing numbers of pupils achieve as well as pupils elsewhere and the academy meets the government's floor standards by:
  - improving pupils' spelling and handwriting so that they are able to write more fluently and at a greater length
  - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils, particularly the older pupils, make faster progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by:
  - raising expectations about the amount pupils can and should produce in each lesson
  - making sure that teachers' explanations are clear and they move pupils on to new learning as quickly as possible.
- Improve pupils' attitudes for effective learning by:
  - insisting that pupils stick at tasks and produce better quality work in each lesson and over time
  - giving pupils more opportunities to use their initiative and make decisions about their learning.
- Improve leadership and management by providing the most effective support to help disadvantaged pupils make faster progress.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The Principal and Vice Principal understood from the start the rapid change that was needed to ensure that pupils receive the quality of education they deserve. Their drive, enthusiasm and clarity of purpose have brought about very obvious improvements, albeit from very low levels, in teaching, pupils' achievement, behaviour, safety, well-being and attendance. This means that pupils are better prepared now than in the past for their next steps when they move to secondary education.
- Senior leaders have been supported well by the Lead Principal, as a member of the previous management board and now in her current role. It is to the leaders' credit that improvements have been achieved by motivating the staff and building an effective team. As a result, morale is high and there is a palpable determination throughout the academy to continue and increase the pace of improvement.
- Other leaders, such as the special educational needs coordinator and the early years and subject leaders, are increasingly influential in supporting their colleagues, providing training and coaching and bringing about improvements.
- There are rigorous systems to ensure that pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are regularly and accurately assessed. The information is used well, along with regular checks on the quality of teaching and the work in pupils' books, and rapid action taken to address any weaknesses.
- Plans for improvement are sharply focused with explicit expectations and responsibilities for each group of staff, leaders, governors and pupils. The success of the plans is measured by how well pupils achieve. Staff performance targets are also closely linked to pupils' achievements.
- In the past, the emphasis was on making sure that all staff adhered to clear expectations about specific aspects of teaching. As staff increasingly followed the agreed guidelines, the focus has shifted and is now sharply directed onto how well pupils are learning.
- Teachers and learning support assistants are held accountable for pupils' progress through the academy's performance management arrangements. Training, coaching and support activities are provided and checked to make sure they are having the necessary impact.
- Leaders take seriously the need to avoid discrimination, promote positive relationships and make sure that all pupils have the opportunity to make equally good progress. Learning support staff have been trained so that their individual and small-group support activities are more effective. As a result, most groups of pupils achieve as well as others. The only exception is the disadvantaged group of pupils, particularly the very oldest pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding. These pupils are taking longer to catch up although they are beginning to make faster progress now.
- In the past, the curriculum was narrow and uninspiring with little opportunity to learn about subjects other than English and mathematics. This is changing and now more subjects are covered in greater depth.
- There are opportunities to learn about and appreciate different cultures and beliefs. Pupils regularly work with an artist in residence and musicians. There are also planned lessons for pupils to think about their own safety, their relationships with others and to consider values such as determination and tolerance. Leaders place an emphasis on enabling pupils to look at life outside the school and the local area by teaching them about current affairs such as the budget and forthcoming election.
- Pupil premium funding is carefully targeted. As a result, the behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils have improved significantly. Their academic achievement is improving because they come to school more regularly and engage more fully in their learning. However, although a full review of pupil premium spending is not required, leaders need to find out more about which actions are making the most difference and helping disadvantaged pupils to catch up fastest. These pupils are making similar and sometimes better progress than the others, but their progress needs to be even faster if attainment gaps are to close.
- The use of the sport premium funding has resulted in an increased emphasis on the importance of physical activity. Teachers are better trained and there are improved resources for different types of physical education. As a result, participation in sporting events and physical activities has increased.
- Arrangements to keep pupils safe are rigorous. All staff are trained, follow the agreed procedures and are well aware of their responsibilities to be alert to and act swiftly if they have any concerns. Leaders work very effectively with colleagues from external agencies to safeguard pupils.
- The academy has benefited from support and training from the previous sponsor, and since January, the current sponsors and external consultants. Leaders and staff work effectively with colleagues from the other academies in their group to implement revised curriculum and assessment arrangements and also to check that their assessments of pupils' achievements are accurate.

