

# Wilshere-Dacre Junior Academy

Fishponds Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1NS

## Inspection dates

27–28 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Require improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Many older pupils are still catching up from a legacy of underachievement. Weaker teaching in the past has left many with gaps in their skills and knowledge.
- The school has improved considerably over the past academic year. Despite the rapid gains made, inconsistencies remain in achievement, teaching and behaviour that mean that the school is not yet good.
- Pupils do not consistently make enough progress from their various starting points. Although attainment for reading, writing and mathematics is at, or above, the national average, pupils could be achieving more, if teaching helped them to catch up.
- Assessment is not always used consistently enough by teachers to plan sequences in learning which allow pupils to make the rapid progress that they need to.
- The quality of teaching is improving, but there is still inconsistency across the school. Some teaching does not ensure that all pupils make the required amount of progress.
- Teachers provide regular feedback but this is not always precise enough and, as a result, pupils are uncertain about how to make their work better.
- Some curriculum leaders are new in post and have not yet had the opportunity to fully develop their role and make a difference to the standards achieved in their allocated subject area.
- Although the situation is improving, pupils are not always keen to do their best in lessons. Their attitude towards work is inconsistent. As a result, some pupils do not achieve their full potential.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body know the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders are moving the school forward and securing better teaching. Consequently, pupils' attainment is rising.
- Pupils' attendance is consistently at the national average or above. Pupils enjoy going to school and parents confirm that their children are happy at school.
- The personal development and welfare of pupils is good. This is particularly the case for the more vulnerable pupils who benefit from bespoke support that ensures their emotional needs are met effectively.
- The majority of parents are pleased with the school's work. They are unwavering in the view that the school has improved considerably and it is led well.

## Full report

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour so that pupils can make the progress of which they are capable, by:
  - continuing to ensure that weaker teaching is eradicated
  - supporting all teachers to use assessment information accurately to inform their planning, especially for the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils, and in mathematics
  - checking that all teachers provide consistently high-quality guidance to pupils which makes it absolutely clear how pupils can improve their work.
- Continue to improve the behaviour of pupils, by:
  - ensuring that teachers plan activities which engage and enthuse all pupils with their learning
  - developing further systems to improve learning attitudes and behaviours, ensuring that pupils develop greater levels of resilience in their learning and a pride about their achievements.
- Improve pupils' achievement across a broader range of subjects by ensuring that new curriculum leaders embed their newly evolving systems.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since the school became an academy, the headteacher, well supported by governors and her three assistant headteachers, has been successful in rapidly improving the standards at Wilshere-Dacre, particularly over the last academic year.
- The senior leaders work closely and effectively as a team, with an accurate understanding of what will best improve the school quickly. They scrutinise the quality of teaching and learning and use this monitoring to develop teachers' skills and improve teaching. This is serving to successfully raise the achievement of all pupils across the school.
- Leaders and governors, with the support of the academy trust, are improving the quality of teaching and ensuring that it is sustainable for the future. Owing to the challenges in recruiting, they have been creative – talent-spotting staff to undertake further training to qualify as teachers or to be promoted into leadership roles. The support for staff who are new to the profession, especially in developing their teaching practice, is effective. Appraisal targets for staff are linked to the school's priorities and staff members' individual training requirements. Leaders have taken action to challenge weaker teaching. Staff are very positive about the chances they have to develop, and they believe that the school is improving as a result of good-quality leadership.
- The English leader is bringing about rapid improvements. She has quickly identified where support is required and deployed support staff purposefully. She has also implemented whole-school strategies that are ensuring that pupils learn skills in grammar and punctuation which are allowing them to make rapid gains in their attainment in writing.
- The leader in mathematics has a clear grasp of where pupils have gaps in their mathematical understanding and knowledge. She has rightly identified that mathematics is an area of focus for the school. The leader has used this to help teachers to plan lessons that better meet pupils' needs. This is contributing towards accelerating pupils' progress in mathematics.
- The inclusion leader is ensuring that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. She is knowledgeable about these pupils' needs and makes sure that they get the provision required to learn effectively. Art therapy and additional speech and language support, along with a range of other support packages, is helping pupils to access all curriculum subjects confidently. Leaders routinely evaluate the provision to ensure that it is making a difference.
- Leaders are using their assessment system to hold staff to account effectively for the progress that pupils are making. Leaders use their work with the neighbouring infant school to ensure that they have an accurate knowledge of pupils' starting points in Year 3. Leaders also work together with the academy trust and the local authority to ensure that their attainment and progress information is accurately reflecting where the pupils are compared to pupils of the same age nationally. Within the school, teachers then use their 'class provision plans' to monitor pupils' progress in their class. However, some teachers are still not yet precise enough in their assessment of pupils to deliver teaching that moves the pupils on as quickly as they are capable of.

