

# Palace Fields Primary School

Badger Close, Palace Fields, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2QW

## Inspection dates

2–3 April 2019

<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	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The principal, governors and trustees have ensured that the school provides pupils with a good standard of education.
- The focused and effective leadership of the principal and the new senior leadership team has led to mammoth improvements across the school.
- The inspirational new leader of early years has brought about significant improvements to this provision. The early years staff team ensure children are well prepared for Year 1. However, there are fewer opportunities for learning outdoors than there are in the classrooms.
- Phonics is taught well. Younger pupils read, pronounce sounds, and write the letters that these sounds represent, with confidence.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are respectful towards each other. They have positive attitudes to learning and say that they feel safe.
- Leaders have implemented effective strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent absences. The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school.
- Relatively recent improvements have been made to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics, resulting in pupils' rapid progress. However, these are not fully embedded.
- The quality of teaching has improved. It is now good. Gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are being identified and activities planned to close these.
- Pupils attending the resourced provision and those across the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress in a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders have implemented a new curriculum. This is raising standards across a range of subjects. Music and performing arts are strengths of the school.
- Subjects in the wider curriculum such as geography and history are brought to life through trips and visits beyond the local community. However, the most able pupils do not routinely tackle work in these subjects with the level of challenge necessary to gain deeper understanding.
- The vast majority of parents and carers speak positively about the raft of improvements made by the principal and leadership team. They told inspectors that 'a genuine feeling of positive change has been injected into the school'.

## Full report

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

- Improve pupils' outcomes, especially in key stage 2, by:
  - embedding the new approaches to teaching English and mathematics to maintain and build on recent rapid progress
  - ensuring that the most able pupils routinely tackle work with a level of challenge that enables them to hone skills and deepen knowledge in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Improve the provision in early years by providing children with more opportunities to learn through structured outdoor activities.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The principal and vice-principal are ambitious for the school and its community. Staff and governors share this ambition, as do pupils. Older pupils told inspectors they know that learning is at the heart of helping them to secure a good job in the future.
- The new senior leadership team has brought about significant improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Parents see the evidence of this in their children's books. Leaders have introduced new whole-school approaches to the teaching of English and mathematics. They provide high-quality training and support for teachers and teaching assistants. For example, the approach teachers use to develop pupils' writing has had a significant impact on the quality of writing both in English and across the wider curriculum. Leaders are focused on consolidating recent changes.
- Senior and middle leaders check the effectiveness of teaching and learning through thorough systems that are in place across the school. Leaders carefully measure how well pupils are progressing in their learning. Where areas to improve are identified, leaders ensure that well-planned training and support are put in place.
- Arrangements for performance management are effective. Leaders and governors challenge underperformance and have addressed weaker teaching. The vice-principal is a positive role model for all teachers, particularly those at an early stage of their careers, supporting them to extend their skills and to improve their practice.
- Leaders ensure that the pupil premium funding is now used well to benefit disadvantaged pupils. There are specific interventions to support learning and to enable this group of pupils to participate in a broad range of experiences, such as a programme to develop pupils' social and emotional resilience. This breadth of support is helping this group of pupils to catch up with their learning.
- Leadership of SEND is good. Pupils in the resourced provision and pupils with SEND across the school make good progress. Leaders work alongside several partner agencies and ensure that pupils receive the support they need.
- Leaders use the specialist funding for physical education (PE) and sports to build pupils' confidence and teamwork. For example, there are coaching sessions from sports specialists who work with pupils and develop the skills of staff. During the inspection, boys and girls were excited to be developing their techniques in football and staff were also clearly developing their own teaching skills.
- Leaders have planned and embedded a broad curriculum which includes religious education and personal, social and health education. Visits and visitors bring learning about other cultures, tolerance and British values to life. Teachers ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is integrated into the curriculum.
- As a result of leaders' actions, pupils' progress is improving strongly across different subjects. Pupils have more opportunities to practise their reading and writing skills through a range of different topics which they clearly find engaging. Opportunities to develop mathematical skills in science are evident. However, in topic work, the most

able are not always challenged enough to deepen their learning across subjects beyond English and mathematics.

- The vast majority of parents recognise the positive changes brought about by the principal, staff team and governors and are very appreciative of the difference this makes to their children and the community. A small minority do not like the recent changes. There are opportunities for parents to share their opinions, such as the parent forum, and a complaints procedure is available on the school website.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and the areas to develop further. They have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the principal in making several whole-school changes, including restructuring the senior and middle leadership teams, to bring about marked improvements.
- Governors have supported the appointments of several new leaders and teachers who have effectively brought about improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well. They have ensured that safeguarding is effective and systems to keep pupils safe are strong.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All statutory checks are in place to ensure the suitability of adults working in school. Appropriate checks are made on visitors when they arrive at the school.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' safety is a priority and staff are vigilant. Leaders make sure staff receive appropriate training to identify any signs of possible danger or potential abuse. Leaders have created a safe and caring culture in which pupils feel confident they have someone to talk with if they are worried. Pupils spoken with during the inspection said they feel safe in school.
- The procedures for reporting any incidents or concerns are clear and understood by staff, including those not directly employed by the school. Leaders effectively engage with parents and external agencies to ensure that all pupils are supported and safe.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teaching in the past did not ensure that pupils made good progress. This is no longer the case. However, some pupils are still living with the legacy of weak teaching. There are gaps in their learning to fill to ensure that they can make the progress that they should by the end of key stage 2.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge contributes well to pupils' learning. Teachers use information on pupils' progress to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and to plan activities accordingly. As a result, pupils are stimulated to learn new things and pupils' learning is sequential.

