

Ardley Hill Academy

Lowther Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 3NZ

Inspection dates

24–25 April 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Standards at the end of key stage 2 have been below the national average for mathematics and reading since the school's conversion from a lower school to a full primary school in 2015.
- Leaders and governors do not use assessment information coherently and robustly to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses at key stage 2. Consequently, some pupils, particularly in Year 6, do not make enough progress in reading and mathematics.
- Leaders and governors do not have high enough expectations and aspirations for pupils' success at the end of Year 6. Consequently, teachers do not set work that sufficiently challenges some pupils in Years 5 and 6.
- Governors do not offer stringent challenge to school leaders. Governors do not effectively hold the school to account for the performance of pupils at the end of key stage 2.
- The progress of the most able pupils at key stage 2 is not rapid enough.
- Teachers' use of assessment information in Year 6 is not robust enough to accelerate the progress of pupils so that they achieve at least in line with other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make accelerated progress in writing and mathematics to ensure that they attain at least in line with other pupils nationally by the end of Year 6.
- Attendance is improving slowly but remains below the national average. Some parents, carers and pupils do not understand the link between attendance and achievement at school.

The school has the following strengths

- Standards at the end of key stage 1 in reading and writing have been at or above the national average over time.
- The early years provision is well structured, ensuring that children make good progress.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good overall and strong in key stage 1 and lower key 2; thus, pupils make good progress.
- Pupils behave very well both in the classroom and around the school. They enjoy learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the effectiveness and impact of leaders, by:
 - ensuring that systematic evaluation and reviews of pupil assessment information are used to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses so that those pupils who need it receive targeted support at upper key stage 2 in Years 5 and 6
 - ensuring that high expectations and aspirations for the success of pupils in Years 5 and 6 are effectively shared with all members of staff
 - monitoring more closely the level of challenge embedded in teaching and learning at upper key stage 2 so that a higher proportion of pupils achieve at least in line with pupils nationally
 - ensuring that governors provide a robust level of challenge to school leaders
 - ensuring that assessment information for disadvantaged pupils is more robustly evaluated so that they make rapid progress.
- Improve standards in Year and 6, by:
 - ensuring that pupils' assessment information is used accurately and effectively to inform teaching and learning so that a higher proportion of pupils achieve at least in line with pupils nationally by the end of Year 6.
 - embedding greater challenge in the teaching and learning of mathematics and reading at upper key stage 2 for all pupils, including the most able pupils.
- Improve pupils' attendance by making clear the links between success at school and attendance to pupils, parents and carers.
- Arrange for an external review of governance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the school became an all-through primary school in 2015, leaders have driven improvements in the quality of education provided for pupils. However, the strategic focus on improving standards has not been as robust or rapid at upper key stage 2. As a consequence, pupils do not achieve as well as other pupils nationally in mathematics and reading at the end of Year 6.
- Leaders do not systematically review and evaluate assessment information about pupils so that precise and targeted adaptations can be made to the curriculum and teaching and learning at upper key stage 2. Some pupils, therefore, are not routinely challenged to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding at upper key stage 2.
- Leaders, including governors, do not have high enough expectations and aspirations for the success of pupils at upper key stage 2. As a result, targets for their learning are set too low and some pupils do not develop more advanced skills and understanding in mathematics and reading.
- Leaders have made improvements to the ways in which they monitor, review and evaluate the use of the pupil premium funding. Through a range of additional social, emotional and academic support, pupils make progress. However, the impact of support is not evaluated stringently to support some disadvantaged pupils' accelerated progress.
- Leadership of subjects across the curriculum is embedded well. Leaders have strong subject knowledge and are facilitated by senior leaders to monitor the delivery of their respective subjects well. Leaders' action plans for their subjects link to the school's overall action plan and embed the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, most pupils engage well with many subjects in the wider curriculum and make good progress.
- The curriculum provides pupils with ample opportunities to develop subject knowledge alongside the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. For example, pupils in Year 4 considered the language and sentence structures they needed to write a report about the Egyptians. In Year 5, pupils debated their perceptions about life in ancient Athens and ancient Sparta.
- The school makes effective use of additional sports premium funding for physical education (PE). There is an enhanced focus on healthy living and pupils engage in a breadth of sports and exercise. External PE coaches provide specialist teaching, enabling pupils to make good progress and to develop the skills of teachers.
- Pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well through the curriculum. Pupils study the ways in which global issues impact on the world they live in. For example, Year 5 pupils made explicit links between the government system and the experiences of women in ancient Athens, ancient Sparta and the contemporary United Kingdom. Through the curriculum, pupils have many opportunities to develop into kind and considerate 21st-century British citizens.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. Pupils receive bespoke, tailored support where required and this

is reviewed regularly to ensure that pupils make good progress academically, socially and emotionally.

