

Palace Fields Primary Academy

Badger Close, Palacefields, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2QW

| Inspection dates | 20-21 October 2015 |
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| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Not enough children make sufficient progress in the early years to allow them to reach a good level of development; consequently, they are not well prepared for Key Stage 1.
- The outdoor provision for children in early years is bland and does not foster their creativity.
- The outcomes achieved by pupils in writing, mathematics and reading by the time they reach the end of Year 6 are not high enough. Too few pupils make strong enough progress from their starting points to allow them to achieve the nationally expected standards.
- Boys do not always perform as well as girls, particularly in writing.
- Pupils do not always concentrate well and consequently they become disengaged from their learning and do not always complete tasks.

- Teachers of all year groups do not always make the best use of the academy's rich environment to provide challenging and interesting activities.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to deepen their learning and apply their new skills and knowledge to more complex situations.
- The governing body does not share responsibilities equitably between its members. Governors are not always quick enough to deal with issues as they arise.
- Leaders' and managers' evaluation of their detailed monitoring is not always as sharp as it could be. As a result, the academy has not secured consistently good teaching or made best use of middle leaders to lead improvement.
- Attendance, although improving, is below the national average.

The school has the following strengths

- The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education at the academy is good and allows pupils to broaden their horizons to be ready for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils feel safe because systems to protect children from harm, including from the threats posed by radicalisation and extremism, are effective and well established.
- Teachers and leaders have responded quickly and effectively as a result of feedback, training and sharing good practice. As a result, pupils' rates of progress are improving rapidly and standards are rising, particularly in writing.
- Pupils conduct themselves well. Pupils are proud of their academy, polite and well behaved as they move around the school; they welcome the opportunity to share their learning with visitors.



Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils' rates of progress accelerate further and lead to better outcomes in all subjects by:
 - ensuring recent actions to systematically teach the skills of writing, phonics (letters and their sounds),
 reading and mathematics continue to have the best impact possible
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to develop their confidence in their application of mathematical knowledge and skills to solve increasingly complex problems
 - providing pupils with additional opportunities to apply their English and mathematics knowledge and skills across different subjects
 - ensuring all pupils are engaged in their tasks so that they concentrate and learn well
 - ensuring that good teaching enables boys to catch up with the girls
 - ensuring teachers make best use of the academy's environment to provide both suitably interesting and challenging opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils by:
 - ensuring they are engaged by their learning so that they remain focused on tasks
 - continuing to improve pupils' attendance so that learning is maximised.
- Improve outcomes for children in the early years so that more reach a good level of development and are well prepared for Key Stage 1 by:
 - improving the quality of the outdoor provision in the early years to foster children's creativity
 - accelerating children's development of language and communication skills and mathematical understanding.
- Further develop the quality of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening all leaders' evaluation skills and using these skills more effectively to inform the governing body of the impact of actions and lead further improvement
 - ensuring all middle and subject leaders are given appropriate well-planned opportunities to undertake the monitoring of their areas of responsibilities, and opportunities to learn from good and outstanding practitioners
 - developing fully the role of all governors in the evaluation of the impact of actions so as to hold all leaders to account and increase the responsiveness of the governing body to address any emerging needs of the academy
 - quickly completing the commissioned review of governance and implementing its recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the governing body.



Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management requires improvement because leaders' actions have not been strong enough to develop the potential in middle leaders quickly enough to allow them to support senior leaders and governors in improving the academy at pace. Leaders have not secured consistently good teaching; consequently, outcomes for some pupils are not as high as they should be.
- Significant turbulence in staffing since the last inspection, linked to difficulties in recruitment, led to senior leaders taking their eye off the ball and, as a result, the proportion of pupils making good progress and achieving national standards in 2014 slipped significantly. Leaders, alert to these issues, have implemented appropriate actions to address them. These actions are now bearing fruit and have led to significant improvements in pupils' progress, particularly in writing. There is, however, still more work to be done.
- Governors have restructured and strengthened the senior leadership team through the appointment of an additional vice-principal; however, it is too early to see the full impact of this change.
- The principal and senior leadership team have an understanding of where the academy needs to improve because of an increased frequency of monitoring that provides them with large amounts of information about pupils' progress. The evaluation of this information is, however, not always sharply focused enough to be of best help to academy improvement and sometimes leads to overgenerous judgements of the impact of actions.
- Academy development and subject action plans do not always include clear and measurable final or interim expectations. As a result, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the plans is sometimes overly descriptive and not sharply evaluative.
- The quality of middle leadership of some subjects other than English and mathematics is not consistently good. This is because these leaders have not received the same training as those in more senior positions. Some middle leaders are new to their role and some are just starting out in their careers. Middle leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics all have clear action plans, but are not given sufficiently regular and planned opportunities to monitor and evaluate the impact of their actions or to subsequently report to and be held to account by governors.
- Senior leaders are not complacent in their desire to improve and have actively sought help from other schools to improve their practice. This has led to improvements in the way attainment and progress information has been collected and used to hold teachers to account for the progress of their pupils. For example, leaders hold regular 'progress hub' meetings at which they forensically examine the progress of each child and hold teachers to account for any underperformance. This results in better and more focused deployment of support for individual pupils that has led to improved rates of progress. A representative of the governing body attends some of these to keep the governing body informed about the progress and achievement in the academy.
- Both vice-principals have implemented the training they have received to develop their leadership skills. As a result, clear development timelines are in place and identify what needs to be done in writing and mathematics. Leaders identify when actions are to happen and who is responsible for ensuring they do. Frequent and regular checking of actions by vice-principals ensures that they remain on schedule for completion and that they are having impact on raising standards.
- There are strengths in the leadership of early years and special educational needs. Although the leader for early years has been in post a relatively short time, she has established what needs to be done to improve the provision and outcomes for children and implemented actions to address this. They have identified the urgent need to enhance outdoor provision and have drawn up an action plan to do so and shared it with the principal and governors.
- The academy's curriculum is broad and balanced and allows pupils to learn a variety of subjects while retaining a firm emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics. This is having a positive impact on the progress pupils are making in developing their skills and knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a strength of the academy. Regular access to learning through music, dance and the performing arts and the wide variety of extracurricular activities broaden the pupils' experiences of the wider world and boost pupils' interests and imagination. Themed days and residential experiences, such as World Book Day and the annual family camp to Wales, add interest to pupils' learning. Little use, however, is made of the extensive and diverse environments found around the academy to stimulate learning in lessons.



- Leaders use the additional pupil premium funding effectively to promote learning through increased numbers of learning assistants who deliver bespoke support to pupils. This helps higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils to make expected progress in writing and reading than that seen by others nationally. The academy's use of pupil premium funding helps to provide an attendance officer who endeavours to ensure pupils come to school and learn. Additionally, the funding gives access to extracurricular activities and learning experiences to children who otherwise may not be able to attend.
- The additional primary school sport funding is allocated effectively to extend pupils' involvement in competitive sports and improve opportunities to develop their skills, for example in rugby. Pupils comment positively on the increased opportunities for both boys and girls to take part in sport; this is helping them to lead more healthy lifestyles.
- Tolerance and respect are promoted effectively through the curriculum and assemblies. Pupils also raise money for different charities and collect items for a local food bank. Displays around school show how pupils are developing an understanding of British values, including through writing laws or school rules and learning about the structure of the British monarchy.
- The academy receives expert advice and support commissioned from a neighbouring local authority. This support has bolstered the impact of the senior leaders by holding them to account, supporting governors in the principal's performance management and brokering support to improve the quality of teaching from a high-performing school.