- Phonics teaching has improved. Teachers use a range of strategies that maintain pupils' interest. Staff receive comprehensive training so that they all have a strong understanding of how the system for developing pupils' phonic knowledge works. Adults' pronunciation is clear and concise. Consequently, pupils make sounds accurately themselves. Pupils who read to the inspectors used their phonic knowledge well to work out unfamiliar words.
- Leaders have raised the profile of reading across the school. Pupils are encouraged to review and share the books that they have read. Teachers carefully choose books to read in class that are of high quality and stimulate the interests of girls and boys alike. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are taught well in English lessons and these are reinforced across a range of other subjects.
- Staff training in the school's new approach to the teaching of writing is working well. Pupils are enthusiastic writers. The quality of work that they produce has improved significantly during the last academic year. Pupils practise their writing skills across topics such as the Anglo-Saxons and Ancient Egypt and improvements in pupils' handwriting skills are evident.
- In mathematics, pupils have a good understanding of number and their written calculations are accurate. Teachers develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. Teachers quickly address misconceptions and make sure that pupils are secure in their knowledge. As a result of improvements in teaching mathematics, pupils' attainment is rising.
- Across the wider curriculum, pupils benefit from specialist teaching in music and dance. They enjoy opportunities to perform in the Brindley Theatre in Runcorn. Teachers' planning of subjects such as history and geography ensures that there is a sequence to building pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. However, in some topics, the most able do not routinely tackle work to enable them to deepen their understanding.
- The new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) provides tailored training to develop the skills of class teachers and teaching assistants to support pupils who need additional help with their learning. In addition, external support is sought and used well to cater for those pupils who have more complex learning needs. Teachers provide specialist support for those pupils who attend the resource base and support pupils' integration into mainstream classes in the afternoons.
- Teaching assistants work well in classes, supporting individuals and small groups of pupils. They work closely with teachers and adopt a similar, positive approach in their interactions with pupils. Volunteers provide another valuable resource for those pupils who are not reading regularly enough at home.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Staff know pupils and their families very well. The emotional needs of vulnerable pupils are met well through a varied range of initiatives and opportunities. External agencies work with individuals where the needs are greatest.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe, both online and in the wider community. The pupils spoken with during the inspection are confident that staff listen to any concerns that they have and take action to help them.
- Staff teach pupils to be thoughtful and considerate to others. For instance, pupils take part in charitable fundraising events. They show respect for each other and the environment. Pupils can turn to play leaders to raise any worries that they may have.
- Pupils are given opportunities to develop their independence and resilience. For every class, teachers carefully plan visits linked to topics. Pupils spoke animatedly about visiting a museum in Liverpool and a whole-school trip to Chester Zoo. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about the challenges experienced on residential trips to outdoor education centres. These types of visits broaden pupils' horizons and bring learning to life.
- Through the curriculum, pupils develop a clear understanding of how to choose a healthy lifestyle. At lunchtime, pupils told inspectors about the importance of a balanced diet and regular exercise. Pupils talked excitedly about taking part in activities such as learning to play the guitar and various sports clubs.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Positive relationships between adults and pupils are promoted effectively. Pupils are polite, well-mannered and friendly.
- Pupils said the behaviour of other pupils is good. Incidents of bullying are rare and dealt with quickly by adults. Pupils speak confidently about how staff help them to resolve any disagreements. A small minority of pupils are supported by staff to improve their behaviour by making appropriate choices.
- Due to the actions of leaders, attendance has improved considerably and is now close to the national average. Fewer pupils are persistently absent from school. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced dramatically under the school's new leadership. Vulnerable pupils are well supported by staff who also provide families with advice and signpost them to other agencies and charities for additional support.
- Inspectors observed pupils' good behaviour in lessons. Pupils move around the school sensibly, and they play well with one another at breaktimes. As well as staff, the head boy and head girl reward pupils who demonstrate the school's new core values.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Improvements to the quality of teaching and learning, and to pupils' attitudes to learning, led to a dramatic increase in the achievement of Year 6 pupils in 2018. From progress that was well below the national average in 2017, pupils made good progress across key stage 2 in their reading, writing and mathematics in 2018. The impact of

the new whole-school approaches to teaching English and mathematics has resulted in current pupils making good progress across key stage 2.

