

The Hill Primary Academy

Tudor Street, Thurnscoe, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S63 0DS

Inspection dates

1–2 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have improved the quality of education since the last inspection and the school no longer requires special measures. However, significant weakness in teaching and learning over time have resulted in substantial gaps in pupils' learning.
- Leaders rightly identify that teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes need further improvement.
- A significant proportion of pupils in key stage 1 cannot read with fluency and accuracy. This is because there is a lack of consistency in phonics teaching. Lower-ability pupils in particular are not given the support they need to catch up quickly.
- Recent direction to using high-quality texts to engage pupils in reading and support their knowledge and use of vocabulary has got off to a good start in key stage 2. However, these aspects are considerably weaker in key stage 1.
- Whole-school curriculum development is in its early stages. Pupils have access to a range of activities and experiences across the curriculum, but the progress they make varies considerably between subjects and classes.
- In early years, although provision across a wide curriculum has been improved, the progress that children make in reading, writing and mathematics is not strong enough.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders, expertly captained by the new principal, have united the staff team in determined and effective school improvement.
- The trust and the transition management board provide extensive and knowledgeable support and challenge that strengthen improvement.
- Support and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is strong.
- Leaders have created a culture of effective safeguarding.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved substantially since the last inspection, including in early years, because leaders' new policies are consistently applied by staff.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are now a strength of the school. Mutual respect is apparent and pupils' engagement in learning has improved as a result.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils' attendance has improved: this is now similar to the national average.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils who read well, by:
 - improving the teaching of phonics, so that lower-ability pupils in particular catch up quickly
 - making sure that reading books are well matched to what pupils have already learned in phonics
 - raising the profile of high-quality texts, particularly in key stage 1, and making sure that pupils read widely and often
 - using engaging texts across the curriculum to develop pupils' knowledge and use of vocabulary.
- Use the positive staff morale now evident to ensure that leaders' precise plans for improvement are consistently implemented by all staff in all classes to raise pupils' achievement across the curriculum.
- Improve the progress that children make through early years by ensuring that adults give children clear direction and support in practising their skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders have a powerful ambition for the school that now permeates all aspects of school life. Since the principal's substantive appointment in September 2018, essential actions needed to improve teaching and learning have significantly gained momentum. Staff morale is strikingly positive and the previous extreme turbulence in staffing has, in the main, stabilised.
- Leaders are unanimous and uncompromising in their recognition of the hard work still needed to address the legacy of pupils' underachievement. They balance this expertly with support and training for staff and consideration of their welfare. Leaders' deliberate move to give teachers responsibility for class provision and assessment, including for pupils with SEND, has resulted in everyone having a much clearer understanding of pupils' progress.
- Leaders leave no stone unturned in checking the effectiveness of the actions they and the staff team are taking. Extremely comprehensive systems in place mean that leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses are spot on.
- Great emphasis is given by leaders to seeking the views and confidences of staff and pupils. This strengthens evidence gathered and informs senior leaders' plans further.
- Leaders' intelligent actions to improve the provision for vulnerable pupils have resulted in pupils making stronger progress this year from their different starting points. The leader for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils ensures that additional funding is spent wisely to remove potential barriers to learning. She is insightful about the needs of these pupils and the progress they are making.
- Priorities to improve pupils' knowledge and skills in writing and mathematics have been identified accurately by leaders and carefully considered systems and programmes have been put in place. Overall, these have supported the staff team's improved understanding of national expectations and how to support pupils in achieving and exceeding these. However, this is not yet consistent across all classes.
- In the relatively short time that senior leaders have been working together, they have managed to have a notable effect on pupils' behaviour. Improvements have been underpinned by the positive relationships established between staff and pupils. Leaders have made sure that learning is engaging, expectations are consistently high and that warm praise is given when it is due. Consequently, the majority of pupils not only behave well, but now attend school regularly and on time.
- Trust leaders have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the challenges that have been encountered along the journey of improvement. This is gained through receipt of precise information gathered and shared by new school leaders, trust members' own stringent measures to check the effect of leaders' actions and by members' receptiveness and response to professional external advice. They have, commendably, held their value of pupils accessing curriculum enrichment activities high, and maintained these experiences alongside much-needed direction in English and mathematics.
- Leaders explain that wider curriculum development is in its infancy. Since September

