

The Palmer Primary Academy

70 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, RG2 7PP

Inspection dates 2–3 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Teaching requires improvement. Although practice is improving, it is not yet good in all classes. Leaders' checks on teaching are helping to drive these improvements but there has not been enough time for these to become embedded.
- Between Years 1 and 6, pupils do not achieve as much as they should, because not all learning time is used well enough and because teachers' expectations are not always high enough.
- The most able pupils across the school do not achieve as well as they should, with very few reaching the higher attainment levels.
- In mathematics, teachers' subject knowledge is variable, with some teachers being unclear how to teach pupils new concepts and develop their mathematical thinking.
- The many actions to foster a love of reading are not helping to promote and improve reading as much as they should. This means achievement in reading is not increasing rapidly enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Leadership at all levels is good. The headteachers provide clear direction and have high expectations of teachers and pupils. They are supported well by other senior and middle leaders who are effective and share the headteachers' vision.
- Governors know the academy well and provide a good balance of support and challenge to help the academy to improve.
- The early years staff meet the needs of their children well and ensure they make rapid progress from their low starting points.
- At the end of Year 6, pupils' rates of progress are very good, with many pupils making much more progress than expected in that year.
- Pupils behave well. They are well mannered, considerate and cooperative towards each other and to adults.
- Governors, leaders and staff ensure pupils are safe. Pupils say that staff take care of them and they feel safe.
- Parents speak positively about recent improvements in behaviour and learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons, of which four were joint observations with the two headteachers. Inspectors also made some shorter visits to classes, listened to pupils reading and scrutinised pupils' work in books and on display.
- Meetings were held with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair, a group of pupils from Years 2 to 6 and the executive principal from the academy trust.
- Inspectors took account of parents' comments, including informal discussions and 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered 45 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the school's information on pupils' progress, the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings and documents related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Louise Adams, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrea Curtis

Additional Inspector

Spencer Allen

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average sized primary school.
- Just under half the pupils attract pupil premium funding (government funding to support disadvantaged pupils), which is significantly higher than average. This reflects that the school is in an area of high deprivation.
- There are a large proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The academy has a Nursery which children attend part-time. Pupils attend full-time in Reception.
- There is a breakfast and after-school club, which was observed during the inspection.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards for pupils' achievement.
- The Palmer Academy became part of the REAch2 Thames Valley Multi-Academy Trust in September 2013. At the time, it was the only school in the trust.
- The two headteachers are both full-time at the school. They both took up the post in April 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and achievement between Year 1 and Year 6 by:
 - ensuring all teachers use lesson time well to maximise learning and have high expectations of what can be achieved
 - checking that teachers are providing well-structured tasks which enable the most able pupils to extend their learning
 - making sure teachers have the necessary subject knowledge in mathematics to teach new concepts and develop pupils' mathematical thinking
 - ensuring all teachers recognise the importance of promoting a love of reading and that they plan day-to-day activities to increase pupils' enjoyment of books and reading.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The two headteachers have worked very effectively together during the last year to bring about improvements. The agreed vision, to which staff, pupils and governors contributed, ensures that all staff are working towards getting the school to 'good'. The headteachers have worked relentlessly to create a culture of good behaviour. This change has been well supported by staff and governors, and is recognised and appreciated by pupils and parents. Now that behaviour is good, leaders are channelling their energies into teaching and achievement.
- All leaders are involved in checking teaching and identifying what is and is not helping pupils to learn as much as possible.
- Leaders check information in detail about pupils' progress to make sure it is accelerating for individuals and for groups of pupils.
- Leaders set useful targets for teachers to improve their performance. They are taking appropriate steps to ensure there is a close link between teachers' effectiveness and how much they are paid.
- All middle leaders carry out their roles well. They understand their roles in improving the academy and are clear about the actions they need to take. Leaders of teaching teams support their staff to recognise and make improvements. Other leaders, such as the inclusion manager and the sports leader, check carefully that pupils are making progress in their learning, and make changes or provide additional support as required.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional support and help to accelerate pupils' progress. Leaders have rightly focused the funding on supporting achievement through additional qualified teachers and are keen to explore other ways of supporting pupils, for example to further improve attendance.
- Sports funding is used very effectively to improve physical education for pupils, through effective teaching and increased opportunities. The dedicated sports team, consisting of a teacher and two teaching assistants, ensures pupils receive high quality lessons and make good progress. Accurate assessments and record-keeping demonstrate that an increasing number of pupils are participating in sports and doing well.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported very well. Leaders ensure appropriate adult support is provided. Each pupil's progress is checked regularly to ensure interventions are leading to improvements in learning, and, where this is not the case, they are adapted quickly.
- The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities to learn about all subjects and work has been done to make sure it is interesting and engaging. The topics for history and geography are related to specific countries and often link well together. An example of this was when the children in Year 5 compared Ancient Greece to life in Greece today.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed well. In a Year 1 lesson, the teacher discussed with pupils whether it was ever appropriate to lie. During the lesson, pupils, although still confident that lying is not right, recognised some of the grey areas they may encounter in their daily lives. However, as one pupil rightly articulated, 'If you lie, people don't believe you next time.' The spiritual and cultural aspects are less visible around the school, but work in books and discussions with pupils demonstrate that these are taking place.
- There are good opportunities through the curriculum and policies to develop British values such as democracy, justice, tolerance and respect. For example, during a Key Stage 1 assembly, a pupil from the 'Palmer Parliament' put forward a selection of charities which the pupils could support and they had to vote. The pupils listened attentively to the pupils speaking and took their votes seriously.
- Leaders promote equal opportunities well, tackling any discrimination and ensuring pupils recognise each other's differences and respect each other. The diverse population of the academy reflects the cultural diversity of our country and ensures that pupils are developing the skills and understanding required for life in modern Britain.
- The academy trust provides good support. During the executive principal's regular visits, there is a strong focus on school improvement and checking standards. Effective leadership support has been provided through the additional headteacher.
- Safeguarding meets statutory requirements. Leaders and governors ensure all staff are trained to an appropriate level and carry out their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. The knowledge and expertise in these areas are very good.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school well and provide useful challenge and support for leaders. When they do not have sufficient information to make a decision about a particular aspect of the school's work, leaders are requested to provide additional detail so that informed decisions can be made.