- Curriculum development has evolved and continues to develop so that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their lives. Leadership in English and mathematics is making a real difference to pupils' achievement, and new subject leaders in computing and music have been appointed to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are as well led and managed. Integral to the curriculum is the focus that leaders have given to promoting British values. Evidence seen during the inspection shows that the school uses current national situations to explore what the core British values are, such as debates about 'Brexit' and currently a focus on the lead-up to the US presidential elections. During the Queen's birthday celebrations the school used events to understand the history of Britain's heritage. This work gives pupils an insight into the world they are growing up in and their role within that as responsible, respectful adults. Pupils spoken to showed an awareness of this and were able to talk about the work they had covered with understanding.
- Leaders use the additional sports funding effectively and pupils' attendance and participation in clubs has increased considerably. One example is the employment of a sports coach who provides extra clubs and playtime activities to support vulnerable pupils. He also supports teachers during physical education (PE) lessons to develop their skills in teaching PE. As a result of this, teaching and behaviour are improving.
- The pupil premium funding is used well. Disadvantaged pupils access additional teaching staff, the pastoral support worker, and therapeutic support such as art therapy, music tuition and clubs. As a result of this good provision, disadvantaged pupils' are ready to learn and their progress is increasing rapidly.
- Leaders ensure that pupils attend well. Attendance is consistently at the expected national levels. The rates of persistent absence are reducing because of well-embedded systems. Leaders' work to reduce persistent lateness is making a real difference. This is because pupils want to come to school and they value their education. The pastoral support worker has developed and maintained positive working relationships with families based on honesty, respect and trust.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work and the improvements that the leadership team have brought about. One parent reports that 'the school is massively improved from four years ago'. The majority of parent views are summarised well by one who said: 'My children love going to school and love learning. As a parent I could not wish for a better place for them to go to school. The school is caring, inclusive and engages families in the schooling of the children. The teachers really care.'
- External support from the academy trust is effective. As well as having representatives on the governing body, they have a dedicated team, including the regional director, which provides individualised support to the school according to its specific needs. This includes providing good-quality training, challenge, guidance and support. They also play a vital role in monitoring to ensure that the leaders are rigorously held to account for the school's work.

### **Governance of the school**

- The academy regional governance board monitors the work of the governing body. From the outset of converting to an academy, the regional director has worked closely with the local governors to support the formation of the current governing body. Evidence seen on inspection shows that the governors have been well guided and trained by the academy trust.

- Governors are very committed to improving the school and have a good range of skills between them that help them to challenge and support the school in all aspects including standards, financial, and health and safety.
- Governors have a good overall understanding of the school. They visit regularly and they have an informed view of teaching and learning. They know the areas of strength and keep a close eye on the progress that different groups of pupils make and the quality of teaching throughout the school. They ask probing, astute questions that hold leaders to account. Governors are always keen to know how the work being carried out is making a difference for the pupils at Wilshere-Dacre.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school business manager manages the single central record of checks on staff and continually reviews the effectiveness of this work. She has a very clear understanding of the whole-school picture and because of this all checks are rigorously carried out, referenced clearly and statutory expectations fulfilled. The headteacher and the safeguarding governor inspect the single central register on a regular basis.
- Leaders take their duty of care to pupils very seriously. Paperwork is thorough and reflects the latest guidance, while training ensures that staff are well informed about the signs of abuse. Staff have a thorough understanding of the potential risks of extremism and radicalisation. Leaders and the pastoral support worker take the necessary steps to involve other agencies to ensure children's safety and well-being when a staff member raises a concern.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They say that they learn about personal safety and keeping safe on the internet during their lessons. Parents confirm that they think the school keeps their children safe and pupils are very well looked after. One parent said: 'staff are caring, the support children receive is exceptional no matter what they need to help them and we are lucky to have such a safe and thoughtful school environment'.
- The school's care and support for pupils is a strength. This is because the culture of safeguarding pupils and ensuring their personal well-being is a priority. The ethos of the school reflects that pupils learn best when they are safe, happy and face no barriers to their learning. As a result of this attitude from all staff, pupils are nurtured and cared for well.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**      **Requires improvement**

