

Gothic Mede Academy

High Street, Arlesey, Bedfordshire SG15 6SL

Inspection dates

27–28 June 2017

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	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders are uncompromising in their efforts to ensure that all pupils fulfil their potential. With good support from the academy trust, they are securing good improvement in all aspects of the school's work.
- The leadership team, including those in charge of subjects, trustees and the governing body, is very knowledgeable about the quality of provision because it checks all aspects carefully and quickly takes action if it spots a weakness.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. A rich environment, especially in the Reception classes, and good teaching enable children to make good progress most of the time.
- Good teaching in key stages 1 and 2 means that pupils make good progress in English and mathematics as well as in subjects such as science, history and geography.
- Pupils acquire new skills quickly, especially in phonics, which is taught particularly well. However, when writing, pupils do not always spell accurately. Leaders have already identified that this aspect of the English curriculum is not covered effectively enough.
- Teachers provide good challenge to pupils most of the time, but occasionally do not move on the learning of the most able quickly enough.
- Pupils are good ambassadors for the school. They feel safe and behave well. They are polite and courteous and develop good levels of confidence.
- Pupils are tolerant and respectful to each other. They work hard in lessons but they do not always take enough care to present their work neatly.
- Leaders use additional funding extremely effectively to tackle any potential barriers to pupils' learning. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.
- The curriculum is broad and exciting. Extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors develop pupils' skills across a wide range of subjects and contribute well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and they hold it in high regard. Strong relationships between home and school are established in the early years and are maintained as the children progress through the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the level of challenge for the most able by ensuring that teachers respond consistently well when pupils have grasped a concept and are ready to have their learning moved on.
- Improve the focus on spelling within the English curriculum, so that skills improve more quickly.
- Ensure that pupils understand the importance of consistently presenting their work neatly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new principal is building successfully on the school's many strengths. He is very well supported by his deputy and the rest of the leadership team. Together, they have ensured that there is a culture of high expectations where pupils are enabled to flourish both socially and academically.
- All leaders, including middle leaders in charge of subjects, work well together, analysing carefully all aspects of school performance in their quest for excellence. Self-evaluation is rigorous. Leaders monitor pupils' progress thoroughly and respond quickly when they identify anyone who is in danger of falling behind.
- The good leadership and management of teaching are ensuring that it continues to improve. Training and the management of teachers' performance have been used well to develop teachers' skills. The academy trust has supported this successfully by providing a range of training opportunities to staff that have been closely matched to the needs of the school.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's main priorities. The principal and his deputy know that they have had to take on too much in their first year. They have already appointed additional staff, such as a special educational needs coordinator and a family support worker, to take on some of their current responsibilities, so that they can focus more closely in their monitoring on ironing out the remaining inconsistencies in practice across the school.
- Leaders make good use of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils. The relatively new pupil premium lead teacher has looked closely at the needs of individual pupils and has then tailored support to meet their specific circumstances. Funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils' social and emotional development as well as their academic progress. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, make good progress most of the time and develop positive attitudes towards learning.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. They evaluate it regularly to check its effectiveness. Pupils enjoy the good number of clubs and visits provided by the school. These help to bring subjects alive. The curriculum focuses well on teaching basic skills of literacy and numeracy, but creativity in art is also promoted successfully. Pupils have many opportunities to write purposefully in subjects such as science, history and geography, and this has helped to improve their skills. However, the English curriculum does not focus strongly enough on developing spelling so that pupils' skills in this area improve as quickly as other aspects of writing.
- The school gives sport and physical education a high priority. The primary sport premium is being spent effectively to extend the opportunities that pupils experience. Pupils enjoy taking part in competitive sport and are able to learn new skills when trying out activities such as cheerleading and 'Bollywood' dancing. Specialist sports coaches have provided support to develop pupils' physical skills as well as to extend the subject knowledge of teaching staff.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the promotion of British

values are threaded throughout the curriculum and are supported well. Pupils are taught about values such as courage or tolerance and are then encouraged by staff to show these attributes in their work or interactions with others. The school council helps pupils to develop an early understanding of democracy. Pupils are tolerant and respectful and show good concern for the needs of others by organising fundraising events for charities, such as children's hospitals.

- Parents express very high levels of satisfaction with the school. The vast majority would recommend the school to others. Activities such as a recent Fathers' Day Breakfast are greatly appreciated by parents. Parents especially like the way that staff take care of their children, typically making comments such as, 'My children have flourished academically and socially because the staff are so passionate about the school and the children in it', and, 'This is a fabulous community school, which both my child and myself love.'

