

Inspection of The Grove Academy

Fourth Avenue, Watford, Hertfordshire WD25 9RH

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 November 2022

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

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They are keen to learn, and work hard in lessons. Pupils experience a broad curriculum that generally helps them to develop their understanding of the world. However, in some subjects, pupils do not make as much progress as they should. This leaves pupils underprepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils are friendly and respectful. They respond well to the high expectations staff have for good behaviour. Children in the early years quickly learn the routines that help them to feel confident and settled in school. In lessons, pupils listen carefully to adults and to each other.

Pupils enjoy the time they spend with their friends at breaktimes. They are happy to include others in their games. Pupils say that bullying does not happen very often. If it does happen, it is followed up quickly and resolved. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Pupils know that adults are there to help them if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils rightly feel safe at school.

Parents are positive about the school. They appreciate the commitment of leaders and staff in ensuring that all children feel valued as members of the school community.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a number of changes in leadership and in staffing. While the trust has worked to stabilise this situation, the good quality of education has not been maintained. The trust is working with school leaders to bring about the necessary changes needed to address this. Staff share leaders' and the trust's vision for improvement. Members of the local advisory body carry out their roles effectively. Members are clear about leaders' priorities for improvement. Their regular school visits enable them to see for themselves the difference leaders are making through their work to improve the school. All leaders are mindful of staff members' well-being and workload.

Leaders have identified that the curriculum was not supporting pupils to achieve well across a range of subjects, including in reading and mathematics. They have revised the curriculum in the English and mathematics, and in the majority of other subjects. This revised curriculum is at various stages of implementation. In some areas, pupils have not built up the detailed knowledge they need to deepen their understanding and make connections in their learning. This means that some pupils are not achieving as well as they could across the full range of subjects that they learn about, including in reading and mathematics.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is carefully matched to pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers make appropriate adjustments so that pupils with SEND access the full curriculum.

Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils have access to a wide range of books to read and enjoy. Pupils enjoy being read to by their teachers. Teachers read in a way that captures pupils' interests. They help pupils to understand new vocabulary and the context of the stories they are reading in class. Younger children enjoy listening to stories read by older pupils at breaktimes.

Leaders have recently introduced a new systematic programme to teach phonics and early reading. Daily phonics lessons are effective in providing pupils with the practise they need to secure their phonics knowledge. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are given books that are closely matched to the sounds they are learning. This is helping pupils to develop their confidence and fluency in reading. Older pupils who are not yet fluent readers are now receiving the support they need to help them catch up. Leaders are raising staff expectations of what younger pupils can and should achieve when learning to read. However, leaders recognise there is still work to do to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they should in reading.

Children in the early years experience a well-considered curriculum that develops their curiosity and interest in the world around them. Leaders place a strong focus on developing children's language and communication. Children practise counting and develop their understanding of number. Adults intervene skilfully to help children extend their learning and their play. Learning opportunities are carefully planned to support children's physical and emotional development. Staff work closely with parents so that children in the early years make a positive start to school.

The curriculum and wider opportunities support pupils' personal development well. Pupils learn tolerance and respect for different cultures, traditions and beliefs. They learn how to develop healthy relationships and how to keep themselves and others safe, including when using the internet. Pupils recognise how the school's values help them to become responsible, active citizens.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A positive culture of safeguarding is in place. Staff are vigilant. Regular training and communications help ensure that staff knowledge of safeguarding is kept up to date. Staff know how to identify the signs of potential abuse. Efficient systems are in place for reporting safeguarding concerns. These are understood and used effectively by staff. Leaders act promptly to follow up concerns. Leaders are persistent when working with other agencies to help ensure that vulnerable families access the support they need.

The processes for recruitment and pre-employment checks are robust and carried out diligently.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the new curriculum in reading and mathematics is not yet fully effective. Some pupils are not achieving as well as they should in these subjects. Leaders should build on the work that they have already done, to ensure that all pupils become confident and fluent readers and mathematicians who are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The curriculum is underdeveloped in some foundation subjects, and it is not always delivered well. As a result, pupils are not acquiring the detailed subject knowledge that they need to achieve well in these areas. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently well in all subjects, to enable the best possible outcomes for pupils across the broad range of subjects.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	138507
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10212376
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	527
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Elizabetta Camilleri
Principal	Sarah Hennigan
Website	www.thegroveacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 and 16 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection there have been a number of changes in the leadership of the school. The principal was appointed in February 2022, following a period as interim principal.
- There is a new chair of the local advisory board, which also has new members.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the assistant principals, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and inclusion lead, and the early years leader.

- The lead inspector met with the chair and five members of the local advisory board, and one trustee. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and executive principal of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, history, and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at, and carried out inspection activities in, other curriculum subjects, including computing; physical education; personal, social, health and economic education; relationships and sex education; and religious education.
- Other meetings took place with the SENCo and inclusion team to discuss the provision for pupils with SEND.
- The lead inspector met with the principal, who is also the designated leader, to discuss the school's safeguarding arrangements. They looked at records of safeguarding concerns and how these are followed up. The lead inspector scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks. Inspectors spoke with school staff about the guidance and training they receive to support the school's safeguarding culture. Inspectors spoke with staff and with pupils to explore how the curriculum helps pupils gain the knowledge and understanding they need to keep themselves safe, including when they are using the internet.
- The lead inspector met with the principal to discuss pupils' attendance. The lead inspector scrutinised records of behaviour and bullying incidents and how these are followed up. Inspectors met with pupils to talk about their experience of school, including behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors reviewed the documentation that is published on the school website, including school policies and information about the school's curriculum.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also considered responses to the staff and pupil inspection surveys. Inspectors spoke with parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day. Inspectors also spoke with staff and with pupils to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Catherine Wilson	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Taggart	Ofsted Inspector

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