

Plains Farm Academy

Tudor Grove, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR3 1SU

Inspection dates 24–25 March 2015

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	Outstanding		1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This school is improving rapidly. Pupils are now making much better progress.
- Under the dynamic leadership of the headteacher the quality of teaching has improved significantly. Staff and pupil expectations are much higher.
- Teachers know their pupils well. They plan lessons that excite and enthuse all pupils.
- Children in early years make an excellent start to their learning. Teaching prioritises the development of personal, social and communication skills. The exciting provision captures children's interest and imagination.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their good behaviour make a strong contribution to their achievement and enjoyment of school.
- A supportive and caring atmosphere contributes strongly to pupils' safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Attendance has improved over time and is now broadly average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced.
- Pupils are polite and courteous to adults and to one another. They show respect and tolerance to those from different cultures and communities.
- Pupils' experiences are enriched by a wide range of clubs and activities that develop their sporting, musical and artistic interests.
- School leaders are committed to ensuring that pupils and staff achieve their potential. Staff morale is high.
- Working with partner schools in the academy trust has improved the quality of teaching and learning. As a result pupils are making accelerated progress.
- Governors provide good support and challenge to the school. They are committed to ensuring all pupils do as well as they can.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Learning activities do not always match the needs of pupils of different ability. Sometimes work is too difficult and sometimes activities do not sufficiently challenge the most able pupils.
- Teachers do not always ensure pupils act upon advice given to improve their work. In a few instances pupils do not have enough opportunity to practise new learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 12 lessons or part lessons. They observed the quality of teaching and learning, looked at the current standards of pupils' work and held discussions with pupils about their learning and progress.
- A number of shorter visits were made to observe groups of pupils receiving additional support outside their classroom sessions and to lessons where pupils were taught phonics. Inspectors also attended a whole-school assembly.
- Inspectors observed pupils in and around school including lunchtimes and playtimes. They also listened to a number of pupils read in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- They held meetings with groups of pupils, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, senior leaders responsible for English, mathematics, the early years and special educational needs. Inspectors also met with members of the governing body, the executive headteacher and the Chair of the Inspire Multi-Academy Trust. In addition discussions were held with a representative of the local authority and an external consultant who has been working with the academy.
- Inspectors analysed the 28 responses that had been submitted to the on-line questionnaire for parents (Parent View). Inspectors also considered views of staff and the school's own parent and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors scrutinised a number of documents including the school improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings, the checks made on the quality of teaching and performance of staff and those relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

