

# Molehill Primary Academy

Hereford Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 7ND

## Inspection dates

30–31 January 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</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 good school

- Leaders have worked with unrelenting determination and clear focus to drive up achievement and create a can-do culture across the school. This has united staff and inspired pupils so that the school continues to go from strength to strength.
- Governance is strong. The differing bodies within the trust structure work cohesively, but with clearly separate focus areas. This ensures that governance has strength and depth and supports school improvement effectively.
- The recently reviewed curriculum is well used to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders acknowledge that subject leaders need to ensure further refinements to extend pupils' scientific and technical writing and mathematical skills.
- Teachers plan lessons that engage pupils, and which are mostly well matched to their needs. They work effectively with teaching assistants to ensure that those pupils who need extra support make good progress and are fully included.
- On the few occasions that lessons are not well matched to need it is often because teaching does not fully challenge pupils. This means that in some year groups not enough pupils are reaching the higher standards across the curriculum.
- Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points. Attainment levels are rising, with a growing number of pupils working at age-related expectations across the school in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their starting points. The pupil premium grant is used carefully and appropriately to ensure that their needs are fully met, both across the broader curriculum, and in extra-curricular provision.
- Attendance is rising for all pupils. It is carefully monitored to support pupils and their families in understanding the importance of regular school attendance.
- Pupils behave well. In lessons and around the school they are both engaged and engaging. They interact happily with each other and with the wide range of adults who care for them. A strong sense of community unites the school in working towards the school vision – 'fostering a lifelong love of learning'.
- Children enter Reception Year with skills often below those typical for their age, particularly in communication skills. They make good progress from these starting points so that increasing numbers of children reach a good level of development by the end of the year. In this way they are well prepared for Year 1.

## Full report

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

- Raise attainment so that the proportions of pupils attaining age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics are at least in line with those seen nationally at the end of key stages 1 and 2.
- Build on raised expectations so that more pupils attain higher levels across the curriculum, by:
  - securing consistently aspirational teaching across the school
  - ensuring that subject leaders further develop their subject areas to extend pupils' subject-specific skills in writing and mathematics.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The principal and those supporting her in the trust are driven by a passionate commitment to improving all aspects of provision for the pupils. This determined drive for improvement has been supported effectively by detailed and tightly focused plans. This has ensured that the right actions have been completed in the right order to build a school in which the development of the whole child is at the core of all improvements.
- This commitment, along with effective support and well-focused professional development has united the staff team behind the school's leaders. All staff members who spoke to inspectors or completed the staff survey said they were proud to be part of the school. Parents and carers, too, are mostly positive about the changes which have taken place. Comments such as, 'We are very happy with the school... it has got a lot better this year... it has a lot to offer' are typical of those received by inspectors.
- Senior leaders know the school well. They analyse a wide range of information meticulously and review progress carefully. This information is used to provide the right mix of support and challenge for teachers. As a result, teaching is mostly good and improving and pupils are making increasingly good progress.
- The special educational needs coordinator ensures that planning and provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. A wide range of needs are supported well. Hearing-impaired pupils are fully integrated into the life of the school and therefore benefit from the same opportunities as their classmates.
- The additional funding received by the school as the sports premium and the pupil premium grant is carefully spent and used effectively in supporting the needs of pupils.
- There is a rich seam of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education running through the school. Pupils enjoy regular opportunities, for example, for shared sports days to learn alongside other local pupils. Community links are strengthened through activities such as the harvest art display at the church. International days and the Malawi project help to develop pupils' wider cultural understanding.
- The curriculum has been reviewed to ensure that it is exciting and engaging for pupils. Topics such as superheroes and the Winter Olympics start from what the pupils know, develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding, and culminate in sharing and celebration with parents. Artwork around the school is plentiful and of high quality. Physical education sessions are taught by a highly skilled specialist coach working alongside teachers.
- Subject leaders' action plans help them to develop their subjects, but some have not yet had the opportunity to implement some of these actions or to evaluate their impact. This is because much of the curriculum is new. Leaders acknowledge that in some aspects, such as scientific evaluations, writing is not supporting pupils' attainment at higher levels. There are few opportunities to develop meaningful mathematical investigation.

