

The Grove Academy

Fourth Avenue, Watford WD25 9RH

Inspection dates	15–16 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- School leaders, under the skilled leadership of the head of school, have established a very positive culture of high expectations within which all aspire to get the best out of pupils.
- Staff work very effectively as a team. They are led well by subject leaders in English and mathematics and by year leaders.
- Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics and standards are rising rapidly.
- There is little difference in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others.
- Effective training and coaching have helped to improve teaching so that it is now good.
- Teachers set challenging work for pupils most of the time. They use questioning well to check and develop pupils' understanding.
- Provision for the early years is good and children thrive as a result of rich and vibrant experiences.
- Systems and procedures for managing the work of the school are rigorous. These support and guide the work of staff very effectively.
- Pupils are well behaved in and around the school. This contributes to their sense of safety.
- In lessons, pupils are often engrossed in their work. They work very effectively with one another to share their work and improve understanding.
- Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is strong and this helps prepare them well for secondary education.
- Governors provide good oversight of the school's work, asking probing questions and steering the school in the right direction.
- The school has improved well since its last inspection. The good support from the trust has been one of the important reasons for this.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards, although improving rapidly, are not yet consistently high, especially for boys in writing.
- Leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics are not yet active enough in helping to raise standards in their areas. Hence, pupils' skills and depth of understanding in other subjects are unevenly developed.
- Teachers do not always check if pupils understand the work they are given, that it is set at the right level for them, and whether they are ready to move on or need more help.
- Sometimes, teachers do not give pupils enough time to think before answering questions or to reflect on how well they are learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, and hence further raise standards, by ensuring that teachers are more effective in:
 - checking back with pupils to make sure they have understood the work they are doing before moving them onto the next level
 - using assessment information to make sure that work is not too hard for pupils and, when given a choice, they select tasks at the right level of difficulty for them
 - checking how well pupils are getting on with tasks and intervening more quickly to move on those who have finished or are finding it easy while giving more support to those who are stuck.
- Raise standards in English and mathematics further by:
 - developing pupils' skills further in reasoning in mathematics
 - ensuring that wide enough reading resources are available for pupils to choose from
 - continuing to work on improving spelling
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write creatively, especially the most able
 - developing strategies to enable boys to accelerate their learning even more, especially in writing
 - giving pupils more time to think before answering questions and to reflect on their work and learning
 - ensuring that adults interact more with boys when they are working on their own or with other boys in the early years.
- Develop the roles of subject leaders in science and foundation subjects so that they drive up the standards of work in their areas by:
 - ensuring that they check on how well teachers are establishing skills in their subject areas
 - supporting the staff who require it to build pupils' skills and depth of understanding systematically in their subject areas.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The head of school sets a very positive tone and has established strong teamwork among staff. Working with the leadership team and the executive principal, the head of school has set high expectations, both of staff and of pupils. He is very well supported by the deputy headteacher.
- The school has a very accurate understanding of how good it is and has a well-developed set of plans to address weaker areas of its work.
- Much work has gone into establishing good leadership capacity, especially at senior leadership level and for English and mathematics, during a period of significant and rapid changes in staffing. The capacity has been strengthened by strong systems for managing the school's work. This places the school in a good position to continue improving its work at a rapid rate, especially standards of pupils' work.
- The senior leadership team is effective in driving improvements across the school and supporting staff to develop their skills. The leaders for English and mathematics have established their roles very well so that they are driving developments in their areas systematically and successfully.
- The school is developing the roles of other subject leaders but these are not yet established enough to ensure that these leaders are embedding the pupils' skills and understanding across the school in their areas as effectively as in English and mathematics.
- Systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of work in pupils' books are excellent. Information from these activities is very well collated and used to identify individual training needs. Professional development is specific and targeted carefully to where information from monitoring indicates it is needed.
- Well-developed training, coaching and mentoring for teaching staff have promoted better teaching and ensured that staff are equipped to carry out their roles effectively. The teaching school in the trust is being used well to provide training to staff, especially leadership development training.
- Additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is being very effectively used to ensure that the right support is being provided to disadvantaged pupils. Funding is used in a wide variety of ways including to help raise attendance levels and to provide support for social development, factors which have an impact on how well pupils learn and progress. Leaders evaluate the use of funding, and the positive impact on pupils' academic and personal development is clearly evident.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum within which a wide range of subjects are taught. The depth and range of work planned in mathematics and English is particularly good. Planning for other subjects is reasonably effective but the development of some key skills, such as investigation and analysis, is uneven across the school. Pupils have good opportunities for practical work in science and computer studies, which they enjoy immensely.
- The curriculum is well supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. A high proportion of pupils attend after-school clubs. Visits and visitors enrich the curriculum well. A range of authors, for example, have worked with pupils. This has increased their interest in writing and developed their understanding of how an author approaches a task such as producing a book.
- A well-developed programme of assemblies provides additional opportunities for supporting pupils' personal development and teaching them about values such as democracy, respect, liberty and the rule of law. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The physical education (PE) and sports funding has been used to buy in expert coaches and improve equipment for sports. The funding has had a positive impact on pupils' health and fitness and supported the school in developing and retaining its expertise. The head of school has also received training so he is in a good position to raise the profile of PE across the school and can lead professional development activities in house.
- Parents are very positive about the school and how well it has improved especially over the last year. They, and pupils, have a very high regard for the head of school and feel he is making a positive difference to the quality of the school's work.
- The school works well with other schools both in the trust and beyond to share best practice and cross-check how accurately it is assessing its pupils' work. The school also uses external professionals to help it support pupils such as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who have English as an additional language.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors and trustees know the school well. This is because they are actively involved in its work. They visit often and are clear about what they are coming to do. Governors follow up to see how well policies they set are being implemented. For example, governors came to check the impact of the new behaviour policy earlier this year. As part of their checking, they spoke to pupils and asked them for their views.
 - Minutes show that governors ask probing questions and are clear about the information they want from the school. The structure for governance includes good representation of trustees on the governing body and the chair working with the executive principal and trustees, for example when setting the performance management targets for the head of school.
 - The quality of information provided to governors by the school is comprehensive. It enables governors to be very well informed about the school's performance, issues that need to be addressed and how these are being dealt with. This enables them to ask probing and pertinent questions and to hold school leaders to account for the school's performance.
 - Governors have a clear and accurate view about the quality of teaching and the performance of teachers through the school's self-evaluation and breakdown of performance management information.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The culture in the school is one of vigilance but also one where pupils' safety and caring for them is part of everybody's job. Staff have been well trained to identify and support any pupils at risk of harm. Referrals to social services are followed up tenaciously and work with external professionals is rigorous. Governors are involved well in checking with the school the effectiveness of its safeguarding arrangements. They accept this as an important responsibility.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers have established good relationships with pupils and, consequently, pupils readily respond to instructions from them.
- Teachers plan lessons well, paying careful attention to setting tasks at different, appropriate levels of difficulty for different groups of pupils. This is done exceptionally well in most lessons in mathematics although, occasionally, teachers let pupils choose the task without enough guidance. In these cases, some choose a task that is too difficult or too easy for them.
- Pupils know what they are meant to be learning and the outcomes they are supposed to produce because teachers define clear learning intentions and share these effectively with pupils.
- Tasks are well developed to help pupils to practise skills and apply what they have learned, especially in English and mathematics. In most lessons, the level of difficulty is just right, challenging enough but not daunting. In some lessons, however, the work given to pupils is too hard. This is usually because the task has not been broken down enough or teachers have not provided the right resources to help pupils understand important aspects of the task and how to complete it.
- The most able pupils are given demanding work in most lessons and are extended particularly well in mathematics. The school recognises that the most able do not get as many opportunities for creative writing as they need to help develop the use of their imagination more effectively.
- When given work to do, pupils get stuck in and waste little time to get to grips with it. They are also very good at working in pairs to discuss their work and develop a deeper understanding of it through their discussions and by sharing ideas. Teachers encourage and support them to do this.
- Teachers question pupils well and this helps to extend and deepen understanding. However, sometimes, teachers do not give pupils enough time to think about their responses to questions.
- A very focused set of targets are used to ensure that the work set for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities helps to move them step by step through their learning. This speeds up their learning.
- Phonics and reading are taught well and, consequently, pupils enjoy reading and make good progress. Occasionally, reading books are not challenging enough and pupils say they do not have a wide enough selection of reading resources to choose from.
- Teachers pay good attention to developing subject-specific and technical vocabulary. Other skills, such as grammar and spelling, are being systematically taught in English.

