

Axminster Community Primary Academy

Stoney Lane, Axminster, Devon EX13 5BU

Inspection dates

5–6 October 2017

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
|--|--------------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Standards reached by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Year 6 have been below the national average.
- Training for teachers has not equipped them with the subject knowledge necessary to meet the full requirements of the national curriculum.
- Teaching gives insufficient emphasis to boys' handwriting, grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have not been high enough. Lower-attaining pupils are given work that is too easy.
- Pupils lack resilience to tackle unfamiliar challenges. In such situations they default to adults for support or to provide answers.
- Subject leaders are developing their skills but have yet to have a full impact on improving pupils' outcomes.
- Governors' work to hold leaders to account has not been sufficiently rigorous.
- Planned activities do not stretch and challenge the most able pupils to reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Assessment information gleaned from questioning by adults is not routinely used to further learning more rapidly during lessons.
- Children in the early years make a sound start to their learning and development.
- Pupils' attendance remains below average, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- Since the appointment of the head of school in March 2016, tangible improvements are evident in behaviour, the quality of teaching and work in pupils' books.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Pupils with additional needs and their parents receive effective care and support.
- All staff are ambitious for the school. Staff feel well supported. A passionate culture for further improvement exists.
- During the last academic year, pupils' progress across the school in all subjects was rapid. Attainment is rising quickly.
- Leaders' actions to improve phonics have been effective. Pupils in the Year 1 phonics check in 2017 reached the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement by:
 - making sure teachers have the highest expectations of achievement for all groups of pupils
 - using assessment information to plan activities that meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils and build on their prior knowledge, skill and understanding
 - making sure that work is challenging enough to enable the most able pupils to reach higher standards
 - providing clear expectations for boys' use of spelling, grammar and punctuation when writing
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress by:
 - raising expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and pride in their work, especially for boys
 - ensuring that teaching interests and engages pupils in their work, motivates and helps them to make good progress
 - helping pupils develop the strategies and resilience required to overcome new or unfamiliar challenges and problems.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by supporting subject leaders in developing the skills and confidence they need to carry out their roles effectively and account for pupils' performance.
- Improve attendance for all groups of pupils and reduce the proportion of pupils persistently absent from school.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Axminster Primary Academy has had an unfortunate history. School results in 2015 at both key stage 1 (Year 2) and key stage 2 (Year 6) were annulled due to the maladministration during statutory testing. A period of staff and parental unrest followed. Consequently pupils' achievement and behaviour at that time declined.
- Trust leaders sought to quickly establish renewed leadership, drive and vision after this turbulent period and the subsequent investigation by the appropriate authorities. The head of school, appointed in March 2016, provides much-needed stability to the school's effort. Effective actions have arrested a further decline in standards and work in current pupils' books shows that their progress last year was rapid and continues to improve.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics are new to their posts. They are yet to undertake formal monitoring in their areas of responsibility and are therefore unable to point to tangible impact of their work. Good plans are in place that show the potential to bring about necessary improvements to teaching, the curriculum and pupils' outcomes.
- The curriculum is appropriately organised to develop pupils' skills of literacy and numeracy. Links are made to other subject areas where possible. Leaders are accurately focused on ensuring more pupils acquire the skills necessary in the core subjects so they are better prepared for secondary school. All staff are aware that they must build on the work of the last year to ensure greater consistency in curriculum delivery and teaching. This will ensure that new ways of working embed quickly and exert maximum influence on pupils' learning.
- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural is developing. Pupils on the school council play an active role in planning developments. School leaders and governors listen carefully to their views and provide responsibilities for council members to put into practice what they have learned. Pupils' involvement in the democratic process is developing their understanding of British values.
- The sport premium funding is used well to promote pupils' standards in sport and improve their health and fitness. The increased range of sports being offered after school is increasing levels of pupils' participation and performance. Local sports competitions enable athletes to compete against the best in the local region.
- Attention to the impact of pupil premium funding and additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is now carefully checked. The special needs co-ordinator uses her expertise to check the impact of intervention programmes precisely. This is helping more pupils to catch up in their learning.
- The executive headteacher and head of school have a very clear picture of the school's strengths and areas requiring improvement. They are realistic about where the school is on its journey of improvement and the next stages of its development. Together, they provide good role models for staff and pupils. There is a positive culture of respect and tolerance, where both staff and pupils feel well supported.
- Staff at all levels are ambitious and excited about the future improvements which are

planned. Staff contribute well to developments and as a result understand the part they play in securing improvements.