### ■ The governance of the school:

- There has been a recent change to governance arrangements with the academy becoming part of Leigh Academy Trust. Some of the same governors remain on the new development group so that some consistency has been maintained.
- Governors and Academy Trust leaders carry out their statutory responsibilities effectively and make sure that health, safety and safeguarding checks are rigorous.
- Responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the academy are explicit across the different levels of governance. As a result, there is a strong clarity of purpose between the Trust and local governance.
- Governors are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and what is being done to bring about more consistently good practice. They know how the achievement of pupils compares with that of other pupils nationally. However, the history of the academy means that there is a tendency to compare how things are now with how things used to be. This results in a slightly more positive view than is actually the case.
- Additional government funding, such as the pupil premium and the sports premium, is carefully managed and targeted. Governors understand that the activities provided using the pupil premium funding are making a positive difference to behaviour and attendance. The impact on pupils' learning needs further evaluation.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

## require improvement

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because it is taking time for pupils to develop good attitudes to learning. Many find it difficult to persevere with tasks or move to new activities without many reminders and a lot of encouragement. They sometimes chat with each other instead of concentrating on what they are supposed to be doing.
- Pupils are generally polite and friendly and they get on well together. They show respect for other people and usually listen carefully to different points of view or when other pupils are contributing to discussions.
- Pupils say that behaviour has improved and the academy's records show that this is the case. There are far fewer instances of poor behaviour than in the past and the number of exclusions has plummeted.
- Almost all parents and carers who responded to the recent survey said that the academy deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. There was a sharp increase in the number of positive responses compared with the previous survey and this reflects the improvements in the way staff manage behaviour. The systems are understood by everyone and used by all staff.
- There are opportunities for pupils who have particular emotional and behavioural needs to spend time in small groups or in one-to-one sessions. Pupils are able to describe how they have been helped to manage their own behaviour and emotions and how they do not become angry as quickly as they used to. They say that other pupils help them as well as the staff.
- Pupils enjoy taking on various responsibilities. Their elected representatives on the academy council meet regularly. They understand about voting and democracy, especially since visiting the Houses of Parliament. They make decisions to improve the academy, such as providing recycling bins, and about which charities to support.
- Most pupils come to the academy every day, unless they are ill, and attendance is now around about the national average. The staff have worked well with parents and carers to successfully reduce the amount of time particular pupils are absent.

### Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Parents and carers who responded to the academy's survey overwhelmingly believe that their children are safe and happy in school. The pupils agree and say that the adults care for and look out for them.
- The peer mediators are spoken of highly by other pupils who say that they help to solve any difficulties. The improvements in behaviour mean that pupils feel safer now than in the past.
- Systems for making sure that pupils are safe are thorough. The site is safe and the pupils appreciate the

improvements, such as the new fencing.

- Pupils are able to discuss issues such as how to deal with different types of bullying or harassment, although they say that this sort of behaviour is rare now. They know about internet safety and about the dolphin button which they can press if something appears on the computer screen that concerns them.
- The breakfast club provides a calm and positive start to the day for the pupils who attend.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because, although there is some good practice when pupils make rapid progress, this is not always the case in all classes or subjects.
- Teachers' expectations are still sometimes too low and not all teachers insist that pupils stay on task and complete enough work. Sometimes adults do too much and, as a result, pupils have less time to learn in depth. This is particularly true in writing activities where weak spelling and handwriting skills also slow the pace of learning.
- Occasionally teachers' introductions are confusing and so pupils are not sure that they know what to do. Pupils lose confidence and need a lot of encouragement to stay on task or move on to the next steps. There are too few opportunities for pupils to use their own ideas and interests to extend and deepen their learning.
- There are common strengths due to the school's agreed core principles about what good teaching involves. All teachers follow these principles so that, for example, activities are planned to take account of pupils' differing abilities, including providing challenge to stretch the most able. Expectations are shared and explained so that pupils know what good learning will look like and they also know their longer-term targets.
- All staff have been trained so that they make good use of newly acquired resources to support learning. This is helping learning support assistants to make an increasingly valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Classrooms are bright and well organised with displays which support learning activities and build pupils' knowledge and skills. Teachers' marking is helpful and pupils are given time to use this feedback to improve their work.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved and there are more practical and problem-solving opportunities. For example, Year 1 pupils enthusiastically gathered information from their classmates about what drinks, snacks and flavours of ice cream were the most popular. They were able to use tally charts to collect and count the results and are planning to use the information to prepare for an imminent dinosaurs' party.
- Improvements in the teaching of reading, particularly early reading, mean that pupils' skills are improving. Teachers use good quality literature to interest the pupils and to provide good models for their writing. For example, Year 6 pupils, inspired by the book, *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes, produced some lovely charcoal pictures of iron ladies, along with lively, descriptive writing which made good use of metaphor and simile.
- Recent changes mean that pupils are enjoying learning across a more varied range of subjects. There are good examples around the academy of art, design technology, science and geography. Different subjects are combined to make learning more meaningful and interesting for pupils. Visits are also used to spark interest. For example, a visit to an aquarium inspired Year 2 pupils to produce some interesting non-fiction writing.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Across the academy, including in the early years, there are improvements in pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills. The pace of progress is at least as good as expected and is speeding up as the quality of teaching improves and pupils become more confident in their own abilities. Some pupils make even better progress, particularly in mathematics. This is making up for poor teaching and learning in the past which resulted in pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills being exceptionally low.
- In 2014, pupils left at the end of Year 6 with skills at much higher levels than in previous years but which were still well below average. Results in the spelling, grammar and punctuation test were particularly low and poor spelling is still causing concern throughout Key Stage 2.
- Current Year 6 pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics are already at higher levels than those



achieved by last year's cohort at the time of the national tests. This year the academy is on track to be much closer to the national averages and to meet the government's floor standards for the first time.