- Teachers check pupils' books frequently and correct errors or make helpful suggestions for improvement. However, in lessons, teachers do not always check how well pupils are working, and so are not able to intervene quickly enough if pupils are making the same mistakes, move them on faster should they finish, or provide support if they find work difficult.
- Pupils routinely respond to teachers' helpful feedback and this helps them to improve their work.
- Learning support assistants usually provide effective help to the pupils they are working with.
- Teachers make good links between different subjects. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson, pupils were working on a diary about the journey of a river, hence combining English skills with geographical content.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to school and enjoy their work and lessons. They are keen to learn and try hard in lessons to do their best. In addition, pupils take pride in their work. This is evident in the good quality of presentation in their books and the care they take over their written work.
- Pupils are developing good levels of resilience through the way they accept, and respond to, feedback from teachers and their peers. They are learning that it is often fine to make mistakes because they learn more through correcting these.
- Through lessons and the wider curriculum, pupils are developing good social skills. They get on well with one another and use their social skills to learn by working with others.
- Pupils are developing effective understanding of other cultures. In a Year 2 class, for example, pupils enjoyed exploring the work of a Nigerian artist and others liked dressing up in African costumes as part of international week.
- Values such as democracy are being taught through mock elections and pupils show good levels of respect for those from backgrounds different from their own.
- Spiritual awareness is less well developed than social, moral and cultural because pupils are not given enough time to reflect or think about their work.
- Pupils are safe at school. They feel safe and happy and their parents agree this is the case. Pupils are taught effectively about how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. They say that they are confident about getting help from adults should they be concerned about anything.
- Issues of bullying, including racist bullying or other discriminatory bullying, are rare. Pupils are confident that staff will deal with these should they occur. In addition, pupils are taught about how to deal with situations in which they or someone they know might be bullied.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils know the difference between right and wrong and usually make good choices about how they are going to behave.
- Pupils are polite and helpful. They readily engage in conversation with other pupils or adults.
- Behaviour in lessons is good and pupils are attentive during whole-class teaching. This contributes to the good progress that pupils make in their learning. Even on the odd occasion when lessons might seem dull or uninteresting, pupils maintain their good behaviour and continue to focus well on their work.
- Pupils, parents and staff say that behaviour has improved considerably this year. This is evident in the rapidly reducing exclusions and number of incidents in the behaviour logs. Incidents that are now being recorded tend to be fairly low level, as these, on the infrequent occasions they occur, now stand out against the good behaviour of the very large majority of pupils.
- Attendance is rising and is now close to the national average. Pupils want to come to school.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- When pupils begin at the school, their starting points are low for their ages particularly in relation to personal, social and emotional development and communication skills.
- Pupils are making good progress and beginning to make good progress over time. Pupils make good progress in their knowledge and application of phonics. Results in the phonics test at the end of Year 1