■ The governance of the academy

- The governing body of the academy includes the academy's trustees and directors.
- Governors are not sufficiently responsive to some academy needs because they formally meet only three times per year. The majority of work of the governing body is undertaken by a small, dedicated group who visit the academy more regularly. This, however, sometimes results in some inequality in the distribution of information. Governors recognise that this needs to improve to ensure responsibility and information are shared across the whole governing body so that more members can play an active role in evaluating the impact of leaders' actions and holding them to account. As a result, the governing body has commissioned and begun an external review of governance. It is, however, too soon to see the outcomes of this review.
- Governors do not always respond quickly enough to the needs of the academy because meetings are infrequent. For example, academy leaders are awaiting the outcomes of requests to develop the outdoor provision for the early years, and some of the requirements for information to be published on websites have not been fulfilled.
- Governors are supportive of the academy. They were effective in guiding the academy through a period of staff turbulence during the last two years. Governors have secured an executive headteacher with a proven track record of improvement to lead the academy forward in anticipation of the principal's retirement in December 2015. The executive headteacher has established links with the academy over the last term and her involvement is improving the quality of teaching and leadership.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses because of the information they receive from the principal and vice-principals.
- Members have undergone the required statutory training. They check on the academy's finances, including the additional primary school sport funding; they are clear about how the pupil premium funding is spent and the impact it is having on learning.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are trained in the principles of keeping children safe. Academy leaders have moved quickly to update all staff about their responsibilities to protect pupils from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. All staff are undergoing online training on the Prevent strategy, while some staff have already completed additional training about antiradicalisation delivered by the local police. Specific governors with responsibility for safeguarding and health and safety meet regularly with senior leaders to discuss any relevant matters. There are effective partnerships with other agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Staff work together to ensure that pupils learn in a safe environment. The vast majority of parents who responded during the inspection, and those who responded to the academy's recent consultation with parents, agreed that the academy keeps their children safe. Due to the academy's robust actions, attendance is rising and is just below national average.



Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure rapid progress for all groups of pupils in all subject areas.
- In many lessons, particularly in mathematics, pupils do not receive sufficient opportunities to deepen their understanding of subjects and increase the mastery of their newly acquired skills in applying them to more complex or real problems and investigations. Teachers often 'play safe' and set tasks that, although develop knowledge to consolidate understanding, do not sufficiently challenge to 'light the spark' of pupils' learning and allow pupils to show what they can achieve.
- At times, especially in science and mathematics, not enough attention is paid to what pupils can already do. Consequently, some pupils who have a good understanding of a concept do not receive the correct level of challenge soon enough, in some lessons.
- Teachers and teaching assistants sometimes do not seize the learning opportunities presented to them by children's mistakes or misconceptions to explain how to overcome them.
- A minority of pupils in some lessons can be silly and this results in some low-level disruption. This is more frequent where tasks are less engaging or where the pace of learning and challenge is slow.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge but do not always use this to identify stimulating ways to get pupils to apply their thinking in more complex situations. Consequently, some pupils lack confidence in their own abilities and progress is not as great as it could be. Where teachers do use their knowledge to set more complex and challenging tasks, many pupils thrive in explaining their thoughts. For example, in a science lesson, children were exploring the differences between solids, liquids and gases. When the teacher asked a more-able group to explain why there is a difference in the number of particles in a given volume of different states of matter, they became engaged and keen to explain. Similarly, in Key Stage 1 in mathematics, money tasks were more complex involving the calculation of change, and led to enhanced understanding of the concept by pupils.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use questions effectively. They often use open questions to encourage pupils to articulate the reason behind their answers. Sometimes, adults are too quick to give the answer rather than explaining strategies where children could find the answer to a question for themselves.
- The teaching of writing, reading and mathematics is systematic and rightly focuses on developing pupils' basic skills. The newly established home reading scheme in early years is already having a positive impact on children's reading, communication and literacy skills, resulting in children developing their love of books, while the systematic development of sentence construction and vocabulary in Key Stage 2 empowers many pupils to extend their limited vocabulary and explore the use of similes and metaphors. For example, in one lesson in Key Stage 2, children were able to use onomatopoeia to describe and personify characters in their writing. However, more work is needed so that pupils, especially boys, consistently apply their learning of phonics to help their spelling and apply their writing skills to all subjects, so as to accelerate their progress further to reach the highest standards.
- Teachers and teaching assistants across the academy consistently follow the academy's marking policy well. As a result of this, all pupils are given clear guidance on how to improve their work which helps them to improve their outcomes.
- Teachers' assessments of standards are well informed and accurate because of regular checking of standards between year groups and key stages. The development of collections of written work for every child provides teachers and pupils with clear points of reference and enables parents to see the improvements that children are making. Evidence files for mathematics are being developed, but it is too soon to see their impact.
- The academy's behaviour policy is well structured and sets out expectations, sanctions and rewards clearly. It is well understood by pupils and consistently implemented by teachers across the academy. However, teachers' well-developed behaviour management strategies are not always successful in preventing some low-level disruption where pupils are not engaged in their learning.
- Homework activities are used to consolidate learning, including the continued development of a love of reading.



Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- All pupils spoken with are proud of their academy and say that they feel safe and are happy to come to school.
- Pupils are taught well how to stay safe and look after themselves. Regular visitors from outside agencies help to reinforce teachers' messages. Pupils were keen to share a visit by the local fire service about fire safety and spoke of visits from the police about keeping safe in the community. There is a strong emphasis on care in the academy, and pupils reflect the caring attitudes of staff in their conduct around the academy. Older pupils often carefully look after younger siblings and friends at the start of and during the academy day. Pupils develop good personal hygiene habits because they are taught from an early age in the academy and messages are constantly reinforced. 'Dirty McSquirty' is a prominent character in the early years, who features on displays encouraging children to wash their hands and clean up after any spillages.
- Pupils say that there is little bullying and teachers deal with any incidents guickly and effectively. Pupils are aware of different types of bullying and hold strong views on them because of the impact of the academy's moral coaching. Some pupils were appalled by the thought of intolerance to others with different lifestyles.
- The academy has strong relationships with outside agencies and is proactive in referring any concerns that may place children at risk of harm.
- The academy provides many extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to help to develop academic, social and sporting skills while also helping to develop their confidence. These include the provision of 'Challenger Troop' run in partnership with the local army reserve. Here, a number of pupils, both boys and girls, develop their personal discipline skills and confidence to tackle adventurous activities and challenges. Other clubs and opportunities include judo, woodwind, guitar tuition and an academy band, which are very useful in helping pupils in becoming successful learners.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning require improvement. In a small minority of lessons, some pupils become disengaged, lose focus and chatter or move aimlessly about the room. When this happens, some minor disruption to learning can occur. While this behaviour is not the norm for the vast majority, it does disturb and affect all pupils' learning because teachers have to stop teaching to deal with it.
- Pupils' attendance is rising but remains below the national average. A small minority of pupils persistently do not attend as regularly as they should. This number is diminishing because of the robust actions of the academy, including court action. The academy's actions led by the academy's attendance officer are having a positive impact and attendance is rising.
- Pupils' conduct around school is good. They are polite and welcome the opportunity to hold conversations with visitors. Pupils show respect for adults and each other and demonstrate pride in their academy.
- The academy's behaviour policy is effective in motivating pupils, through the effective use of rewards such as 'golden time', certificates or vouchers that give access to community leisure facilities. As a result of the effective management of behaviour, the academy has low levels of exclusion.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The outcomes for pupils have declined since the last inspection and in 2014 dropped significantly. Outcomes for pupils in 2015 show a significant improvement, particularly in the progress made in writing and reading by all pupils, including those with complex special educational needs who attend the academy's local authority-funded resource base.
- A considerable number of children in 2015 did not reach a good level of development by the time they had left the early years. Children did, however, make expected progress from their starting points because of the teaching they received. The majority of children begin the early years with lower than typical levels of communication, literacy and language skills, and many have difficulty in understanding



number, shape and space.