David Wilson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Anne Vernon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Plains Farm Academy is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for support through the pupil premium) is well above average at twice the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding the school receives for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is broadly average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. No children speak English as an additional language.
- In 2014, the academy met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 6 in English and mathematics.
- The academy is part of the Inspire Multi-Academy Trust, which includes two other local primary academies and has an executive headteacher. All three academies have their own headteacher.
- Nursery and Reception-aged children attend on a full-time basis.
- The headteacher was made permanent headteacher in March 2014 following a period as acting head. When the academy's predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in May 2012 it was judged to require special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further so that it is consistently good and moves rapidly to outstanding, enabling all pupils to reach their potential, by:
 - ensuring all learning activities are carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils of different ability
 - ensure pupils act upon the advice given for improvement and check that improvements are sustained over time
 - when necessary ensure pupils have sufficient time to practise new learning so that it is secure and builds upon existing skills, knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The inspirational and determined leadership of the headteacher to provide all pupils with the very best educational experiences has been central to the school's rapid improvement. Staff at all levels, share the headteacher's ambition and high expectations for the school and the pupils' achievement and behaviour. As one member of staff commented, 'We are all working together as a team to make sure our children do as well as they can and give them the best possible start in life.'
- The strong leadership of teaching has been key to the school's rapid improvement. Previously identified weaknesses in teaching have been addressed. All leaders maintain a relentless focus on the impact new initiatives are having on the quality of teaching. Regular feedback to staff about their performance is used to acknowledge good teaching and tackle poor performance.
- Staff development has been at the heart of the school's improvement. Excellent links across the partner schools within the academy trust have improved teaching. Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues across the trust are successful in developing a culture of continuous reflection and improvement.
- Subject leaders have moved quickly and decisively to raise the performance of teachers and improve rates of pupil progress. They are making good progress in sharing aspects of best practice identified within the school and across the trust.
- The curriculum rightly prioritises the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics so that all pupils have a secure grounding in basic skills. School leaders ensure that pupils are equally well prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, well-planned assemblies, lessons in citizenship and personal, social development promote pupils' tolerance and respect towards those from other cultures, faiths and communities. These successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Additional funding, such as pupil premium and primary school sports funding, is used effectively and is successful in improving the achievement, engagement and well-being of pupils. As a result pupils' confidence and self-esteem are growing and this is having a positive impact in terms of narrowing the gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and their peers. The school successfully promotes equality of opportunity, is committed to fostering good relations and determined discrimination of any kind is tackled.
- Systems to monitor teachers' performance are thorough. Every teacher has a personalised development plan and, through support and challenge, is increasingly effective in developing individual expertise. The governing body oversees the cycle of checking teachers' performance rigorously and ensures teachers' pay matches their teaching skills.
- Senior leaders have benefited from the support of the local authority in moving the school forward. Valuable support through moderation of pupils' achievement and progress and support to measure the impact of teaching has enabled senior leaders to get an accurate view of school improvement.
- The academy has benefited enormously from its membership of the Inspire Multi-Academy Trust. Through joint staff training, the sharing of expertise, moderation of pupils' progress and checking the impact of teaching, the school has very quickly established secure systems to measure how effective it is. In addition, an external consultant works across the three academies and provides ongoing support and challenge. As a result the school is well placed to improve further.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very effective and have played a significant role in getting the school back on track. Working in partnership with the academy trust and the local authority, governors have worked tirelessly to improve the quality of provision for all pupils. Actions taken over the last year demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's priorities and a resolve to do everything possible to both challenge and support school leaders to secure necessary improvements.
 - Governors have a secure understanding of the school's performance data and the key areas for improvement. Through regular visits to the school they are clear about the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. This ensures governors are clear about the performance of teachers and take informed decisions when rewarding good teaching and tackling underperformance.
 - Governors ensure that child protection and safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Statutory responsibilities are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well both in and out of the classroom. Pupils are very kind and considerate to one another and play happily together. They are polite and courteous. They show respect to teachers and other adults and respond immediately to instructions and requests. As a result the school has a feeling of a family all sharing similar values.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and join in activities with enthusiasm. Their ability to work collaboratively starts in early years and develops well across the school. They work well together sharing ideas and resources to complete given tasks.
- Pupils are encouraged and engaged in the development of class topics. They take responsibility for the presentation and displaying of class work and talk animatedly about their contribution.
- Pupils have numerous opportunities to become involved in the running of the school. Older pupils act as playtime buddies and there is a very active school council. Year 5 pupils have recently trained as sports leaders. They are working to support others in developing healthy exercise as a way to improve health and well-being and to develop social skills through physical activity.
- Pupils state that bullying is rare and they know that they can get help from an adult if they have a worry or concern. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying, including racist, cyber and homophobic bullying. One Year 1 pupil stated 'It doesn't matter if you have different colour hair or different colour skin. We are all the same.'
- A few parents registered concern that behaviour and issues of bullying were not dealt with effectively enough. Inspection evidence does not find this to be the case.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the online inspection questionnaire and the parents spoken to throughout the inspection agreed that the school keeps their children safe.
- There are clear systems and procedures in place to safeguard pupils and to follow up accidents and any inappropriate behaviour. Appropriate risk assessments are in place. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in classrooms and when outside. They are also aware of how to be safe when using the internet.

The quality of teaching is good

- Senior leaders have been relentless in improving the quality of teaching and placing pupils' learning at the centre of everything the school does. Teachers have an increased understanding of what makes effective learning and have benefited from sharing best practice and from high quality training. As a result teachers are far more aware of their impact on pupils' progress. Teaching is typically good with an increasing amount that is outstanding. This results in pupils making much better progress.
- Teachers provide interesting lessons and have good relationships with pupils. All this gives pupil's confidence to try new things and to concentrate and complete tasks. On occasions learning activities do not always match the needs of different ability groups. Sometimes the work presented is too difficult and this slows the rate of progress. In some instances the work presented does not sufficiently challenge the most able pupils.
- Effective teaching of phonics through a structured, well-planned programme enables pupils to use these skills well in their reading and writing. The development of reading is well planned and teachers use every opportunity to develop reading skills across other subjects of the curriculum. At both Key Stages 1 and 2 good use is made of mini-computers to support reading, the development of phonics and comprehension skills. This work can be accessed at home and there are opportunities for family learning in school where parents come in and support their child in their reading and phonic development.
- The development of writing is given a high priority across the school. From nursery, children are encouraged to write and record their work. Independent writing skills in the early years are outstanding. The vast majority of children in early years are confident in making marks, forming letters, making lists and in Reception constructing simple sentences which are clearly punctuated. Across school pupils enjoy writing and good progress is made in both creative and technical aspects of the subject.
- Much progress is being made in the teaching of mathematics. Pupils are making much better progress in

all aspects of mathematics and are confidently using their knowledge and understanding to solve problems.