2018, there has been full curriculum coverage. Work is being overseen by a curriculum leader, who has well-thought-out plans for the school's curriculum offer. She knows that plans will need to be refined and amended over time because of pupils' limited existing knowledge across subjects. Middle subject leaders are in post and about to start a planned programme of training and development. Leaders are clear that strengths in the curriculum are not subject specific at this stage, but as with other aspects of learning, are dependent on individual teachers' expertise.

Governance of the school

- The transition management board (TMB) shares school leaders' and trust members' vision and ambition for all pupils at The Hill. Scrutiny of minutes of the board's meetings and conversations with its members show that they have a wealth of information and understanding about improvements made and remaining weaknesses.
- As with school leaders, the TMB regularly seeks the views of stakeholders to support its evaluations and direction for improvement. Members are very well informed about the quality of education from extensive data gathering, their visits to the school and the highly organised and accurate information they receive directly from senior and subject leaders.
- Records of the TMB's work show in-depth questioning and probing into information provided to secure an accurate evaluation. For example, following a recent school review of SEND provision, detailed information was shared about the SEN Code of Practice and staff professional development needs were considered.
- The TMB has given high priority to checking the systems and procedures that school leaders have for keeping pupils safe and ensuring that pupils attend school regularly and on time.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The appointment of a new leader for safeguarding, attendance and behaviour has brought consistency and rigour to these crucial elements of leaders' work. Explicit procedures and protocols are well understood by the whole staff team.
- The new leader recognises that the school has been on a journey of improvement and acknowledges that there were safeguarding issues to resolve. Her leadership has integrity and is effective and impactful on pupils' welfare and safety, particularly those who are vulnerable. Policies and protocols are now fit for purpose, secure and frequently audited internally and externally. Staff training is wide ranging and up to date. It is planned carefully to ensure that new and supply staff are quickly informed of school procedures.
- Relationships with the community have been strengthened. The gathering of pupils' and parents' views helps leaders to continually refine their systems. Careful consideration is given to supporting pupils in how to stay safe. These sessions are well planned across the year, but also quickly responsive to any issues that arise. There is a strong culture of safeguarding pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Over time, inadequacies in teaching, a high turnover of staff and supply teachers, and pupils' poor behaviour have had a significant effect on pupils' learning. Leaders' recently introduced policies, structures and programmes are supporting teachers and teaching assistants in addressing gaps in pupils' learning.
- Refined and improved assessment procedures, in which teachers are fully involved and trained with, identify exactly which pupils need to catch up. Pupils' progress this year still shows some variation where staffing changes are taking place. For example, the precise support given to pupils in Year 6 is resulting in rapid gains in their learning. Support for pupils in key stage 1 has taken longer to get right, and it is only recently that there have been higher expectations of, and effective support for, this group.
- Pupils in key stage 1, particularly those of lower ability, do not get off to a strong start in reading. The teaching of phonics is not consistently good. Often, pupils are not given clear enough modelling by adults in how to say and write sounds. A combination of different strategies and expectations in lessons and interventions is confusing for lower-ability pupils. Sometimes, the environment is not conducive to good listening and learning. For example, during the inspection, a Year 1 group of pupils were distracted by Reception children undertaking lively activities nearby.
- The recently appointed phonics leader has rightly reorganised the reading books so that pupils read books that are well matched to their ability. However, it is early days and this intent is not consistently implemented. For example, when inspectors heard six key stage 1 lower-ability pupils read, most of them had books that were too challenging. Some of the pupils did not know all the initial sounds and spent so long trying to sound out new words that the meaning of the book was lost.
- In contrast, the improved direction that key stage 2 pupils are given in reading is helping them to become fluent and accurate readers. Their knowledge of different texts and authors is stronger. The books they read are appropriate and matched well to their abilities.
- In mathematics, although it is early days in the implementation of a new programme, a positive impact of leaders' direction can be seen in pupils' progress. This is because pupils are now taught age-appropriate concepts. Lower-ability pupils in particular are making strong progress to catch up.
- A substantial number of teachers are new to teaching. Like other teachers, they are being given effective training and clear direction to address pupils' low starting points. They are very positive about the support they receive from their school mentor and the trust in helping them to improve pupils' behaviours and outcomes.
- Enrichment opportunities support pupils' learning across the curriculum. For example, Year 4 pupils were extremely eager to share their experiences of a recent trip to a charity-run fairy-tale writing shop. They described the support they had been given to create their own magical stories, inspired by the chance to slide down the giant beanstalk and disappear through trapdoors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The inclusion and safeguarding managers' transformation of the safeguarding culture in the school, with the support of the trust and the TMB, has had a very positive effect on the welfare of the most vulnerable pupils and their families.
- A much-needed focus on improving pupils' handwriting and encouraging them to have pride in their work is paying dividends. Similarly, Year 6 pupils sport their blazers and leadership badges with pride in themselves and in being part of the school.
- The day begins positively for many, with their visit to the school breakfast club or the bagel club. Families can join their children for a bagel and a relaxed chat before school begins.
- Older pupils speak with delight about the enrichment opportunities provided by the trust. These experiences are used to enthuse pupils about learning, but also to support their understanding of safety and help them to become good citizens. For example, pupils talk with confidence about how to use the internet safely through their work with 'internet legends' and as a result of the 'crucial crew' sessions.
- Pupils and their parents and carers are generally positive about the recent changes that have been made. They talk about how new leaders have made The Hill a better place to learn, as well as a place where pupils can happily and safely go about their work.
- Parents are particularly positive about how their children are now taught by the same teacher each day. A very small minority of parents expressed concerns about bullying. During the inspection, none of the large number of pupils spoken to by inspectors expressed similar concerns. Many pupils said that behaviour and bullying used to be a problem, but now they were incredibly rare. Only one pupil could think of one incident and they said that the teachers had dealt with it very supportively and it had been resolved immediately.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There is now a calmness around the school that has been an essential change to allow effective learning to take place. The pupils themselves identify behaviour as the aspect of school life that has improved most significantly.
- Positive relationships between staff and pupils, high expectations of what pupils can achieve and consistency in how new policies are applied have ensured improvements in behaviour.
- The number of exclusions has declined considerably over time as expectations have been made clear and raised, support for pupils has improved and policies have been applied consistently. For example, in 2016/17, there were 151 days of fixed-term exclusion. In 2017/18, the total was 56 days. In 2018/19, this has reduced further to six days so far.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is now similar to the national average. This is due to leaders' promotion of good attendance, careful daily monitoring of where any

