

# The Oak Tree Academy

Newham Grange Avenue, Stockton-on-Tees TS19 0SE

## Inspection dates

23–24 May 2017

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>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. As a result, the standards and progress for some groups of pupils, for example the most able pupils, disadvantaged and boys in some year groups, are not as good as they should be.
- Leaders and governors do not evaluate the use of the pupil premium funding well enough against outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in all year groups. In some year groups the difference in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally is not diminishing.
- Teachers do not set work or pose questions that offer a consistently high level of challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- There is a lack of consistency and accuracy between teachers and teaching assistants when teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Although the school continues to improve attendance rates, the persistent absence of pupils still remains above average and this has a negative impact on these pupils' achievement.
- Aspects of middle leadership are underdeveloped. Some staff require further help and guidance in monitoring and assessing how well groups of pupils are achieving in their subjects.

### The school has the following strengths

- The executive principal, together with the assistant principal and head of school, leads with clarity and purpose. Senior leaders have a tenacious drive to improve the school and are doing so effectively overall.
- Governors and the multi-academy trust are ambitious for the school; they provide strong support and challenge to school leaders.
- Pupils in the early years make good progress from their starting points because of good teaching and strong leadership. The teaching of phonics is a positive feature in school.
- Pupils generally behave well and demonstrate a deep understanding of important values; they appreciate diversity and show care for others.
- Leaders strongly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are tolerant and are respectful of other cultures and different faiths.
- The broad, balanced and rich curriculum provides pupils with good opportunities to consolidate and enrich their learning.

## Full report

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

- Raise achievement by improving the consistency of teaching, by:
  - ensuring that work is more accurately matched to pupils' needs and pupils are consistently challenged in their learning
  - improving the quality of teachers' questioning by posing searching questions that enable children to think for themselves and expand on their answers to extend their learning
  - ensuring that staff receive relevant support so that they can apply consistently accurate subject knowledge when teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
  - developing the role of middle leaders, especially in their understanding of the monitoring of the progress of the different groups of pupils in all year groups
  - providing time for middle leaders to visit classes and support colleagues
  - evaluating the impact of the pupil premium funding across the school and adjusting provision where necessary to further raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
  - continuing to raise attendance and reduce further the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The executive headteacher leads the school with determination and ambition. She is rightly proud of its many successes and the improvements in the quality of education that have taken place since she started her role in September 2016. She is very ably supported by the head of school who brings drive and expertise to her role, especially in relation to the early years. Together with the assistant principal, they work very well together as a team, providing very effective leadership for the other staff. The multi-academy trust's director of primary academies, the director of teaching and learning and the achievement partner add further to this effective teamwork. Overall, the sense of common purpose in pursuing the best possible outcomes for pupils that is displayed by all the senior leaders is palpable.
- Middle leadership requires further development, though there are many strengths. These strengths are in areas such as mathematics and the area resource base for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Middle leaders display the same drive and ambition as senior leaders and reinforce the sense that everyone in the school is focused resolutely on securing good outcomes for pupils. However, in some cases middle leaders do not have a deep enough understanding of how well groups of pupils are achieving in each year group. Many middle leaders are new to their roles and have not had time to visit all the classes in their areas of responsibility to fully understand what the strengths and areas for development are.
- Leadership of teaching is effective and although teaching still requires improvement, there have been numerous changes and very significant improvements. The school has an effective programme of continuing professional development. Leaders also work well with other schools in the trust to ensure that teachers can learn from the best practice of colleagues. Regular monitoring of teaching and the impact it has on outcomes for pupils is a key factor in improving the progress that pupils make across the school. The trust supports newly qualified teachers very well in their new roles and these new teachers recognise and appreciate this.
- The school generally makes effective use of the additional funding it receives in the forms of the pupil premium, the physical education and sport premium and funding for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 have made rapid progress due to effective use of the pupil premium to provide extra targeted resources and additional staff. However, this has not been as successful in some other year groups. Consequently, the difference between the standards reached by disadvantaged pupils in school compared to the standards reached by other pupils nationally remains too high.
- A successful feature of the school's work is seen in the way the curriculum is structured. It is particularly coherent in the way separate subject areas are linked together by common themes without losing the particular features of each subject. For example, pupils in Year 5 continued to develop their letter writing skills while studying the ancient Greeks. At the same time they learned key historical concepts such as chronology and the methods that are used to understand the past. As a result of this well-designed curriculum, pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding

effectively and this is at the root of the good progress they make in subjects such as science, history and religious education. The curriculum is very well supported by a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities to participate in sport, clubs and trips.

- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. For example, pupils wrote with empathy about the early, unhappy childhood of Winston Churchill and how he battled with this to become a hero. As a result, pupils are more understanding of the link with resilience and self-esteem. Moreover, the school successfully places a particular focus on the development of pupils' social and emotional development across the curriculum. This is at the heart of their very strong personal development.
- The school promotes fundamental British values well. For example, elections to the school council explicitly link to the democratic process. Similarly, in assemblies and lessons pupils discuss with growing maturity what is happening in the world. In addition, pupils' interactions with each other are characterised by mutual respect and tolerance and these values are modelled well by staff in the school. As a result of all this work, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school's self-evaluation is a precise analysis of the impact of leaders' actions and is effectively linked to the priorities of the school's strategic improvement plan.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governance is effective.
- Governors share the passion of senior leaders to secure the best possible outcomes for the pupils of Oak Tree Academy. They are an extremely well-focused group who give of their time generously. As regular visitors to classrooms, they speak to pupils and staff, seeing the school's work at first hand.
- Governors ask searching questions of senior leaders and there is evidence of valuable discussion in meetings, which uses the considerable expertise of governors well and helps decision-making.
- External expertise from the trust is used to further validate the reports that governors receive from the executive principal. As a consequence, they now have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They hold leaders to account for the impact of most of their actions, though recognise there is more to do.
- Members of the governing body ensure that they know how the extra funding that the school receives is spent. For example, they review assessment data with the senior leadership team. Governors have an accurate view on the impact of pupil premium spending in terms of the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils. However, they agree that they currently do not have a solid understanding of the impact that pupil premium funding is having on the academic achievement of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for

purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Key policies and procedures are firmly in place. They are understood by all and robustly followed to ensure the safety of pupils. The register of checks that the school makes on the backgrounds of staff and their suitability to work with children fully complies with the requirements. All adults are cleared to work with pupils.

- Staff and governors are regularly trained in safeguarding procedures. For example, the training of the four designated safeguarding leaders is up to date and at an appropriate level. All staff have received training and leaders check that they have absorbed the detail. Key staff and governors have undergone the necessary training in the 'Prevent' duty, the government's extremism strategy, and this has been disseminated to all staff.
- Pupils unanimously told inspectors that they feel safe and well looked after and most of the parents who responded to Parent View agree with this.
- External agencies are involved well alongside school staff and parents.

### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

### Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good across the school.
- Some teachers do not plan work which is matched precisely enough to pupils' needs. For some the work is too easy, for others it is too difficult. Occasionally, the most able pupils are capable of carrying out more challenging work or starting harder work sooner. However, in other classes teachers make very good use of the wealth of information available about pupils' needs and consequently move pupils' learning forward briskly. The work teachers set for pupils deepens and extends pupils' learning and understanding.
- Teachers' use of questioning varies in quality between classes. Where teaching has the strongest impact, questions are posed that enable pupils to think deeply in order to build upon their understanding. The questioning effectively assesses, probes and develops pupils' understanding. It uses misconceptions or errors constructively to help pupils make progress. Sometimes questioning is weaker and it does not encourage pupils to think for themselves and does not display the previously noted strong characteristics consistently.
- Some teachers' and teaching assistants' subject knowledge lacks consistency and accuracy when teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling. This means that some pupils do not have a clear idea of how to improve their writing accurately and successfully.
- The school has responded positively to address the dip in reading standards in the Year 6 test last year. Teachers in key stage 2 have started teaching reading comprehension in a more focused way, which is beginning to help pupils to learn specific skills. Teachers promote a culture of reading and pupils enjoy reading the same book as their friends because they can talk to them about it and share their enthusiasm.
- Teaching assistants are usually, but not consistently, deployed effectively. They work alongside teachers and most have the same high expectations of pupils. Some are skilled in leading interventions for different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, in some key stage 2 classes the gaps in the learning of disadvantaged pupils are not