- A welcoming and caring culture now exists across the school. Most parents are supportive and value the personal attention their children receive. Relationships are strong. A collective sense of teamwork and willingness to improve ensures that pupils are provided with good-quality care. Pupils are proud of their school and morale is high.
- All those who met with members of the inspection team, including parents, commented on the marked and positive changes to pupils' conduct and behaviour, progress and the ethos at the school since September 2016. The head of school, in particular, is deserving of much credit in successfully tackling the many and significant challenges the school has faced.

Governance of the school

- Governors are knowledgeable about their role and the contribution they should be making to the overall leadership of the school. They demonstrate a strong ambition for the school to improve. However, governors have not systematically gained clear information on the performance of pupils to evaluate the impact of actions carefully. More recently governors have used the findings from external reports to inform decision-making more precisely. More probing questions about the progress of different groups are beginning to be asked.
- Trust decisions are proving successful. The appointment of the head of school and subsequent improvements to the quality of teaching, pupils' progress, behaviour and Year 1 phonics outcomes demonstrate governors' and leaders' overall capacity for further improvement.
- Governors have used the lessons learned from previous experiences to ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective and secure. Working together with trust leaders, governors foster a strong culture of safeguarding at the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff are up to date with the relevant training. Record-keeping is well maintained and meets all current requirements. Support for vulnerable pupils is highly detailed and personalised. Close liaison with parents and outside agencies ensures that all pupils are catered for with care and attention to detail. Staff are well trained in dealing with complex issues. A high priority is given to e-safety through assemblies and the curriculum. Risk assessment are thorough, including for those pupils who have specific learning or physical needs. Staff act as effective role models for pupils. In turn, pupils increasingly follow these examples in the way they talk, act and treat each other.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- During 2015, the quality of teaching and pupils' learning declined. Temporary staff and inconsistent approaches meant that pupils' achievement at that time suffered. Leaders' actions to improve teaching, through effective performance management and training are securing rapid improvements to the performance of most pupils currently at the school.
- Teachers' expectations over time of pupils' academic capability have not been high enough. Therefore some planned activities are too easy, especially for lower-attaining pupils and the most able.
- Teaching has not helped pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who have lower attainment, or are the most able to make good progress over time. For example, the most able, including the most able disadvantaged, show their true potential in some pieces of writing but this is not sustained over time. This prevents them moving ahead of the expectation for their age. Often these pupils report that their work is too easy.
- A range of different methods and approaches are used to teach reading. Pupils report that they enjoy reading and read regularly in school. Younger pupils become well versed in the mechanics of decoding letters and the sounds they make when learning phonics. However, broader reading comprehension skills are not as well developed.
- Occasionally adults' use of questioning to check pupils' learning and to intervene quickly is not effective enough. Some adults are too ready to accept too brief or simple answers. In other instances pupils move on to new knowledge or concepts before they are fully confident and ready to do so. This results in gaps in their learning. Pupils' progress is more rapid when questioning identifies misconceptions and action to correct them is taken.
- Teaching does not routinely meet the requirements of the national curriculum, particularly in mathematics. Pupils' fluency in number is therefore not built upon to develop their conceptual understanding. Questioning to develop reasoning skills associated with the national curriculum, such as 'How do you know? Why do you think that? What do we know about how numbers work to solve this?' are not evident in pupils' books or lessons planned over time.
- The school has an assessment policy that is generally followed. Pupils are therefore reasonably clear about how to act upon comments made in order to make their work better.
- Teaching is insufficiently rigorous in its attention to pupils' accuracy in handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar, especially for boys and lower-attaining pupils. Teachers' planning and assessment do not play close enough attention to these aspects of pupils' work to bring about more rapid improvement.
- Support staff play an important part in helping pupils across the school. They provide good-quality pastoral guidance and care for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They support pupils during lunchtimes and breaktimes and run extra clubs. Occasionally some do not focus closely enough on pupils' academic development.