- Teaching is still too variable across the school. Although the quality of teaching is rapidly improving, it does not yet ensure that progress from pupils' various starting points is consistently good over time.
- Leaders have dealt effectively with the numerous issues relating to staff recruitment and retention, but this has taken time. Previously there has been too much variation in the quality of teaching, and pupils, particularly in Year 5 and Year 6, still have to catch up in their learning; this is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not make precise enough use of assessment information to plan lessons for pupils' differing needs from their starting points. This leads to those pupils who need to catch up not making quick enough

progress, and so they are not always achieving as well as they could or should.

- Inconsistent implementation of the school's feedback policy means that often pupils do not receive the guidance they need to improve their work. The school is implementing new assessment procedures effectively, but practice is not yet fully embedded across the school. The guidance that teachers give to pupils does not indicate to the pupils what they need to do to improve. Consequently, pupils do not make as much progress, using teacher feedback, as they should.
- Teaching assistants are not consistently effective in their work. Where they are most effective, they work well alongside teachers to support the pupils' learning, providing good, targeted support for individuals and groups. However, where support is not as successful, teaching assistants are not deployed well enough by teachers to make a difference to the progress of the pupils that they work with.
- Early intervention with additional pastoral support, along with targeted one-to-one support, is ensuring that the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics is improving over time. This is particularly the case for the most able disadvantaged pupils identified by the school, who are now catching up with the progress that non-disadvantaged pupils make nationally. Where teachers do not always use the analysis of assessment to inform what they teach, disadvantaged pupils make slower progress than they are capable of.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress overall. Where teaching is effective and their starting points well considered, pupils are making faster progress. However, there is some teaching that does not always achieve this. Consequently, in a couple of classes a few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, despite accurate identification of need by leaders, do not make the better than expected progress which they are capable of.
- Overall, the most able pupils are being challenged in their work. This happens best where the teachers know pupils' higher starting points. The 'self-differentiation' that the school uses ensures that pupils are deepening their knowledge and applying what they know to different situations and across other curriculum subjects. Again, in the instances where the most able pupils are not making as much progress as they could, they are not provided with enough challenge and this is because some teachers do not assess accurately where the pupils are starting from. As a result they repeat things they already know and are already proficient at.
- In contrast, most effective teaching builds carefully on pupils' prior knowledge and pupils are given appropriate and timely opportunities to consolidate and deepen their understanding. Teachers model clearly what pupils are expected to achieve, so pupils know what to aim for. They use questioning skilfully to probe pupils' thinking and develop the language of explanation and reasoning. In these instances, pupils' learning and progress is more rapid. For example, in a Year 6 class where pupils were investigating a variety of number problems a pupil very articulately explained how many numbers less than 1,000 are divisible by 2, 5 and 7, using knowledge of multiples of 2, 5 and 7. When asked by the teacher how he knew, the pupil drew skilfully on his understanding of multiplication and division inverse operation, and his mental calculation strategies, to give reasons why he had ended up with the numbers he had.
- Mathematics teaching is improving. It is an area that the school is focusing on. Careful, regular analysis of pupils' work highlights specific skills that pupils lack. With the

capable support of the leader, these are targeted by most teachers and used to inform their teaching. As well as this, the school offers all pupils the opportunity to access extra maths skills sessions every morning before school registration. The uptake for this is high, and consequently pupils are improving their basic number skills.