exceeded national averages in 2015 and are on track to be as good this year.

- Standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, although improving rapidly, remain below age-related expectations by the end of key stage 1. This is because there are gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge which have yet to close. Those who do not meet the national standard in phonics by the end of Year 1 do so by the end of Year 2.
- In Years 3, 4 and 5, despite good progress this year, past gaps in learning mean that pupils' levels of attainment are still behind where they should be in English and mathematics. However, again, attainment is improving at a good pace.
- In Year 6, most pupils are working at age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. They have made significant progress, especially this year, to catch up to where they should be.
- Last year's Year 6 pupils also achieved results which matched national averages in reading, writing and mathematics, although the writing results were lower than those in reading and mathematics and girls did less well in mathematics than girls nationally.
- For pupils currently in the school, progress is equally good for girls and boys in mathematics and their respective levels of attainment are broadly matched. Girls and boys make equally good progress in reading and writing but boys' attainment levels are lower than those of girls, especially in writing. This is because boys often have lower starting points. There is more to do to help boys to catch up.
- There is little difference between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others. This is because the school targets funding and support very carefully to ensure that disadvantaged pupils keep up with others.
- The most able pupils have achieved well, particularly in mathematics, where the level of challenge and the range of problem-solving work have extended these pupils well across the school. The most able pupils explain their ideas well and reason effectively.
- The written work of the most able pupils is of high quality by the end of Year 6. However, the school recognises that they are not extended as much as they could be to produce pieces of work that require them to think more widely outside their experiences and to make more use of their imaginations.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good, often very good, progress in their learning. This is down to the very systematic approach taken in setting personalised learning targets and the small steps these pupils need to take to improve are very well defined. The very careful checking of progress against these targets and the small steps means that targets are adjusted continuously and work tailored closely to the learning requirements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils are developing their knowledge well in a wide range of subject areas with some good work in most subjects. However, progress in science and non-core subjects in pupils' theme books is uneven across the school and not always as extensive or rapid as in English and mathematics in terms of depth of understanding and the systematic development of skills.
- Subject-specific skills are not always developed well enough to support investigative, exploratory approaches in subjects such as history, geography and science, although this is beginning to happen well especially in Years 5 and 6. For example, Year 5 pupils have been researching the Amazon rainforest and drawing conclusions about life there as well as effects of deforestation. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are planning experiments and writing experimental reports.
- There are many examples of good writing being developed through other subjects but writing is not as consistent as it could be across the school.
- Some good mathematical development across the curriculum is evident in pupils' theme books, especially graphical representation in subjects like science.
- Pupils with English as an additional language are doing very well and making better progress than others. For those who are developing fluency but still learning English, their progress accelerates as they develop their depth of English language. Beginners make rapid progress in learning English and this then helps their development in other subjects.
- Overall, progress has accelerated considerably this academic year and, certainly, by the end of Year 6, pupils have been prepared well for secondary education, especially in relation to English and mathematics and in their enthusiasm for learning. This has required significant work and effort during Year 6 because of uneven progress and achievement in past years.