being rapidly addressed. In some classes, teaching assistants struggle to ensure that all in their groups remain on task and make sufficient progress. In some year groups, and in some subjects, the progress of boys lags behind that of girls and more is needed to help them catch up.

- The teaching of mathematics is good and there has been a successful focus on improving the quality of teaching of this subject. Teaching is now enabling pupils to develop improved fluency in their basic skills, including calculation. Furthermore, pupils are now being given sufficient opportunities to apply their understanding by developing their reasoning skills.
- Writing is a significant strength in school but leaders recognise that there is still room for improvement in some classes. In Year 6 classes, pupils were successfully editing their writing based on 'Stig of the dump' and improving the quality of their work. One pupil identified the word 'salubrious' and, after considering its meaning, included this in the improved version of their work. Many pupils show the ability to write with high levels of sophistication and are working at greater depth.
- Teachers are secure in their teaching of phonics in key stage 1 and so pupils are helped to grasp sounds quickly and improve their reading. Staff are skilled at supporting pupils' language acquisition, particularly for the high proportion of pupils who enter the school with poor speech and communication skills. Staff model language precisely and use resources to help pupils improve their understanding, which in turn ensures they can access the learning in classrooms.
- Teachers' accuracy and understanding of assessment has improved since the last inspection. They check pupils' progress regularly and plan interventions for any pupils that require more support. The use of specialist teachers, in subjects like music and physical education, is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are proud of their school and their achievements. The school council is proactive and is very positive about how it influences improvements in the school. Pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, the school has appointed playground buddies and a head girl and head boy.
- Pupils have many opportunities to work collaboratively. During their discussions they listen to the views of others with interest and respect, giving their opinions in a mature manner.
- An ethos of respect and tolerance permeates the whole school community. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors are clear that it does not matter who you are, what you look like or where you come from: everyone is welcome at Oak Tree Academy. This attitude is evident in the playground, where pupils of all ages and backgrounds play harmoniously alongside each other.
- Senior leaders place a high emphasis on supporting the emotional well-being of all pupils. Difficult and sensitive issues are discussed in a mature way by pupils so that

they are able to offer support to one another. Pupils spoke very highly of the help that they had received to keep safe. They have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Visits to school by organisations such as the police help pupils to develop a good awareness of safety around school and at home.

- Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying and how to report it if they were a victim or a witness. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors are confident that bullying is rare in their school and are sure that adults can be trusted to deal with it immediately.
- A very well attended breakfast club provides a positive start to the school day for pupils who attend. A good range of physical activities are provided which engage pupils. Pupils are happy, settled and cooperate well with others in the club.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Teachers and senior leaders skilfully manage pupils' behaviour because they have set high expectations, so pupils know what is expected of them and they respond accordingly.
- The quality of pupils' behaviour in lessons is typically good and often exemplary. In the lessons where work is closely matched to their needs and interests, pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and want to do well. However, when the work in lessons is either too hard or too easy pupils become a little restless and display some low-level disruption.
- The vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes to school and are extremely respectful towards members of staff and visitors. They listen carefully when the teacher talks and eagerly get on with their work when directed.
- Pupils are kind to each other and behave very well during playtimes. At the start of the school day inspectors observed a very orderly response as pupils greeted their teachers and sensibly entered school. Due to their good behaviour, little learning time is lost.
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average but the reduction of persistent absence remains a thorny issue. Various strategies to promote attendance are in place. There are robust processes for checking on absences and stronger sanctions for instances of persistent absence. Detailed attendance analysis identifies cohorts, groups and individuals whose attendance is raising concern and subsequent action is taken. These have resulted in attendance rates improving considerably but persistent absence still remains above average.
- Every parent who spoke with inspectors during the inspection expressed very positive views about pupils' behaviour and the efforts of the school to provide a caring and supportive environment. Inspectors endorse these views. A small number of parents expressed concern in the online survey, and inspectors rigorously examined the logs of incidents and reports. Leaders complete these in an exemplary manner and it is clear that every effort is made to ensure that children are safe at this school.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The progress made by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics has not been consistently good over time as they have moved through school. There have been, and still are, variances between year groups and sometimes within year groups. However, this situation is rapidly improving.
- From the generally lower-than-typical starting points, the work in pupils' books, pupils' learning in lessons and the school's own tracking of pupils' progress over time illustrates that there is variability in the progress made by pupils throughout school. For some key groups, such as disadvantaged pupils and boys, progress is not good enough in some year groups.
- Standards in key stage 1 were above the national average in all subjects in 2016. Evidence shows that current pupils are on track to be so again in 2017. Progress is good for all groups of pupils, though this cohort has fewer most-able pupils.
- The school was rightly disappointed in the outcomes of the 2016 national curriculum assessments at key stage 2. These show that pupils made less than average progress in reading. Detailed analysis shows that many pupils missed the expected standard by one or two marks. By the time they left the school at the end of Year 6, pupils were not sufficiently prepared for the next stage of their education. The progress of disadvantaged pupils, and particularly the disadvantaged most-able pupils, was significantly lower than the national average. Nonetheless, given that many had low starting points, the progress in mathematics was not significantly different from the national average. Progress in writing was strong overall and also for disadvantaged pupils as a group.
- Attainment in phonics is strong and a higher proportion of pupils than the national average pass the Year 1 phonics screening check. As a result, pupils are often fluent readers in key stage 1, especially the most able. Lower-ability readers demonstrate resilience in the way they use phonics to tackle difficult or unfamiliar words successfully.
- Progress in the early years foundation stage is very strong. Whether children join the school in the Nursery or Reception Years, a significant proportion do so working at levels below other children of their age. Given these low starting points, children make rapid and sustained progress during their time in the early years and a higher-than-average proportion of children achieved a good level of development in 2016. The difference in attainment between the proportion of disadvantaged children in the early years who achieved a good level of development and the figure for other children nationally entirely diminished last year. Evidence suggests a similar position this year.
- The most able pupils in Year 6 achieve well, but this is not consistently the case in all year groups in key stage 2. The school's own information, together with work checked in pupils' books, shows that progress is inconsistent in different subjects and in different classes. Some pupils make good gains in their learning where teaching is effective and assessment information is used well to set work at the right level. In other cases, pupils' progress stalls when the work lacks challenge or teachers' expectations are not high enough.
- The work of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school, whatever their level of ability,



shows that they make good progress from their starting points in some classes, but not in others. For example, in Year 6 the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard is very much higher than last year. It is broadly in line with the proportion of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally who achieved this standard in 2016. The most able disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 achieve well. Their work is closely monitored by the school and additional enrichment activities are carefully planned to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence. As a result, their attainment is high.