- Teaching assistants provide effective support for groups of pupils including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. For example, they have helpful discussions with pupils about their work and give clear guidance for writing.
- Teachers mark pupils' work carefully and most set clear targets for further improvement. However, teachers do not always insist that pupils make the necessary improvements. As a result pupils do not always learn from their mistakes and progress is sometimes slower than it could be.
- Teachers make good use of homework, such as reading, spelling, number and extended topic work to consolidate pupils' learning.

The achievement of pupils is good

- There have been significant changes to the leadership team, teaching staff and governing body since the school became an academy in 2013. Following low performance over time, including in the 2014 national tests, the headteacher, executive headteacher and the Trust Board took swift and decisive action to improve the quality of teaching and address pupil achievement and progress.
- The vast majority of children enter the early years provision with a level of skill, knowledge and understanding below that typical for their age. This includes their personal and social development, communication skills and those areas related to language, literacy and mathematical understanding. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children are currently making good progress from their starting points. This includes children with special educational needs and the most able. As a result children are now better prepared for moving to Year 1.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1 are currently making rapid progress in their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Evidence in pupils' workbooks indicates that almost all pupils are making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. An increased proportion of pupils are making more than expected progress. As a result gaps in attainment are narrowing for all groups.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in the Year 1 phonics (letters and sounds) screening check in 2014 was well below the national average. Similarly the proportion of Year 2 pupils retaking the screening test indicated fewer pupils achieved the threshold compared to that seen nationally. Currently improved teaching and successful support work are leading to significant improvement in pupil achievement and progress. The vast majority of Year 1 pupils, as well as those Year 2 pupils retaking the screening check, are in line to achieve the national threshold.
- The 2014 Key Stage 2 national tests indicated that pupils attained below the national average in each aspect of reading, writing and mathematics. Typically attainment was between six months to a year behind that seen nationally. Current evidence indicates that pupils are now making rapid progress in their reading, writing and mathematical skills with the majority now making accelerated progress. Clear and convincing evidence exists to show that pupil attainment is rising quickly this year.
- From their different starting points, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are now making good progress. This is because identification of need is more accurately defined and appropriate support is regularly checked. Levels of adult support and learning activities are kept under constant review to ensure this group achieves well.
- Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 are currently working at similar levels to their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. This shows significant improvement in reading and mathematics over the previous year. Typically this group was six to eight months behind their classmates in reading and mathematics. There was no significant difference in terms of attainment in writing. The progress of disadvantaged pupils throughout the school has accelerated and compares very favourably with that of other pupils nationally.
- Over the past year, the school has raised the level of challenge presented to the most able pupils. Most pupils are making good progress although in a few instances the most able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to achieve as well as they could.

The early years provision is outstanding

- Under the outstanding leadership of the acting early years manager all staff work together to provide a rich, vibrant and well-organised place for children to learn.

- Children start in the early years with skills and abilities at levels generally below those typical for their age. The vast majority of children make at least good progress across the areas of learning so that many reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. This ensures they are ready for entry to Year 1.
- Outstanding care, support and guidance ensure that children quickly settle into early years. As a result children are confident, happy and ready to learn. Staff have an absolute focus on developing and encouraging personal and social skills and the skills of communication. Every opportunity is taken to promote the development of language and staff act as excellent role models.
- Strong positive relationships ensure that children feel safe in school, enjoy all that is on offer and behaviour is outstanding. One boy remarked, 'he's a good boy for taking turns on the bike', when another child asked for a turn on one of the bikes being used. Children work well together, enjoy their snack times and cooperate well with one another in play activities.
- Teaching is outstanding. Staff provide an exciting range of activities, both inside and outside, that engages and captures the imagination and interest of all children. Children are encouraged to be curious and explore. For example, linked to the story of The Tiger who Came to Tea, Reception children tracked tiger foot prints and various food items hidden in the outdoor area. They talked excitedly about what they had found and recorded their ideas independently.
- Good teaching of phonics develops children's knowledge and skills very well and enables them to use their skills effectively in their reading and writing. The development of early writing is excellent and children engage freely and regularly in writing across all areas of learning.
- Outstanding systems of assessment are in place to track individual progress and identify next steps in learning. All staff are highly skilled in knowing when to intervene in children's learning to check knowledge and understanding and to move learning forward through additional challenge.
- Staff work well with parents and carers, engaging them in their child's learning and providing opportunities to discuss their child's progress.

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	139389
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	449912

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	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Ruffell
Headteacher	Joanne West
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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