## Governance of the school

- Governance is strong and effective. Governors have a good understanding both of the school and the community it serves. They encapsulate this when they say, 'right at the bottom of it each leader can talk about each child as well as driving up achievement'. Governors are highly skilled in a range of relevant areas. This means that they can provide leaders with the support and challenge needed to drive the school forward.
- The academy board discharges its delegated responsibilities diligently. It keeps a careful check on finances and matters regarding health and safety. The directors are aware of the need to build a 'culture of improvement' across the school. The board keeps this in mind when evaluating leadership, analysing performance information and looking at attendance information. In this way it is able to help ensure that improvements are wide ranging, appropriate and sustainable.
- The academy development group monitors the delivery of the academy performance agreement meticulously. Its members have a good understanding of school performance information. This supports detailed questioning of school leaders in relation to the performance of groups of pupils across the school. Members have visited the school to help them to see this in action but acknowledge the need to develop a more systematic approach to this process.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff who completed the Ofsted survey, and 96% of parents who completed the school's own parent survey, felt that pupils were safe at school. Systems to keep pupils safe are robust and well managed. All required training is up to date, and staff are aware of required processes and relevant documentation.
- There is a culture of vigilance across the school. Staff build on the trusting relationships they have with pupils to create increasingly strong relationships with their families. This means that when help and support is needed from time to time it can be provided quickly. In this way needs are met, and pupils are helped to stay safe. Where necessary, wider support networks are created and appropriate referrals made.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. This helps them to plan lessons which support the development of appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum. They plan engaging lessons. Pupils told inspectors, 'they make something boring into something really fun'.
- Leaders' expectations of the grammatical aspects of writing are high. Pupils generally present their work carefully. Work in pupils' books shows increasing writing stamina, rich vocabulary choices and well-developed punctuation. These expectations are evident across the curriculum. However, opportunities to extend higher-level writing skills using technical and scientific language are not yet fully developed.
- Phonics is taught effectively. This supports pupils in both their reading and their spelling. In an effective phonics session in Year 1 pupils explored the different sounds

'c' can make when paired with the letters 'y', 'i' and 'e' – in 'rice', for example. The teacher skilfully helped pupils to identify a range of sounds and then to have a go at developing spelling patterns

- Pupils are generally competent and fluent readers. They enjoy reading demanding texts and are developing good basic comprehension skills. Fostering a love of reading and supporting the development of higher-order reading skills is rightly a current school development focus.
- Pupils are developing their investigative skills in science and mathematics well. Most pupils have a secure and age-appropriate understanding of basic mathematical operations, although in some aspects of mathematics, such as fractions, pupils' understanding is not so well developed.
- The wider curriculum is rich and engaging. Pupils, including those with impaired hearing, enjoy and participate in regular art, music and physical education. Meaningful curriculum links are well used to support learning. For example, in an effective Year 3 music lesson pupils used poetry segments about the differing stages of a river as a stimulus for musical composition.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled. They use questioning well to support and extend learning, particularly for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or who need extra support.
- The most able pupils do not have their needs met as effectively. Questioning does not systematically stretch and extend them. Work does not consistently contain enough challenge to support them attaining at higher levels across the curriculum.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Alongside high academic expectations, pupils are provided with a wealth of opportunities to expand their horizons. For example, by participating in the Young Voices choir event in London or taking part in 'jobs' at Kidzania. In this way, pupils are well prepared both for the next stage of their education and the wider world.
- During the inspection Year 6 pupils were taking part in drugs-awareness workshops along with pupils from other local schools. Events such as these, along with regular curriculum sessions on aspects of safety, such as e-safety, support pupils in keeping themselves safe.
- Healthy eating is encouraged by the popular breakfast club. Healthy lifestyles are further developed by the well-attended before-school aerobics sessions in which pupils participate with enthusiasm and a degree of creative interpretation!
- Pupils told inspectors that teamwork is an important part of their learning, such as building a wall that had to be strong. They enjoy these regular opportunities to work together saying, 'It's my favourite part of the lesson.'
- Most pupils attend school regularly. Attendance has risen overall and is in line with that seen nationally. Effective support from the welfare team has resulted in rising

attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Appropriate support, both from within school and from other agencies, is in place for the few remaining families for whom regular school attendance is a challenge.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Most pupils are attentive and apply themselves well in lessons. On the very few occasions when this is not the case it is mostly linked to teaching which is less effective.
- The school is a calm, well-ordered environment. Pupils move around the school safely. Playtimes are exuberant but well supervised. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and have good friends. They are confident that if they have any problems they could tell an adult, but say this is rarely needed.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- In the 2017 end-of-key-stage-2 national assessments most Year 6 pupils made good or better progress from their starting points in writing and mathematics. Progress in reading was slightly below that seen typically. Currently, pupils across the school are mostly making good and improving progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is good from their starting points across the curriculum. Their progress is improving towards that of non-disadvantaged pupils. In Year 6 this gap has closed so that both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils are making equally strong progress across the curriculum.
- In the 2017 end-of-key-stage assessments, proportions of pupils attaining expected and higher levels were below those seen nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. As progress rates improve, so current pupils are catching up, and current attainment levels in most year groups are more in line with age-related expectations. Although more pupils are attaining levels in line with higher standards, leaders acknowledge that this is not a consistent picture across the school.
- Many children start school with lower than typical levels of communication. While they acquire the necessary phonic skills to reach the levels necessary to pass the phonics screening check it can take them a little longer to do so. In 2017, fewer pupils attained the standard in Year 1 than seen nationally. However, by Year 2 almost all pupils had attained the standard, higher proportions than seen nationally.
- Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points in acquiring phonics skills.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- Children start the Reception Year with skills that are often well below those typical for their age. This is particularly the case in communication and physical skills, and in reading, writing and mathematics. They make good progress from their starting points

so that an increasing number of children are reaching a good level of development. Despite this, fewer children reached this level in 2017 than seen nationally.

- There are a wealth of opportunities to play and explore in the well-resourced learning environments both inside and out. Children enjoy investigating and learning together. For example, during the inspection a group of children enjoyed hammering shapes into a board to 'make a monster'. They described what they were doing and explored how the shapes moved in relation to each other. In this way a range of skills were effectively developed.
- Disadvantaged children and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are well supported. Additional funding has been carefully spent to support their areas of need through specialist speech support and investment in play equipment to develop physical and control skills. Because of this they are making good progress from their starting points.
- Children's reading skills are developed well both through the systematic teaching of phonics and by regular reading sessions to apply this knowledge. For example, during a shared reading session a child spotted the sound which had been taught earlier in the shared text. Another child reading independently linked the capital 'D' letter from the book title to names of classmates.
- Children are kind to each other and generally get along well when playing. They are supported effectively by the adult team which models warm relationships and helps develop children's language and social skills effectively.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors felt their children had settled quickly into school. They said that the effective transition arrangements and information provided by the school had helped in this process. They have access to information to help them support their children's learning at home.
- The early years leader has benefited from support in her role from within the trust. She ensures that children's needs are met and has an accurate picture of both the strengths and needs of the provision.

## School details

Unique reference number	138195
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10040925

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	285
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Robert Findlay
Executive Principal Principal	Deborah Biggenden Gemma Brierley
Telephone number	01622 751729
Website	<a href="http://www.molehillprimaryacademy.org.uk">www.molehillprimaryacademy.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:contactus@molehillprimaryacademy.org.uk">contactus@molehillprimaryacademy.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	9–10 December 2015

## Information about this school

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Until the end of February 2015, the academy was sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust. From the beginning of March, it became a member of Leigh Academies Trust.
- The academy is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The academy includes a specialist unit for pupils with hearing impairment. There are currently three pupils on the roll and they are integrated into mainstream classes for almost all of their time.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is well above average.



- The academy provides a daily breakfast club.
- The principal receives additional professional support from an executive principal through the trust.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with trust representatives, the academy board, the academy development group, staff, and leaders. They reviewed a range of documentation including development plans, records of adviser visits, minutes of meetings and progress information. Inspectors observed pupils around the school and in their classes. In the classes they observed teaching, looked at books, and spoke to pupils about their work. The inspectors met with pupils to get their views of the school and heard pupils read. They took account of parents' views at the school gate and considered nine responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 free-text responses. They also considered the school's own parental survey information and 18 responses to the staff survey.

## Inspection team

Deborah Gordon, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Wibroe	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Fisher-Pink	Ofsted Inspector

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