- Evidence looked at during the inspection shows that pupils' writing has improved rapidly over time. This extends to other curriculum subjects where pupils have been given the opportunity to apply their writing skills effectively.
- Reading is taught daily through a variety of well-planned activities that encourage pupils to practise their inference skills by explaining what texts are telling them through considering what they read. This is improving both pupil progress and pupils' enjoyment of reading. For example, while reading with a pupil, the inspector asked how they knew how to read the word 'gross' correctly, pronouncing the 'o' accurately. The pupil replied 'well I know it could be two different sounds but I can tell because of the bit before it as the story says about a girl giving him a kiss and that's gross'.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare Requires improvement**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Communication in the school is highly effective in ensuring that the right pupils get prompt support and guidance when they need it. Systems are established and developing, so that pupils who are struggling to come to school, access lessons or make friends are identified and given help. The pastoral support worker offers intensive care to families and pupils. Much of this work goes beyond the school. This successfully helps parents and pupils to manage difficult situations and means that pupils are happier coming to school. Appropriate records are kept to ensure that all communication feeds into the school's safeguarding and care for pupils, notably with the more vulnerable pupils. Consequently, home-school partnerships are positive and a developed culture of trust and openness ensures that all pupils are well looked after.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. They know who to talk to if they are worried and know how to keep safe online. This is further promoted within the curriculum through e-safety themed curriculum days and as part of the computing curriculum so that pupils are always made aware of the risks. Pupils talk knowledgeably about what could happen and report that they think they could go to any adult in school and they would be helped.
- The school invests in modelling good levels of presentation, for example ensuring that all exercise books are personalised and covered in plastic covers for durability. This encourages pupils to maintain their books well, and they also have a meticulous approach to handwriting and presentation in books.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Both the Ofsted pupil questionnaires and the evidence from speaking with pupils during the inspection highlighted the fact that pupils want to come to school. Through dedicated well-planned transition work, both for younger pupils joining Year 3 and older pupils leaving to attend their chosen secondary, the school prepares pupils for the next stages of their education effectively.



## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The inspection team recognise, following scrutiny of behaviour records and looking at exclusion rates, that behaviour is an area leaders have had success in improving. However, not enough pupils always demonstrate that they have a good attitude towards their own learning and some are not yet receptive to learning. This is particularly the case where activities in lessons do not correspond appropriately and correctly to the pupils' ability. This causes some pupils to lose interest and become indifferent about the effort they display, and the quality of their work.
- Leaders are working hard to implement and develop whole-school learning thought processes linked to 'Growth Mindset' and 'Habits of Mind' that they will use to encourage pupils to reflect more on their learning and how they approach it, and take more responsibility for it. For example, an inspector observed an interactive celebration assembly focusing on how to be a good learner. Pupils listened very well and were respectful of each other as they celebrated the achievements of others, and they listened to teachers explaining the positive changes they had noticed in some pupils. In classes where teaching was better and the school strategies are starting to be used more consistently, there was a better response from pupils towards their work.
- The number of exclusions has decreased because pupils are clearer about the consequences of any poor behaviour and understand the expectations outlined in the '3Ws and 3Ds' system in place that makes up the school's chosen rules. More challenging behaviour is identified quickly and these pupils are positively supported to improve their behaviour. As a result, behaviour is improving significantly. Pupils say that 'there was often bad behaviour but this does not happen now because the teachers do things about it'.
- Pupils are aware of different forms of bullying. They are confident about situations in which they would ask for help. The few incidents recorded are dealt with effectively by the school, with clear follow-up actions taken and monitoring carried out to ensure that there is no repetition. The school curriculum includes participation in various programmes such as 'Show Racism the Red Card' and 'Anti-Bullying week'. These serve to develop pupils' awareness of potential issues and give them strategies to help them keep safe.
- The majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and those spoken to during the inspection, are very positive about improvements in behaviour and their children's eagerness to be in school. One parent said: 'behaviour of children is good. I think this is because children know they are well looked after and they also know that there are rules they have to follow and there are rewards and consequences.'

### Outcomes for pupils

### Require improvement

- Historically, pupils enter Year 3 broadly in line with national averages for reading, writing and mathematics. More recently, the last couple of years' cohorts of pupils have arrived at Wilshire-Dacre attaining above what is typically expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The school takes into account the statutory results along with on-entry baselines. This ensures that any discrepancies can be accounted for when



teaching and learning are being considered.