- The school has an additional provision for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. Pupils of differing abilities and needs make good progress, despite many having very low starting points. The focus promotes inclusion wherever possible, and many pupils join the mainstream curriculum and interact with all pupils in the school.
- Support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) is very effective. They follow a carefully structured programme in collaboration with Central Bedfordshire local authority. NQTs receive tailored support from mentors and other members of staff in the school to effectively support their development.
- Parents are very positive about the school. They recognise that the school has experienced change and turbulence since the conversion of the school to a full primary school and they identify the improvements that have been made.

Governance of the school

- Although the structure of the governing body has facilitated greater clarity about roles, processes and the focus for improvement, it does not provide sufficient challenge to the school.
- Governors do not ask sufficiently challenging questions about the rate of improvement, especially in key stage 2. They have improved the frequency and focus for school visits. For example, a governor recently completed a visit to see how well the most able pupils were supported. However, this information is not yet sufficiently evaluated to enable them to ask searching and demanding questions about the rate of progress for upper key stage 2 pupils.
- Governors do not challenge the school regarding the lack of expectation and aspiration for pupils at the end of Year 6.
- Governors do not evaluate the impact of pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that pupils make rapid progress to diminish the difference between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally in mathematics and writing at the end of Year 6.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding leaders are tenacious in ensuring that pupils are safe both at school and at home. They work well with external agencies to ensure pupils' safety and emotional well-being.
- Leaders draw upon information relating to pupils' safety from a wide range of sources well. They use the information to develop an understanding of risk factors and act swiftly and appropriately when required. The safeguarding lead works very well with the school's welfare officer in collating and evaluating information and referrals.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training alongside appropriate updates. Consequently, all staff and governors have a strong understanding of the signs that show a child may be at risk.

- Pupils told inspectors that they felt safe and protected by the staff at the school. Parents who spoke to inspectors and responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, also agreed that their children were safe and well cared for at the school.
- The school's single central register of checks on adults working with children meets statutory requirements and is checked regularly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Relationships between pupils and staff are very strong. Pupils respond well to the ways in which teachers and teaching assistants explain concepts and approaches. For example, an inspector observed pupils engage very well with the teacher's explanation of the concept of a city state in a Year 5 history lesson. Pupils discussed with vigour and understanding the concept of democracy and elections.
- Throughout the year groups and key stages, pupils use talk constructively to support each other's learning. For example, an inspector observed pupils in a Year 3 class explain how to divide fractions very effectively.
- Pupils have opportunities to write for a range of purposes, audiences and text types in all year groups. They apply their understanding of grammar to improve their writing. Teachers make explicit links to grammar and punctuation in writing lessons. As a consequence, pupils make considered language choices when writing. Pupils also edit their work with care, reflecting on their language choices. Pupils in a Year 2 class were enthused about writing a diary entry for a pirate and considered the formality of language required.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school. Pupils apply their phonics knowledge well to access higher-level reading books and the curriculum. Inspectors listened to a range of children read with fluency and accuracy.
- At key stage 1, pupils develop effective mathematics, reading and writing skills. Teachers plan lessons effectively, ensuring that prior learning is drawn upon to build effective understanding. As a result, pupils achieve well at the end of key stage 1.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning effectively to develop pupils' understanding well. Teaching assistants provide effective support to enable pupils to make progress by explaining the focus of activities clearly and asking questions to help pupils think more deeply.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive effective support both on a one-to-one basis and in small groups. Through bespoke support, they are able to access the curriculum effectively and subsequently make good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils receive support where required and make good progress across the curriculum. Inspection evidence in their books and lesson observations demonstrated that they are able to access the curriculum effectively and are making improved progress. However, teachers do not consistently address the gaps in learning that some disadvantaged pupils have to support their accelerated progress at key stage 2.
- Pupils respond with enthusiasm to specialist teaching. For example, pupils learn French with a Belgian national speaker. Year 3 pupils imitated with concentration and care the

pronunciation of words for the body, alongside developing their understanding of the difference between masculine and feminine articles. Similarly, inspectors observed Year 2 pupils very focused on developing their hand-to-eye coordination skills using bats and balls in the hall.

- Some teachers in Year 6 do not consider pupils' starting points effectively to plan challenging lessons that extend pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in mathematics and reading. As a result, some pupils do not make as much progress and do not attain as well as they should by the end of Year 6. Recent interventions such as individualised support for reading is having an impact. An inspector observed Year 6 pupils make rapid progress in their understanding of how writers use language to convey specific meanings. However, it is too early to judge the impact over time.