- It is clear that the quality of teaching is on a rapidly improving trajectory and more pupils are making better headway in their learning. Where effective teaching occurs, pupils thrive, take greater pride in the presentation of their work and make better progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils do not consistently take sufficient pride in their work.
- When presented with unfamiliar challenges of concepts, pupils' confidence and resilience drops quickly, limiting their progress. Pupils default to adults for too much support or to provide the answers. Not enough pupils are demonstrating the self-discipline to actively seek out new work and challenge themselves to improve.
- Pupils are developing their understanding of how to be a successful learner and are developing positive attitudes to learning. They are increasingly thoughtful and considered when joining in discussions and listening to others.
- More pupils are beginning to act out the values the school is determined to promote. Generally, they apply themselves in a compliant manner when tackling familiar work.
- Care for those pupils who need additional support, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is thorough and well documented. Strong working relationships with a range of outside agencies, such as social care, help to ensure the safety of these pupils.
- All parents who met with inspectors and many who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, reported that their child is safe in school. Pupils report they feel safe at all times and show a good understanding of the broader features of what it means to be safe. Pupils show a good awareness of how to stay safe when using the internet. Many older pupils talked enthusiastically about what the school does to help with safety in and out of school such as awareness of road safety.
- The school has worked hard to promote good attendance and this is beginning to pay off. Nevertheless there is more work to do to ensure that attendance continues to improve.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Up to the early part of 2016 standards of behaviour declined dramatically. The high number of temporary staff, combined with a lack of effective leadership of behaviour at that time meant that incidents of poor behaviour escalated and exclusions rose.
- Since that unsettling period, a new behaviour system has been introduced which has dramatically reduced the number of serious incidents and exclusions. All pupils, staff and parents spoken to commented on the marked improvements to behaviour due to

the actions of the head of school. As a result, incidents of disruption to learning are far fewer than previously. Isolated occasions are now typified by 'silly' or 'immature' events.

- Where teachers' expectations are too low, some pupils lose focus, do not follow instructions or chatter while the teacher is talking.
- Adults model how to act and treat each other effectively. More pupils are emulating their actions and are increasingly positive about the atmosphere in the school. As pupils move around the school, they do so in an orderly, calm and appropriate manner.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about aspects of bullying. They are confident that if any incident should occur it would be dealt with quickly.
- When on the playground, older pupils' play can be very active and physical. At times there are few resources or equipment available to help them organise and structure their play times. Some older pupils are unaware of the risks posed when running at speed across the games of younger peers.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Published data for the school has not been accurate or reliable. Inaccurate assessment judgements on pupils' attainment were identified in 2015 during external investigations. Pupils' progress measures from key stage 1 are therefore also inaccurate and will continue to present a false picture of progress until 2020.
- School assessment information and analyses of pupils' work indicates that the proportion of pupils making strong progress from their starting points during the last academic year is high. Marked improvements for most pupils have been secured and sustained by leaders' effective actions. However, gaps in learning of some lower attaining pupils have not been fully dealt with. Consequently when these pupils reach Year 5 or 6 they have had too much ground to make up.
- Across the school, the small number of the most able pupils are not challenged academically to reach their full potential. Some good examples exist such as in Year 5 and 6 where pupils persevere when presented with taxing World War II codebreaking problems in mathematics. In other cases the work set and teachers' marking illustrate that much of the work is too easy.
- The attainment of pupils who started in Year 6 this year is in line with the national average for all subjects. A high proportion of pupils in this small year group have significant additional needs or challenging personal circumstances. These challenges, combined with a decline in the quality of teaching until 2016, has meant that they have not made good progress through the school.
- Pupils' progress in writing is inconsistent between year groups and boys' writing is weaker than that of girls. Some interesting topics stimulate pupils' ideas when writing. In Year 4, for example, pupils' understanding of changing materials in science was enhanced through writing about how chocolate is made as part of studying Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. However, not all teachers provide pupils, particularly boys, with clear enough expectations regarding their use of spelling, grammar and punctuation when writing.

- Around three quarters of children arrive at school with skills lower than those found typically, especially in language and communication skills. Historically, children with low starting points have not been able to accelerate their learning during the early years to reach the standards expected for their age. This is changing for current children in Reception and pupils in Year 1.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well cared for and gain in confidence as a result. However, not all make good progress academically because the quality of academic guidance and support they receive varies across the school. At times not enough is expected of them.
- Last year the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making rapid progress was higher than for other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. School leaders make innovative use of the pupil premium funding. For example, the school has sought to broaden the horizons and raise the awareness of disadvantaged pupils. Participation in activities such as performances of 'Toad of Toad Hall' in the local theatre reflect leaders' commitment this aspect of their work. However, this same level of challenge is not routinely evident in day-to-day lessons.
- In mathematics, pupils become well versed in their knowledge of number and calculation but lack the deeper knowledge necessary to meet the new and increased demands of the national curriculum. This is because they are not required to reason and solve more complex problems during mathematics lessons. The most able pupils are not presented new challenges quickly enough.
- The good foundation pupils received during the early years is built upon substantially during Year 1. Here, the foundations for potentially higher achievement later in the school are being embedded. Programmes to overcome social and emotional barriers to learning during the early years and Year 1 are also successful. As a result, pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics check was average in 2017. In reading, writing and mathematics it is average and improving quickly.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The proportion of children who reached the expected standard by the end of Reception, including those who are disadvantaged or supported by additional funding, has been below the national average for two years. However, the progress of children currently on roll is showing that more children should reach the expected standards this year.
- A 'root and branch' overhaul of all areas of the early years by leaders and governors has been necessary and is now enabling children in Nursery and Reception to flourish. Improvements to the curriculum, the physical environment, the organisation of teaching, and the use of adults all contribute well to this area of the school's work. Leaders and managers are aware that there is more work needed to ensure that these recent improvements are sustained.
- Leaders ensure that children get off to a smooth start through effective liaison with many outside agencies. Close working and sharing of information using consistent policies and procedures means that the transition process for children who move into Reception and onto Year 1 is seamless.