- The starting point of pupils this academic year in Years 5 and 6 is lower due to a legacy of previous inadequate provision. However, current school information, confirmed by evidence during the inspection, indicates that most pupils are making faster progress and the school's expectation is that they will attain standards at least typical of pupils of their age nationally by the end of Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in writing in 2015 exceeded the national figure. There are indications from pupils' work and current progress information that show that this is being sustained.
- In 2015, there was a dip in reading results for those pupils achieving the expected national level of 4b; however, in 2016, unvalidated results show that pupils attained the same as pupils of the same age nationally.
- In mathematics, pupils had many gaps in their learning as a result of weak teaching in the past. In some classes, teachers reduce these gaps well and pupils make good or better progress. This success is based on a sound understanding of mathematical concepts and being able to use what they know well in various contexts. As a result, attainment in mathematics, though showing signs of improving, is not as good as in reading and writing.
- In 2015, disadvantaged pupils' attainment and progress showed an improvement, and since then progress has accelerated for these pupils as a result of the carefully planned support. Leaders check the progress of individuals, and this analysis helps them to compare against other pupils nationally. This means that, with the evidence of many disadvantaged pupils catching up quickly, the school is able to demonstrate that disadvantaged pupils are catching up with non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils are making good progress from their starting points; however, because the starting points are lower for Year 5 and Year 6 this is not yet reflected in their attainment. Current school progress information and books seen during the inspection show that many of the most able pupils are making good progress in reading and mathematics and accelerated progress in writing. Within this group of pupils, the most able disadvantaged pupils are also making rapid gains because their needs are rigorously assessed and appropriate support put in place.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. This is due to insightful, well-considered and regularly reviewed intervention that provides pupils with appropriate scaffolding to ensure that they can access their work and progress well in lessons.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language attain well and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is as a result of effective pre-teaching of vocabulary, particularly in mathematics, so they can access the language that is used in their lessons and apply it to their work successfully. Teachers do this through planned guided groups that ensure language is not a barrier to them making progress.
- Current Year 5 and Year 6 pupils are catching up quickly to what is typically expected of pupils of the same age nationally. Unvalidated results for 2016 show this to be the case. In addition to this, the pupils' 2015/2016 books show that progress is good or better and this is standing them in good stead to reach at least the expected attainment that is typical for pupils of the same age by the end of Year 6 for both year groups.

## School details

Unique reference number	140611
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10021049

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Davies
Headteacher	Sarah Smith
Telephone number	01462 459 215
Website	<a href="http://www.wilshere.herts.sch.uk/">www.wilshere.herts.sch.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@wilshere.herts.sch.uk">admin@wilshere.herts.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Wilshere-Dacre Junior Academy is an average-sized junior school.
- The school became a sponsored academy in March 2014. The sponsors are REAch2 Academy Trust.
- Since the school became an academy there have been leadership changes. In October 2015 the executive headteacher left and the then head of school became the substantive headteacher.
- The proportion of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish on their website.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes, some of which were observed jointly with the headteacher and three assistant headteachers. Inspectors also made short visits to all classrooms at various times to collect books and assess the learning environment.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the three assistant headteachers, and the regional director. The lead inspector also met with the school business manager and the pastoral support worker.
- The inspection team met informally with pupils at lunchtime and during their lessons. A group of pupils met with an inspector to talk about their views of the school. The lead inspector met members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- A scrutiny of the 2015/2016 academic year books and current year pupils' work, including mathematics, English, science and topic books was undertaken. This was carried out jointly by the inspection team, and sometimes involved the headteacher and the English and mathematics leaders.
- The school's own assessment information and a wide range of paperwork were examined. This included records relating to the monitoring of the school's work by the academy trust, governing body minutes, pupil attainment and progress, behaviour, exclusion, attendance and safeguarding, and also monitoring and evaluation documents. The lead inspector evaluated a wide range of information available on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered the 56 parent texts, and 58 responses made by parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). Additionally, inspectors looked at the 42 pupil views submitted on the online pupil survey, and the views expressed by 21 members of staff in response to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Tracy Fielding, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Cindy Impey	Her Majesty's Inspector (Shadowing the inspection process)

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