- In 2014, the Year 6 pupils made far better progress across Key Stage 2 than had been the case in the past and the proportion that made expected progress was similar to that seen nationally. Slightly fewer made better than expected progress. The most recent checks on how well pupils are achieving show that standards are rising. The work in the pupils' books confirms that they are covering a lot of ground and making at least reasonable and sometimes good progress.
- In 2014, the end of Key Stage 1 results were well below average in all subjects and, although the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected level in the phonics screening check improved, it was still well below average. A much higher proportion of the current Year 1 pupils are well placed to achieve the expected level this year. The current Key Stage 1 pupils' skills are already at least as good as were achieved by last year's classes at the end of the year.
- Early reading activities are well planned and pupils' reading skills are improving. Teachers emphasise reading and writing for different purposes and there was a very positive buzz in the Year 2 classroom during a reading activity which was linked to their dinosaurs topic.
- Disadvantaged pupils have historically achieved even less well than the other pupils and it is taking some time to close the wide gaps between their attainment and that of the other pupils. This means that although in last year's national tests these pupils made better progress than their classmates, it was not good enough to close the gaps. By the time they left at the end of Year 6, in 2014, disadvantaged pupils were a year behind their classmates in mathematics and two terms behind in reading and writing. They were almost two years behind other pupils nationally in mathematics and a year behind in reading and writing.
- Across the academy, disadvantaged pupils are beginning to catch up with the other pupils. It is taking longer for the very oldest pupils to catch up because they had lost the most ground in the past. In addition, some of this group have had particular difficulties such as poor attendance. As attendance and behaviour improve, the pace is beginning to increase.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make slightly slower progress than other pupils in the academy. The improving quality and effectiveness of additional support are having a positive impact on this group.
- In the past, the most able pupils did not achieve well, with very few reaching the higher levels, particularly in Key Stage 1. This is also changing and the most able pupils are responding well to the improved challenge in lessons. The most able pupils are now making at least reasonable, and sometimes more rapid, progress.
- A strong, early focus on developing pupils' language and communication skills means that those who are at the early stages of Pupils' spelling, handwriting and presentation are weaker areas. In some pupils' books, there are many short pieces of work and too few chances for pupils to write at length or learn in sufficient depth.
- Changes to the curriculum mean that pupils have better opportunities to learn and achieve in subjects other than English and mathematics. There are good examples of learning in other subjects and pupils are more interested in their learning.

### **The early years provision**

### **requires improvement**

- In 2014, only just over a quarter of the children were well prepared for their next steps as they moved into Year 1. This is exceptionally low even allowing for some very low starting points. They have made rapid progress in Year 1.
- The children who are in the early years classes now are making much better progress. The school's detailed records and careful use of observations show that a much greater proportion are developing the skills and knowledge needed to be better prepared to move into Key Stage 1 in September.
- The quality of teaching varies in the early years, as it does in the rest of the academy and not all of the teaching is consistently good. Consequently, despite some well-planned, lively learning opportunities both inside and outside, the progress children make is not as rapid as it could be. Sometimes staff do not make sure that all children participate in the full range of activities.
- In order to improve the quality of teaching, the staff, supported by the early years leader, plan the children's learning together. They share their expertise and plan activities which better meet the needs and interests of the children.

- The staff make sure that children are well looked after, safe and happy. Children know the routines and, although some of the very youngest find changes difficult to cope with, by the time they are in Reception, they are more confident learners.
- Some children find speaking, listening and communication difficult. These children and those who are at the early stages of learning English get good support to build these skills quickly.
- The staff share information with parents and carers about their children's achievements. They are aware that more needs to be done to encourage parents and carers to share information from home so that the academy can build on home experiences, achievements and learning.
- The leadership of the early years is effective. Information gathered about children's achievements is analysed and used effectively to identify where improvements are needed. Although the leader teaches in Key Stage 2, she is able to join the early years team for half a day each week to work alongside her colleagues and share and promote good practice.



## 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

|                                |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 137882 |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Kent   |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 454126 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

|  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Primary                     |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Academy sponsor-led         |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 3–11                        |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                       |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 227                         |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | Development board           |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Graham Clewes               |
| <b>Principal</b>                           | Libby Fidock                |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 4–5 December 2013           |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01622 754888                |
| <b>Fax number</b>                          | 01622 683542                |
| <b>Email address</b>                       | lfidock@treetopsacademy.org |

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