Governance of the school

- The governing body and trustees provide good levels of challenge and support to other school leaders. They have a good understanding of how well the school is performing when compared with other schools locally and nationally.
- Through visits to the school and information from the principal, governors have a good awareness of the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. They use the information rigorously to ask questions about the improvement being made to pupils' achievement and to ensure that weaknesses are being tackled quickly. For example, they talk knowledgeably about how the decision to take on the management of the Nursery class is already helping to raise the attainment of boys in the early years.
- Governors know where teaching is strongest and ensure that only effective teaching is rewarded financially. They know what is being done to tackle any remaining weaknesses in staff performance.
- Governors know exactly how additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is helping to improve their attainment, because they receive regular updates on their progress. They check carefully the use of specific funding for special educational needs. They ensure that it is being used to support these pupils in making good progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Robust systems are in place in all areas of safeguarding. These are well understood by all staff. Regular and appropriate training for staff is undertaken and is up to date. Strong relationships are in place with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met. Where needed, leaders work closely with parents to secure support for vulnerable pupils.
- Staff and governors have a good understanding of the need to protect pupils from potential radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Across the school, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in their work. They create a good environment for learning by displaying pupils' work to celebrate their successes. Teachers have positive relationships with their class. They expect pupils to work hard and to know they can do so without fear of failure.
- Across the school, teachers ensure that pupils understand what they are learning, explaining work clearly so that time is not wasted. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well most of the time. Pupils respond accordingly, working hard, producing work of a high standard and making rapid progress. Just occasionally, teachers do not make their expectations clear and, when this happens, the pace of learning slows because pupils do not work hard enough.
- The teaching of phonics is especially strong. Staff make learning new letters and sounds fun by, for example, making good use of music and rhyme to engage pupils. There is good challenge for the different ability groups, and pupils improve their skills extremely quickly.
- In English and mathematics, teachers have good subject knowledge and they introduce new topics skilfully. They plan work carefully to meet the needs of pupils. The most able are challenged well most of the time, but sometimes work is not adapted quickly enough for these pupils when they have grasped a skill or concept so that their learning can be moved on even more quickly.
- In mathematics, pupils' progress is rapid most of the time. Teachers plan work that enables pupils to think deeply about their learning by, for example, applying their skills to practical situations. For example, pupils in Year 3 used a wide range of mathematical skills as they were challenged by the teacher to solve some extremely demanding 'code' problems.
- Across the school, additional adults are used well to support disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Skilled guidance from teachers and teaching assistants make a good contribution to the learning of these pupils.
- Nearly all parents who responded to Parent View are pleased with the teaching of their children. They typically make comments such as, 'The teachers are kind, caring and approachable', and, 'The teachers are extremely engaged and focused on doing everything they can to make sure that their pupils are well rounded, independent and enjoy learning.'

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils develop positive attitudes towards learning. They learn important skills such as resilience and perseverance and apply them successfully when working. Pupils are keen to do well and try hard most of the time. However, they do not always take enough care with their work so that it is well presented.
- Pupils are confident, articulate and ambitious. They enjoy learning and school life. They

are keen to take responsibility and do so sensibly. The school council gives pupils a good voice in school life. School councillors organise charity events and contribute to school improvement by, for example, talking about how to improve playground facilities.

- Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Staff are quick to identify pupils' emotional and health needs and to take steps to support them when necessary. Staff meet regularly to identify and discuss any barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils, such as the disadvantaged or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that problems can be resolved quickly.
- Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of what they need to do to avoid potential dangers. They said that there is some occasional bullying but if it happens they are very confident that it will be dealt with quickly. As one pupil commented, 'We are all friends most of the time.'
- Activities both in and out of class teach pupils about the potential pitfalls of using the internet. Pupils know what cyber-bullying is and can explain how they would talk to an adult if they had a worry. Younger pupils know how to stay safe on the busy road outside school. At playtimes, pupils are very aware of how their actions may affect others and do all they can to avoid accidents.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well most of the time. They are polite and courteous and are very welcoming to visitors. Pupils work hard in lessons and cooperate well. They happily share ideas together and collaborate thoughtfully when working. They talk confidently about what they are learning and willingly share their work with others. Pupils are able to articulate what skills they need to learn effectively because teachers frequently talk about this in lessons.
- Pupils like the school's reward systems and feel that they are applied fairly. They are especially keen to win the 'Headteacher's Award' or to take part in celebration assemblies.
- Playtime and lunchtimes are calm and orderly. Pupils recognise the importance of being kind to each other. This results in a harmonious community where everyone gets along well.
- Rates of attendance are improving and are now in line with the national average for all significant groups, including the disadvantaged. Leaders are rigorous in following up absences. They work closely with parents who do not send their children to school regularly, ensuring that they are aware of the importance of avoiding unnecessary absences.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because, occasionally, when teachers do not make their expectations clear enough, pupils become quietly inattentive and do not complete as much work as they could.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress across the school. They develop rapidly a good range of skills in English and mathematics and apply them well when working in other subjects.
- By the end of Year 4, most are working at the expected level for their age, or beyond, in reading, writing and mathematics. Older pupils are fluent readers who tackle a range of texts with competence. They express preferences for different genres or authors and read with good fluency most of the time.
- Pupils also become confident writers by Year 4. Pupils benefit from many opportunities to write in a variety of styles in different subjects, and this has helped to improve skills. Pupils use interesting vocabulary in their writing to engage readers but they do not always spell accurately.
- Pupils' progress in phonics is particularly rapid in key stage 1. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in national screening at the end of Year 1 has risen sharply over the last three years and was above average in 2016. In the current Year 1 screening, nearly all pupils have reached the expected standard.
- In mathematics, Year 4 pupils confidently use their knowledge to design and solve their own problems, showing a secure understanding of different mathematical concepts. Younger pupils identify patterns when looking at the properties of three-dimensional shapes and use different strategies to solve addition or subtraction problems.
- The school successfully ensures that all groups, including the most able, make good progress over time. However, just occasionally the most able do not develop skills quickly enough because teachers do not respond quickly to their specific needs.
- Support for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, is well targeted and helps them to make good progress in English and mathematics, often from much lower starting points.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Both in class and in small groups, teachers give them work that is matched to their needs. Additional adults also give them support when appropriate, and ensure that they do the best that they can.
- Pupils produce good-quality work in art, science, history and geography. For example, pupils' books show that they confidently carry out investigations in science, using their scientific knowledge to draw conclusions from their findings. In history, Year 2 pupils have a good knowledge of life in Victorian Britain. This has been supported well by a recent visit to a museum, where pupils were able to learn about life in a Victorian school.

