

Inspection of Mill Hill Primary Academy

Sunnyside Avenue, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST6 6ED

Inspection dates: 14–15 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this caring, welcoming school. Staff do all they can to support pupils and their families to overcome any challenges. Pupils behave very well. They are polite, friendly and respectful. Everyone agrees that behaviour has improved significantly recently. Bullying is not tolerated and does not happen often. Pupils know staff would sort it out quickly if it did.

Pupils love learning. Many lessons are exciting and engaging. The new curriculum is underpinned by the academy motto: 'Dream big, work hard and never give up'. This is starting to improve pupils' achievement. However, many pupils have gaps in their knowledge and skills, including in reading, writing and mathematics. They struggle to remember confidently what they have learned previously.

Pupils take part in lots of activities to broaden their horizons. Some pupils have visited the Houses of Parliament, and the local MP came to the school to discuss democracy. Pupils have strong opinions and find a way to express them. Some pupils held a silent protest to raise awareness about climate change. In these and many other ways, pupils develop a good understanding of fundamental British values and how to be active citizens and to have pride in their community.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The new principal has brought fresh determination to improving pupils' achievement. Aspirations and expectations are now much higher. Leaders have revised the curriculum and improved behaviour. Parents are now more involved in their children's education. Parents, carers, staff, pupils and governors all say that the academy has dramatically improved recently.

These improvements are starting to have an impact on pupils' behaviour and achievement. There is an improving picture in pupils' achievement in the early years, and in phonics. However, many older pupils need to make much stronger progress to gain the skills they need for the next stage of their education. Pupils' weak literacy skills sometimes prevent them from accessing the wider curriculum in sufficient depth.

Curriculum planning is variable. In mathematics, the curriculum is well planned, with a clear sequence of learning. Teachers use key mathematical vocabulary to support pupils' understanding. Similarly, in science and physical education, the curriculum builds pupils' knowledge and skills step by step. In other subjects, teachers do not have a clear understanding of the key subject knowledge pupils need to learn. In some cases, teachers' subject knowledge is weak. Lesson objectives too often relate to task completion rather than subject knowledge. Sometimes tasks are enjoyable and engaging but they do not help pupils to learn and remember key facts and their significance. Many pupils are unable to recall prior learning confidently.

In English, pupils learn about different reading comprehension skills. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and apply these skills. Reading tasks often focus on retrieving information rather than inferring meaning from the text. As a result, not enough pupils gain the skills they need for the next stage in their education.

Most pupils love reading for pleasure. In the early years and key stage 1, most pupils learn to read fluently through effective phonics teaching. Children who need it get extra help to keep up. However, older pupils too often choose to read books that are too easy for them.

In the early years, children make good progress from their starting points. Staff know the children well and provide caring support. Activities capture children's interests and help them to learn at every opportunity. Even at lunchtime, children learn about healthy eating and table manners. The early years leader has redesigned the curriculum and supports staff well to know how to move children on quickly. Many children start school with weak language skills for their age. Staff take every opportunity to teach children new words. This is starting to improve the progress children make. Some children are now developing sophisticated vocabulary, beyond what is typical for their age.

Pupils learn about their cultural heritage and have pride in their community. They find out about the jobs they might like to do through links with local employers.

Through the City Learning Trust (CLT), teachers take part in research projects, supported by subject experts. This helps to retain staff and is starting to have an impact on improving teaching. Teachers say that leaders consider their workload when introducing new initiatives. They have time to plan together. Staff work hard and are committed to helping pupils achieve their very best.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a high priority. Staff are vigilant and report any concerns promptly. Staff receive regular training. Leaders make sure that pre-employment checks are completed on new staff. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and outside the school.

Pupils and families benefit from lots of support, so that pupils stay safe and come to the school every day on time. The pastoral leader knows the community and parents well. She makes sure pupils receive individual or small group support to improve their behaviour or support their well-being. Many parents say this has helped with family life too.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Many pupils have gaps in their knowledge and skills, as a result of historical weak teaching. In some cases, pupils' weak literacy skills prevent them from accessing the wider curriculum. Leaders should ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills are addressed promptly, so that pupils secure the skills they need for the next stage in their education.
- Curriculum planning in some subjects is not well sequenced. Lessons do not enable pupils to know more and remember more. Activities too often focus on task completion rather than building pupils' subject knowledge. As a result, some pupils are unable to recall prior learning confidently. Leaders should ensure that teachers sequence the learning, so that pupils know and remember the key knowledge in each subject.
- Leaders have ensured that reading has a high priority. Pupils are keen readers. However, older pupils sometimes choose to read books which are too easy for them. Leaders should ensure that pupils are encouraged to read as wide a range of books as possible, including those from the English literary heritage.
- The reading curriculum has been revised, so that pupils learn increasingly sophisticated reading skills. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise these skills. As a result, they cannot confidently apply them and they do not achieve as well as they should in reading. Leaders should ensure that teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to practise and apply the full range of reading skills.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141405
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10122430
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	500
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Melanie Sproston
Principal	Adele Mills
Website	www.millhillprimaryacademy.coop
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school became an academy in April 2017. It is part of the CLT, which consists of four academies.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Before the inspection, the lead inspector reviewed documents on the school website, as well as published assessment information and the previous inspection report. The lead inspector spoke to the principal and other leaders on the phone about academy improvement plans and the approach to curriculum planning.
- An inspector spoke to parents as they dropped their children off in the morning. We considered seven responses to Parent View, including seven free-text responses.
- We spoke to pupils in lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes about behaviour and bullying, life at the school and how they are taught to keep themselves safe. We also considered 31 responses to the pupil survey . An inspector met with pupils to discuss how the academy supports their personal development.

- We held a meeting with staff to discuss extra-curricular activities and the use of pupil premium funds.
- An inspector visited the Wellbeing and Inclusion/SEND Hub (WISH) during lessons and at lunchtime.
- We spoke to teachers about the curriculum, their workload and pupils' behaviour. We also considered 34 responses to the staff survey.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the chair of the local governing committee and a trustee of the CLT and with the chief executive officer (CEO) and the assistant CEO/Executive Principal of the trust.
- The lead inspector discussed safeguarding procedures and practice with the principal, who is also the designated senior leader for safeguarding. We reviewed pre-employment checks and case files. We checked records of incidents of bullying and behaviour, as well as records and analysis of attendance information and exclusions. We spoke to members of staff and pupils about safeguarding throughout the day.
- An inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator and visited intervention support groups.
- We looked in detail at English, early reading, mathematics, science and history. We met with subject leaders, visited lessons, including phonics sessions, looked at pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils for each subject.

Inspection team

Jane Spilsbury, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Wright	Ofsted Inspector
Josie Leese	Ofsted Inspector

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