attendance dips, and effective follow-up with families. It is also because pupils feel valued and the quality of education on offer has improved.

- Punctuality has improved considerably. For example, pupils were late in 1,102 sessions in 2016/17. There were 495 identified late sessions in 2017/18 and there have been 124 so far this academic year.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Many pupils in school have sizeable gaps in their knowledge and skills because of previous disruptions to, and weaknesses in, teaching. Recent improvements in leadership and teaching are helping most current pupils to pick up pace in their learning. However, a considerable proportion are still working below what is expected for their age, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' current work, observations of learning during the inspection and school monitoring information show that pupils' progress, previously extremely weak between the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2, has improved this academic year. However, inconsistencies remain, with some continuing issues with staffing.
- Too few pupils quickly learn to read with fluency and confidence. The proportion of pupils achieving the Year 1 phonics standard has improved over the last three years but is still below the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2018 was substantially below the national average. Leaders' raised expectations and the use of higher quality texts are starting to have a positive effect for pupils in key stage 2, but lower-ability pupils, in particular in key stage 1, do not get off to a strong start.
- Vast improvements in leadership and provision for pupils with SEND mean that most of these pupils have made good progress this academic year.
- Similar clear direction for pupils who are disadvantaged has resulted in the sizeable gaps between these pupils and other pupils nationally starting to diminish.
- The considerable improvement in pupils' behaviour since the last inspection has had a positive impact on their learning.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children enter school with skills that are lower than those typical for their age. Although improved, the progress that children make over their time in early years varies. They make stronger progress in personal, social, emotional and physical development, but weaker progress overall in basic skills. Children of different abilities, particularly those with lower starting points, do not make good enough progress overall.
- The Nursery and Reception indoor and outdoor environments are well planned, with purposeful activities that engage children in a wide range of learning across the early years curriculum. Activities are well thought out and resourced, which results in children enjoying and exploring learning and sustaining concentration in tasks.
- However, when asked to read or share books, children lack confidence. Their books are