- Governors are appropriately involved in discussions about teachers' performance and consider leaders' recommendations about teachers' pay carefully, based on whether or not targets are being met. They are kept informed about the quality of teaching across the school and verify what they are told by regular visits.
- The governing body uses the information provided by the headteachers to review pupils' progress data. They use the information well to ask appropriate questions about achievement. However, clearer information would enable them to be even more rigorous.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, including at lunch and break times. Pupils speak very positively about the ways in which behaviour has improved and say how much nicer it is to come to school because it is calmer and people are kinder to each other.
- Historically, any poor behaviour was typically managed by pupils being temporarily excluded. The total number of missed sessions for the previous year was high. In the last year, this has reduced significantly, so the current amount is now comparable with most schools. None have taken place since January 2015.
- Pupils demonstrate good manners and consideration towards members of the school community and towards visitors. Several pupils asked inspectors how they were and if they needed any help.
- Staff apply the behaviour policy consistently and pupils try hard to earn the rewards. Pupils are motivated to earn reward points which they can accrue and spend.
- Pupils know about the dangers of different forms of bullying and that any kind of name calling is not acceptable. They explain clearly the consequences of either of these behaviours.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils are clear about how they can keep themselves safe in daily lives. Teaching pupils how to be safe when using the internet is particularly strong, and is reinforced through displays around school.
- Pupils and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are very well supported. The family support worker meets with families individually to build relationships from the time their child joins the school. This helps to engage parents in the life of the school and is part of ongoing work to encourage all to see themselves as part of the school community.
- Attendance is improving a little as a result of the actions leaders have put in place, such as following up regular absence and celebrating good attendance. However, attendance is still below that of other schools nationally.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching is variable from class to class and from subject to subject. Teachers are reflective about their practice and keen to teach well, so teaching is improving all the time. Almost all teachers are clear about what they need to do to become more effective, but there is not enough focus on how much learning is taking place in lessons and teachers do not always expect enough of pupils.
- Some teachers lack sufficient subject knowledge in mathematics to enable pupils to develop a clear understanding of new concepts. Inspectors saw pupils carrying out activities which took up a lot of time but did not help them to learn. Too few pupils are able to learn through practical exploration because practical equipment is not always readily available. However, in some classes, teachers' better mathematical knowledge leads to well-structured activities, with key ideas explained well.
- The teaching of reading is variable. Lessons and activities do not always enable pupils to develop their skills because they are not at the right level or because they do not make reading purposeful. This means that, although pupils are making progress, very few are making enough progress to catch up over time. The many actions to foster a love of reading, such as naming classes after famous authors, setting up book corners in every class and inviting authors into school, are not helping to promote and improve

reading as much as they should, because many teachers are not embedding a love of reading into pupils' everyday experiences.