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 polite, respectful, kind and welcoming. They are a credit to the ways in which the school has nurtured and supported their social and emotional development.
- Pupils are well cared for and the range of clubs and nurture facilities supports pupils' well-being and ability to interact positively with each other. Pupils told inspectors that they felt protected by staff members and that they could talk to someone in school if they had a problem. One pupil told inspectors that Ardley Hill was 'the best school [he had] been to as the staff support you so well'.
- The school is highly inclusive. Pupils take on the roles of club leads and are empowered to set up their own clubs. They are encouraged to engage with teachers and leaders through writing formal letters and meetings. For example, pupils write letters justifying why a club such as a 'kiddies' cookery club should be set up, the benefits to other pupils and how they will organise it.
- Pupils' views are taken into account and listened to. The headteacher convenes groups of pupils to discuss how effective teaching and learning is in the school. Pupils told inspectors that they felt that their voices were important and were acted upon. For example, leaders have very recently changed the marking policy in the school in response to pupils' views.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum. Pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep safe when on the internet. Pupils can define bullying and told inspectors that it is a rare occurrence at the school and that staff act swiftly to resolve issues.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well both within the classroom and around the school building. Pupils move around at breaktimes without incident. They are kind and courteous to each other. Pupils told inspectors that the school was a 'friendly' school. As a result,

there is a harmonious learning environment.

- The high incidence of fixed-period exclusions has declined. The use of a range of approaches to develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence, alongside additional teaching assistants, have helped to reduce the number of behavioural incidents.
- Pupils' attendance has improved slightly but it is still not in line with national figures. This is because some pupils do not understand the link between achievement and attendance at school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Although pupils' progress and attainment at the end of Year 6 have improved since 2016, the rate of improvement has not been rapid enough. As a result, over time, pupils at the end of Year 6 achieve below the national average for reading and mathematics. Pupils are therefore not prepared well enough for the next stage in their education.
- Disadvantaged pupils at key stage 2 currently make good progress in most areas of the curriculum. However, the rate of progress is not rapid enough to enable them to attain in line with other pupils nationally in writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils at key stage 1 make good progress in line with other pupils nationally in reading and writing. They are currently making good progress in mathematics.
- Key stage 1 pupils make good progress from their different starting points in reading and writing. Additionally, the proportion of pupils who attained 'greater depth' was above the national average in reading and writing in 2017.
- Key stage 1 pupils have not made as much progress in mathematics historically but inspection evidence such as work in books, lessons observations and current assessment information demonstrates that they are currently making strong progress.
- In the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard was similar to the national average. Currently, Year 1 pupils are on track to exceed national expectations. Strong, coherent guidance from the phonics lead has ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of phonics has improved markedly since 2015. Pupils are able to access the key stage 1 curriculum with increased ease and confidence.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. Assessment information is evaluated effectively and frequently to ensure that pupils receive bespoke and tailored support dependent on their respective needs. One-to-one learning support assistants are very effective in using questioning to support pupils' access to the curriculum successfully and in helping them to make strong progress.
- Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects across the key stages and year groups. For example, inspection evidence demonstrates that most pupils make strong progress in history at both key stages.

Early years provision

Good

- Highly effective leadership of early years has transformed the provision. Children make good progress from average starting points resulting in an increasingly high proportion of children making a good level of development.
- The early years leaders use assessment information effectively to identify gaps in children's understanding and to adapt the curriculum accordingly. For example, children's writing development was identified as requiring additional support so writing activities were structured more explicitly.
- The indoor and outdoor environments have been transformed. Activities are carefully designed to engage, enthuse and challenge children's thinking and language skills. Children maintain their attention well and move between activities with care and consideration.
- The early years provision has embedded clear and fluid transition points from the two-year-old provision to Reception. As a result, children make good progress as teaching, learning and assessment of children is built upon sequentially as they move through early years.
- Children develop strong phonics, writing and mathematics skills in early years which ensures that they are well prepared for learning in Year 1. Children experience the transition from Reception to Year 1 in a very supported way through visits and access to the Year 1 curriculum.
- Children develop their language skills well through high level interaction with adults and through immersion in imaginative play. Children develop an understanding of the ways in which different forms of language are used with different people and in different settings.
- Although the numbers of disadvantaged children are small, they are well supported and consequently, make good progress.

School details

Unique reference number	138209
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10046561

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

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	510
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Vicky Deller
Headteacher	Jonathan Smith
Telephone number	01582 667955
Website	www.ardleyhill.org.uk
Email address	jsmith@ardleyhill.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 March 2016

Information about this school

- The school is larger than most primary schools.
- The school converted to academy status in 2015. The school converted to full primary status in 2015.
- The school operates a pre-school for two-year-olds five days a week.
- The school operates a unit for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- Most pupils are of white British heritage, with small numbers of pupils from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.

- The proportion of pupils in receipt of education, health and care plans is above the national average.
- In 2017, the school met the government's published floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment.

Information about this inspection

- This was the school's first section 5 inspection as a new academy.
- Inspectors observed a range of lessons, many jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also made short visits to lessons and looked at pupils' books.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils from various year groups. Discussions with school staff, including senior leaders, middle leaders and five governors, were held.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documents including the school's self-evaluation, information on pupils' outcomes and records relating to monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment, and behaviour and safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 85 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, alongside 62 text responses and 15 staff responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Susan Aykin, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jane Dooley	Ofsted Inspector
Henry Weir	Ofsted Inspector

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