Early years provision

is good

- Children make good progress from low starting points. This is because the school provides a vibrant and rich range of activities that help to engage children right from the moment they begin in Nursery.
- The practical nature of the work, especially in the Nursery, and the way that activities are put together ensure that all children can readily participate. Children become easily immersed in what they are doing and it is rare to see any child who is off-task or not fully involved in exploring, investigating, building or being creative with interesting resources. Boys and girls are equally focused on activities that help them to develop their early reading, writing and mathematics skills.
- The outdoor area is well developed and its use has been increased significantly since the last inspection where this was an area identified for improvement.
- Adults interact with children well across the whole early years area. They question children well to extend their thinking and to help them to develop their use of language.
- Girls are more inclined to interact with adults than boys by asking questions or, for example, demanding feedback on their work. However, boys and girls interact with one another effectively and share ideas and resources well. They discuss their work and make useful suggestions when solving problems.
- Organisation of work in the early years encourages children to develop their independence and ability to work on their own, use initiative, and explore and investigate confidently. This is a real strength and provides a good foundation for Year 1, especially for boys whose attainment levels remain below those of girls as it enables them to engage in learning positively.
- Children behave well and they are in a safe environment where they feel happy, nurtured and cared for. Consequently, they are confident and self-assured. Children are well prepared for key stage 1.
- The leadership of the early years is strong and ensures that all staff have high expectations of children. The most able are challenged well as a result and those with additional needs are effectively supported.
- The early years staff, under the leadership of the early years leader, have established strong links with parents.
- Procedures for assessing children's development are very well developed and parents and children have good opportunities to contribute. Standards are rising and, although they remain below national averages by the end of Reception, children's levels of attainment are much closer to age-related expectations than when they started.

School details

Unique reference number	138507
Local authority	425162
Inspection number	10011866

This inspection 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	637
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Aaron Wanford
Headteacher	Philip Gray
Telephone number	01923 674463
Website	www.thegroveacademy.org.uk
Email address	admin@thegroveacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	1–2 May 2014

Information about this school

- The Grove Academy is a much larger school than most primary schools. It is part of the Aspire Academies Trust, a local multi-academy trust.
- While the majority of pupils are White British, a significant proportion, about 46%, are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is much higher than in most schools.
- A comparatively high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language although most are fluent or at more advanced stages of learning in English.
- The proportion of pupils who require special educational needs support is similar to the national average. The proportion who have a statement or education, health and care plan is also broadly in line with national averages.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding (additional government funds to support those who are eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority) is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school has experienced a high turnover of staff since the last inspection. About half the teachers have been at the school for close to two years or less. The current head of school took up post in November 2015.
- The executive principal has been in post for about two years and joined the academy trust after the last inspection.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classes across the school, sampling teaching and learning in each classroom at least once. A number of these visits were carried out jointly with the head of school, deputy headteacher and early years leader.
- Inspectors held meetings with the head of school, executive principal, other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders and a group of learning support assistants. They also met with a school governor and an academy trustee.
- Members of the inspection team spoke informally to pupils in lessons and around the school as well as holding more formal discussions with two groups of pupils.
- Inspectors listened to a group of pupils reading to check how well they were developing their reading skills.
- In carrying out the inspection, the inspection team took account of 90 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Members of the team also spoke with parents as they dropped off their children at school.
- The inspection team took account of the responses to an Ofsted questionnaire completed by 60 staff and 33 pupils.
- Members of the team observed the work of the school. They looked at the school improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, documents relating to the work of the governing body and the arrangements for ensuring that pupils are safeguarded. Documentation reviewed included records of assessment information relating to pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour and attendance. The school's website was also examined.

Inspection team

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Paula Masters	Ofsted Inspector

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