- In 2014, the progress made in phonics by all pupils declined significantly. In 2015, however, the majority of pupils, those who are disadvantaged, reversed this decline to narrow the gap with that seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils outperformed the minority of pupils who are not disadvantaged. Current work in pupils' books and lessons, and school-based tracking, confirms that the stronger and more systematic teaching of phonics continues to improve outcomes for all groups of pupils. There is, however, more work to be done to enable all pupils to have a good understanding of phonics. .
- The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015 is still below that seen nationally in all subjects for all groups. Most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, disabled or have special educational needs, however, make at least expected progress across the key stage from their different starting points. Boys attain less well than girls in all subjects.
- By the time pupils leave the academy, published information shows that attainment is approximately two terms below that seen nationally in all subjects. Boys do not do as well as girls and are about one term behind them in all subjects by the time they leave. Girls reach levels of attainment similar to those seen nationally in mathematics, but do not do as well as all pupils nationally in other subjects where they are about one term behind. Disadvantaged pupils do not attain the same levels on average as non-disadvantaged pupils in school or nationally and are approximately one term behind their peers.
- The progress pupils make from their starting points tells a more positive story. Pupils' progress information published in 2015 shows that progress has significantly improved in mathematics, reading and writing. The levels of progress made in reading and mathematics are in line with national expectations, while that for writing has significantly improved to be closer to that seen nationally. Pupils' work in books confirms that this trend of improvement is being sustained.
- The proportion of pupils who make better than expected progress is below that seen nationally but is improving in all subjects, particularly writing. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils making more than expected progress is above that seen nationally in reading and is improving in the other subjects.
- The proportion of pupils making expected progress has risen considerably to close the gap with that seen nationally in all subjects, particularly in writing which is above that seen nationally. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress is higher than that seen for other pupils in school and close to the national figures in reading, and it is above that seen nationally in writing because of the effective use of the academy's pupil premium funding.
- There are too few pupils in the most-able group to identify any statistical trends regarding progress and attainment.
- Pupils in the resource base are few in number. However, because of their complex special needs and their low starting points, they do have considerable impact on the achievement information that is published for the academy as a whole. Nearly all pupils in the resource base make strong progress. This is mirrored by pupils in school who have special educational needs or disabilities and who do not attend the resource base. They too make strong progress from their starting points because of the support they receive.
- Work seen in pupils' books confirms the academy's own tracking that this trend of improvement is being sustained. It also shows that more work is needed to raise standards by accelerating further the progress pupils make to enable them to make up lost ground. Consequently, outcomes require improvement.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- The provision for learning in the outdoors is bland and uninspiring. It does not allow children to develop easily their communication, language, literacy and numeracy skills. Activity areas are set up for children to use, but there is a lack of coherence between them due to a general lack of high-quality resources.
- Outcomes for the early years are low. Few children reach a good level of development to prepare them for learning in Key Stage 1. Children make at least expected progress from their different starting points because of the quality of teaching they receive. Too few children make better than expected progress to allow them to catch up before they reach the start of Key Stage 1 because, overall, teaching requires improvement, particularly in the use of the outdoors to stimulate learning.
- The early years leader has quickly established systems that ensure that assessments are rigorous and accurate and evidenced in detailed 'learning journey' booklets that tell the story of children's development.
- Leadership of the early years is strong. The leader's rapid assessment of what needs to be done has resulted in a clear and appropriate action plan. Some actions are already demonstrating a positive impact



- on learning. The new home—school reading system is enjoyed by children and parents alike and helps pupils to accelerate their progress in literacy and phonics.
- Children's progress in Nursery is accelerating and reflects the quality of teaching they are receiving. Children currently in Nursery are making good progress from their starting points in each area of learning. This continues into the Reception classes where both better teaching and vibrant classroom environments stimulate learning.
- The systematic and effective teaching of phonics results in children now making more accelerated progress.
- The pupil premium is deployed effectively in early years to provide additional staff to support learning and an attendance officer to ensure children attend as frequently as possible. These actions are having a positive impact on standards and result in disadvantaged children making stronger progress from their starting point than non-disadvantaged children.
- Children in early years behave well. They have positive attitudes to learning and love to engage with staff and other adults to talk confidently about what they are learning.
- The systems and procedures to ensure children in early years are safe reflect those seen in all other areas of the academy and are strong.
- Parents spoken with are highly complimentary about the academy, and early years in particular, because of the well-established positive relationships developed by staff.



School details

Unique reference number137301Local authorityHaltonInspection number10006672

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

Type of school Primary

School category Academy converter

Age range of pupils 3–11

Gender of pupils Mixed

Number of pupils on the school roll 235

Appropriate authority

Chair

The governing body

Joanne Tringham

PrincipalDianne MoranTelephone number01928 716521

Website www.palacefieldsacademy.net16.net

Email address <u>principal@palacefieldsacademy.org.uk</u>

Date of previous inspection 16 October 2013

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are 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 well above the national average.
- The academy offers specially resourced provision for up to 10 disabled pupils and those with special educational needs with cognitive delay.
- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the academy during the school year is above average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The early years comprises a Nursery that provides part-time sessions and a full-time Reception class.
- The academy has experienced a significant number of changes to the membership of the staff since the last inspection.



Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons or parts of lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- The inspectors listened to pupils reading and talked with them and other groups of pupils about their lessons and academy life.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior and middle leaders, teaching staff and teaching assistants, representatives of the governing body, the school improvement consultant and a headteacher from another school who is supporting the academy's leaders.
- The inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' progress and to academy management, including the arrangements to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- The inspectors spoke with parents and took account of 19 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), the academy's own consultations with parents and other communication that Ofsted received.
- The inspectors took account of the 17 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Nixon, lead inspector Jonathan Ashley Her Majesty's Inspector Ofsted Inspector Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



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