- However, in some other year groups in key stage 2 the difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally has not diminished enough. Too few disadvantaged pupils achieve the higher standards.
- Historic assessment information has highlighted some differences between the performance of boys and girls in different subjects across the key stages. The work in pupils' books and the school's tracking information shows these differences are reducing but not as quickly as they need to do in mathematics in some classes, where boys outperform girls.
- Pupils in the area resource base who have moderate learning difficulties often work at levels very significantly below those which would be typical of pupils their age. Nonetheless, accurate assessment procedures show that these pupils are making good and in some cases rapid progress. They are, therefore, being well prepared for the next steps in their education. Pupils in the main school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have either a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, are making good progress from their individual starting points.
- The wider school curriculum is well-developed, exciting and interests pupils. It provides great breadth. As a result, pupils achieve well in a range of subjects beyond English and mathematics.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- The early years at Oak Tree Academy is very well led and the head of school has particular expertise in this aspect of the school's work to which she brings determination and commitment.
- Most children, whether they join in Nursery or Reception, arrive at the school working at levels below those typical of children of similar ages. This is particularly noticeable in the areas of communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development. For example, on entry to Nursery, typically fewer than 15% of children are working within their relevant age band.
- Teachers in the early years are highly skilled in assessing the attainment of children on entry to the school, including from information gleaned from home visits. This robust baseline assessment means that staff have a clear understanding of children's needs and so plan effective learning activities to meet these needs. The responsiveness to meeting children's needs is at the heart of the effective teaching in the early years. Teachers involve children, in ways appropriate for their age, in deciding which activities to undertake. This is a key aspect of the successful work the school does in developing positive attitudes to learning from the outset.

- Given their often low starting points, children in the early years make rapid and sustained progress. Even those who do not go on to attain a good level of development by the end of Reception have often made substantial progress during their time in the early years.
- In particular, disadvantaged children make rapid progress in the early years and the difference between their attainment and the attainment of children nationally is diminishing rapidly.
- Phonics teaching is effective in the early years and provides a solid foundation for further development in Year 1. Evidence shows the upward trend looks likely to be continued this year.
- School leaders have created a warm, nurturing and inviting environment in the early years, which successfully encourages children to develop highly positive attitudes to learning.
- The outdoor area is used well to combine areas of learning; for example, children combine numeracy with physical coordination when successfully squirting water or throwing sponges at numbered targets. However, staff miss opportunities to further develop reading and writing in the outdoor area.
- Even at this early stage of their education, teachers expect children to take responsibility for their learning in age-appropriate ways. This approach contributes very successfully to ensuring that progress is rapid and sustained over time.
- Safeguarding is effective in the early years and there are no breaches of the statutory welfare requirements. All the effective aspects of safeguarding seen in the school as a whole are manifest in the early years.

## School details

Unique reference number	139959
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10031958

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	419
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	John Taylor
Headteacher	Debra Murphy (Executive Principal) Elizabeth Pollitt (Head of School)
Telephone number	01642 602029
Website	<a href="http://www.theoaktreeacademy.org">www.theoaktreeacademy.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:MurphyD@thefernsacademy.org">MurphyD@thefernsacademy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	June 2015

## Information about this school

- Oak Tree Academy is larger than the average-sized primary school. It converted to become an academy with Northern Education Trust in September 2013 and was judged to require improvement at its previous inspection in June 2015.
- The current executive principal took up post in September 2016. She is also the executive principal of another school in the trust, Ferns Academy in Bolton.
- There have been substantial and significant changes in the leadership of the school, including in governance, since the previous inspection. Most of these have been very recent, since September 2016. Many new staff have been appointed recently.
- Most children start in the part-time Nursery class but some join in the Reception Year from home or other pre-school provision.
- The school has an area resource base for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. This is funded by the local authority and currently has 11 pupils attending

it.

- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school operates a breakfast club.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. In many of these visits they were accompanied by school leaders. Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and at assessments of pupils' current attainment and progress. The inspectors observed pupils at break and lunchtimes and at the school's breakfast club.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils, parents and staff at various times during the inspection, including break, lunchtime and at either end of the school day. Inspectors also had formal meetings with the school's leaders, other staff, the chair and other members of the governing body. The lead inspector spoke to the director of primary education of the multi-academy trust and conversations were also held with the achievement partner and director of teaching and learning.
- The inspectors also took account of the views expressed in the 28 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The 22 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 86 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey were also considered.
- An inspector listened to some pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including those published on the school's website, the school's records of recruitment and vetting checks, a range of documents relating to safeguarding pupils, the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement, and minutes of the governing body meetings.

## Inspection team

Steve Bywater, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Dent	Ofsted Inspector
Frances Gowland	Ofsted Inspector

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