- The teaching of reading and writing is effective. Children grow in confidence and keenly tackle irregular unfamiliar words using their knowledge of phonics. Adults take great care to model correct letter formation when using whiteboards or presentation devices during whole-class teaching sessions. Children then emulate the adults' high standards. Adults check children's pencil grip and accuracy when handwriting. Inside, adults weave in aspects of grammar and punctuation thoughtfully to ensure children not only receive a good grounding in their understanding of phonics but also the basic literacy skills needed to write well.
- Staff are careful and thorough in safeguarding children. They work closely with parents to make sure that children's personal and emotional needs are developed just as effectively as their academic learning. Children's attitudes when tackling new activities and learning are impressive.
- Staff develop supportive relationships with and between children. As a result, children enjoy the chances they get to learn with and from each other. This underpins their improving progress during the early years, especially in developing their communication, language and literacy skills from starting points below those typically found. Activities planned to promote these aspects through topics such as 'Dinosaurs' are engaging boys in particular and proving successful and improving outcomes quickly.
- Children also make gains in developing their self-confidence and readiness to learn. Children enjoy their learning and behave and play well together. This is because they are equally included in a wide range of indoor and outdoor learning experiences.
- Provision in the outdoor Nursery area does not promote children's literacy and numeracy development as well as other areas of the curriculum. Leaders are aware of this aspect and have effective plans in place.
- Adults ensure that children are able to make their own choices and support their learning by watching and listening carefully to each child during activities. If necessary, staff adapt an activity, prompt a further challenge or move on to a different activity to restore or maintain children's interest.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use the information they have about children to adapt plans and promote the next steps in learning. For example, staff noticed that boys' outcomes in physical development were lower than other areas of learning and developed activities to promote this area of learning. Occasionally children's responses to adult questioning are not used to move their learning on or check their deeper understanding.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 141523 |
| Local authority | Devon |
| Inspection number | 10035667 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 177 |
| Appropriate authority | Academy trust |
| Chair | Brian Impey |
| Head of School | Ross Minton |
| Telephone number | 01297 33005 |
| Website | www.acornacademy.org |
| Email address | axminsteroffice@acornacademy.org |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Axminster Primary Academy is an averaged-sized primary school and is part of Acorn Academy Trust. The work of the trust is overseen by a board of directors. Some responsibilities are delegated to the local governing body. The trust is responsible for six primary schools.
- The school joined the trust and became an academy on 1 November 2014. When its predecessor school, Axminster Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good overall.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish. This includes not identifying barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils, including details of how the PE and sports premium will affect

pupils' PE and sport participation. It also includes not publishing an accessibility plan, required as part of the Equality Act 2010.

- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A much higher proportion of pupils than is typically found arrive or leave the school other than at the normal times.
- The proportion of pupils who received the pupil premium funding is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- Children in the early years are taught in separate Nursery and Reception classes.
- The school did not meet the current government floor standards for 2016, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Pupils' learning was observed across all classes jointly with the head of school. A series of short visits to classes was undertaken to observe the teaching of phonics, mathematics and writing across the school. Inspectors looked in depth at a range of work in pupils' books. In addition, inspectors listened to some children reading.
- Inspectors held discussions with the head of school, other senior leaders and three members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. Inspectors met with a representative from the Acorn Academy Trust. Inspectors met with two groups of pupils and spoke informally with many pupils during lessons and around the school.
- The views of 19 parents expressed through the online questionnaire, Parent View, were analysed. Discussions were held with a number of parents when they brought their children into school.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including information on pupils' attainment and progress, the school's improvement plans and minutes of governing body meetings. The school's records of the monitoring of teaching and information on the management of teachers' performance were analysed. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils, including records relating to the behaviour and exclusions of pupils, were examined.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Richard Light, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Martin Bragg | Ofsted Inspector |
| Liz Wilson-Chalon | Ofsted Inspector |

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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