Early years provision

Good

- Children make good progress in the early years. Attainment by the end of the Reception year has risen sharply over the last three years and was above average for the first time in 2016. There is a similar picture in the current year. These improvements mean that children are being well prepared both academically and

socially for life in Year 1.

- The school has successfully raised boys' attainment in the last year. Historically, there has been a large gap between the attainment of boys and girls at the end of the Reception year. This is no longer the case. Leaders have tackled this in several ways, including ensuring that more is being done in the Nursery class, now that they manage it to prepare boys for the next stage of their education. They have also enhanced the curriculum across the setting so that it takes more account of boys' interests. Staff are relentless in ensuring that boys are fully engaged in their learning and are acquiring new skills as quickly as the girls across the setting.
- Good teaching ensures that children learn new skills quickly. Children are very engaged in their learning, both indoors and outdoors. They show a keen interest in the activities provided. Good opportunities to promote early reading, writing and mathematics skills are threaded through themed activities. For example, as part of their topic about mini-beasts, children make maps, use magnifying glasses to find and count bugs, write about their 'bug-hunt' and sort their insects by habitat.
- Staff keep detailed records of children's progress in their learning journals. This ensures that staff have an accurate understanding of what children can and cannot do so that they can plan and provide activities which match their needs. Adults use questioning well to test children's understanding, but occasionally they do not take this into account quickly enough to enable them to provide the right level of challenge all of the time for the most able children. This is more evident in the Nursery class than in the Reception classes.
- Children develop their social skills particularly quickly in both the Nursery and Reception classes. They behave well most of the time and feel safe. They confidently choose where they are going to work and they move calmly and quietly to activities without disturbing others. They sensibly use the wide variety of equipment made available to them.
- Provision is well led and managed. The early years leader has high expectations and ensures that these are applied by staff. She makes good use of checks on children's progress to identify where additional help is needed. Disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they are supported effectively. Leaders ensure that additional funding for these pupils is used to good effect to support learning both in and out of class.
- The principal and early years leader have a good understanding of the main priorities for improvement. The move of the Nursery class onto the main school site at the start of the next school year is well considered, as a lack of space in its current accommodation sometimes hinders children's learning.
- There are strong links with parents. Parents are kept well informed about their children's learning and are able to talk to staff about any worries at any time. Parents are almost unanimously pleased with the quality of early years provision.

School details

Unique reference number	140281
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10031322

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

Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Stanbury
Principal	Thomas Clarke
Telephone number	01462 732002
Website	www.gothicmede.org.uk/
Email address	gothicmede-info@bestacademies.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to academy status as a part of the multi-academy Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST) in November 2013. This is the school's first inspection as an academy.
- 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.
- This is a larger than average-sized first school with 12 classes. Children in the early years are taught in two Reception classes and in a Nursery class. The Nursery class became part of the school's provision in April 2016, having previously been managed by an external provider.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is broadly average.
- The school's vice principal became interim principal in September 2016 and took up the post permanently in April 2017.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons, many of which were observed jointly with the principal or vice principal. In addition, the inspectors made some short visits to observe learning at other times.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff, the chief executive officer from the multi-academy trust and members of the governing body.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 107 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked with parents at the start of the school day.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at their work and school documents, including the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspectors analysed responses to inspection questionnaires from 43 members of staff.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Rogan	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqueline Treacy	Ofsted Inspector

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