- Due to some previously inadequate teaching and severe disruptions to staffing, there are some year groups in which pupils have gaps in their learning. This is particularly so in Years 4 and 5. However, teachers are swift in identifying these gaps and additional support is in place when necessary. Better-quality teaching and learning are ensuring that pupils are now making rapid progress. The good progress that inspectors saw in pupils' books since September was in stark contrast to previous work.
- The achievement of pupils at the end of Year 2 in 2018 was significantly stronger than in 2017. For example, the proportion reaching the expected standard in reading was much closer to the national average than previously. This is a reflection of the importance that leaders and staff place on the development of a love of reading. The current Year 3 cohort is making good progress across core subjects and the wider curriculum.
- Although the proportion reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check dipped to below the national average in 2018, current Year 1 pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in phonics are very strong. Pupils who read to the inspectors demonstrated how well they use their phonics to work out unfamiliar words. Several older pupils were able to explain why they like certain authors and how important it is to be a fluent reader.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND make good progress. Work in pupils' books and assessment information indicate that these pupils are supported effectively in class and so do well. Pupils with SEND who attend the resource base benefit hugely from integrating with mainstream pupils in the afternoons, especially in music, dance and PE lessons. For some it is an opportunity to shine, for instance in singing.
- Pupils achieve well because leaders have designed the wider curriculum to include a good range of learning experiences. The quality of performing arts work is high and reflects pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment of this area of learning. Similarly, pupils enjoy working on topics. However, in some topic work, the most able pupils are not always challenged enough to routinely tackle work that enables them to hone skills and deepen their understanding across a range of subjects.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- In 2018, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development declined significantly compared to 2017 and was well below the national average. However, a highly skilled and experienced leader of early years joined the school in September 2018. The provision in this area has been overhauled. Parents commented that the transformation is palpable. Current children are making at least good progress from low starting points, particularly in speech and language.
- Improvements in the early years are a result of effective leadership and management that secures good-quality teaching which captures children's imagination and enthusiasm for learning. Attendance is high and reflects the extremely positive relationships between the early years team and families.



- Staff have a good understanding of the early years and ensure that the children now get off to a flying start. They know the children and their families really well. The quality of teaching is strong. Accurate use of the assessment of children's achievement informs the planning of activities well.
- Children's individual development is captured in detailed assessment records which clearly highlight the good and sometimes better progress that children make. The online 'learning journeys' provide a good range of evidence, such as photographs, notes on focused observations and pieces of children's work: these are shared with parents. Parents also contribute to these learning journeys by sharing what their children do beyond school. This helps staff to plan how children can develop further.
- The learning environment in the classroom is well resourced. Staff plan activities well and provide children with a wide range of experiences which cover all areas of their learning. Staff develop children's interests while providing support and challenge. However, the outdoor area does not provide as many opportunities for structured learning.
- Children show that they are highly interested in their learning. They have good learning habits, following routines and listening well. For example, those using a range of different coins to add up to five pence were highly captivated by the teacher's tasks. They worked well in pairs to find different formations of coins using one and two pence pieces to make five pence. The teacher asked probing questions and ensured that children always answered using full sentences. They made good progress with their addition and number skills. This was later reinforced by independent play in the shop area. Activities such as this contribute to pupils' confidence and skills in acquiring new language.
- Behaviour is good. Excellent transition arrangements prior to starting school help children to settle extremely well into school life and routines. During the inspection, it was clear how happy the children are to come to school and this was reflected in conversations with parents. From an early age, children show respect for each other, the adults around them and visitors to the school.
- Welfare requirements are met. The provision is well staffed. It is a safe environment and all statutory school policies are in place, ensuring that pupils are safe and feel safe.



## School details

Unique reference number	143768
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10056530

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	192
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jane Ainsworth
Principal	Paul Holloway
Telephone number	01928 716 521
Website	<a href="http://www.palacefieldsprimary.org.uk">www.palacefieldsprimary.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:Head@palacefieldsschool.co.uk">Head@palacefieldsschool.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school is part of The Heath Family (North West) multi-academy trust.
- The school has a local governing body that reports to the multi-academy trust board of trustees.
- The school has a 10-place resourced provision that caters for disabled pupils and those with significant cognitive and learning needs.
- The school is an average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is well above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- A new principal was appointed in January 2018, having previously been an executive principal during the autumn term of 2017. Since then, there have been many changes to staffing including a new vice-principal, the formation of a new senior leadership team, a new leader of early years, a new SENCo and several new teachers.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. Several sessions were observed jointly with the principal.
- The inspectors met with representatives of the local governing body, including the chair, who is also a trustee.
- The inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils from key stage 2 and talked with pupils in classes and around the school.
- The inspectors listened to a small number of pupils from Years 2 and 6 read.
- A range of pupils' books and tracking records were scrutinised with the principal and vice-principal.
- The inspectors spoke with a number of parents to seek their views. The responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were analysed along with free-text responses from parents. The inspectors analysed the responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. They considered the responses from pupils to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- The inspectors scrutinised a variety of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, records of the local governing body meetings and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. A range of documentation regarding safeguarding was also scrutinised.

## Inspection team

Naomi Taylor, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ann Marie Dimeck

Ofsted Inspector

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