not always phonetically decodable and their reading and the comments in their home books show that the books are too challenging for their current knowledge of sounds.

- Although there are informal opportunities for children to access reading, writing and mathematics activities indoors and outdoors, the progress children make in these subjects is not strong. Conversations with the early years leader, exploration with her of children's work and observations of learning show that more precise adult direction is needed in reading, writing and mathematics. Children are not given enough opportunities to practise what they have learned and become confident in using their basic skills. Children's work shows that a considerable proportion of children are not currently well prepared for Year 1 in writing and reading.
- Adults engage in positive language development during activities. Children are keen to talk to visitors about their learning.
- Children's personal development and welfare are given close attention. Previous lapses in safeguarding arrangements have been addressed diligently. Children are taught how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Leaders know the importance of developing good partnerships with parents. They have a variety of stay-and-play sessions and activities to involve families in learning.
- The early years team ensures that the school's raised expectations for behaviour get off to a good start in the early years. Adults continually support children in developing positive attitudes to learning and towards each other. Children respond quickly to adults' requests. Any dips in behaviour are dealt with calmly and kindly, but firmly, by adults. Relationships between children and staff are strong.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 138700 |
| Local authority | Barnsley |
| Inspection number | 10053311 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 347 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Mark Coppel |
| Principal | Jo Leishman |
| Telephone number | 01709 892145 |
| Website | www.thehillacademy.co.uk |
| Email address | jo.leishman@astreahighgate.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 5–6 October 2016 |

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Astrea Academy Trust (previously Reach4 Academy Trust, which the school joined in May 2016). Prior to this, the school had been part of Navigate Academy Trust.
- The trust board has responsibility for the governance of the school. The transition management board (TMB) reports to the trust executive board.
- At its last inspection in October 2016, the school was judged to be inadequate and to require special measures.
- There have been considerable changes in staffing, including in leadership, since the last inspection. A new principal was appointed in September 2018, along with a new inclusion and safeguarding lead. A new assistant headteacher joined the school in January 2019 and a second assistant headteacher joined the staff in April 2019. Most of the teachers are new to the school.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.

- The proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding is just over double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan and the proportion of pupils in receipt of additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The early years consists of a Nursery and two Reception classes.
- The school runs a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects across classes. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to a considerable proportion of pupils during the inspection. They spoke about their learning and the school. They spoke to pupils in lessons, in meetings and in informal discussions at breaktime and lunchtime. They observed behaviour in lessons and at less structured times of the day.
- Inspectors heard children read in early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 and talked to them about reading.
- Inspectors met regularly with the principal. Meetings were also held with the vice-principal and assistant headteachers, leaders for English, phonics, mathematics and the curriculum, the early years leader, the special educational needs coordinator and inclusion leader, a group of other staff and the sports leader. The lead inspector met with members of the TMB responsible for governance, and representatives from Astrea Academy Trust.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' evaluation of the school's own performance, school development planning, and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors also reviewed the minutes of meetings of the TMB and information relating to safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke to parents before school. The 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were also considered.
- Inspectors met with a wide range of staff to seek their views.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Kate Rowley, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Mike Smit | Ofsted Inspector |
| Christine Turner | Ofsted Inspector |

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