- The teaching of writing is better than mathematics and reading, but there is still some variation across the school. In some classes, grammar, punctuation and spelling are developed well alongside writing skills. In some classes, less attention is given to this. All pupils are making progress and more across the school are catching up in writing.
- Teaching of the most able pupils is not helping enough of them to reach the levels of which they are capable. The school has recently introduced setting work at different levels in order to provide more challenge for the most able pupils. However, these pupils are not fulfilling their potential because teachers do not have a strong enough understanding of how to stretch and challenge them.
- Phonics (the way that letters link to sounds) is taught well. The sessions are well structured to enable pupils to practise their letter sounds and there are useful opportunities during the sessions for pupils to practise writing letters and words. As a result, more pupils are on track to reach the expected level in the assessment in Year 1 than in other schools nationally.
- The teaching of physical education is very good. The lessons are planned well to enable pupils with different abilities to practise and develop their skills.
- Teaching in other subjects, such as history, geography, computing and science is of variable quality. Where teaching is stronger, there is a clear purpose to lessons, with important ideas or concepts taught well, but this is not always the case so progress is sometimes slower.
- Work on display around the school is beautifully presented and demonstrates what can be achieved. This is not always replicated in the books, where work is sometimes scruffy. The expectations of what pupils can achieve is inconsistent from class to class and across subjects.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' progress is accurate and they provide consistent feedback to pupils about their work, much of which is useful in helping pupils to know what to do to improve. When pupils respond to this feedback, they do so appropriately and it often has a positive impact on their work. However, too often pupils do not use what they are told to improve their work or to make progress.
- Teaching assistants provide effective support in classes and when working with small groups. In most lessons, they use their initiative well to adapt the activity and help pupils to understand better what they need to do for themselves.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils are not working at expected levels in most year groups. Pupils' attainment in 2014 was below national averages. In Year 2 and Year 6 assessments, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected levels and higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics was below national figures.
- Historically, pupils did not learn as much as they should. However, progress is improving and is good in some classes, with current Year 6 pupils, for example, on track to achieve better levels in reading, writing and mathematics than Year 6 last year. This is not yet the case in all year groups.
- Disadvantaged pupils are catching up compared with others, but there is still a significant gap between them and their peers, both in the school and nationally. Last year, these pupils were working more than a year behind other pupils in the school and nationally in all subjects.
- As a result of the high quality support they receive, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make very good progress. In many classes across the school, they are catching up with their peers and several no longer require additional support outside the classroom.
- The most able pupils are not making as much progress as they could and are not reaching the higher levels. This is reflected in Key Stage 1 end of year assessments, which were moderated by the local authority and confirm that no pupils achieved the higher levels in reading, writing or mathematics.
- Pupils throughout the school are no longer falling behind compared to other pupils nationally, but in many classes, pupils' progress is not rapid enough to close the gaps. Where accelerated progress is being made, it is as a result of effective teaching.
- In Year 1, the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected levels in phonics was above national figures last year and are on track to be higher this year.

The early years provision is good

- The children in the early years make very good progress from when they arrive at the school, often with skills which are lower than what is typical. The proportion of children on track to reach a good level of development is above that found in other schools nationally.
- Leadership of the early years is good. The leader is clear about how the early years can be even better and is working effectively with teachers and early years practitioners to ensure consistency in all areas.
- Staff in the Nursery and Reception class provide good quality care and support, and keep children safe. They focus on developing basic language skills so that children can communicate their needs.
- Children behave well and cooperate with each other. They take turns to use toys and are supportive of each other when sharing ideas.
- A good range of activities interest children and help them to develop day-to-day skills, such as cutting, sticking and drawing. There are a few children who take a little while to find an activity they want to do; staff are aware of this and support them to get started.
- The recording of children's progress is accurate and helps parents and staff to know how well pupils are developing. However, some learning records do not have as much information in all areas of learning, as would be useful. Parents provide additional information about what pupils are doing at home, and this is used well by staff to plan activities in school.
- Children are encouraged to be independent and the daily routines support this. A good example of this is the way in which pupils get their own snacks when they are hungry. Two children were keen to show one of the inspectors around; they shared their learning journals and enjoyed explaining the interesting activities they had done over the year.

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	139653
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	450221

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	430
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Tattersall
Headteacher	Mr Robert Wyld and Mrs Salima Ducker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01189375481
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