

Hardwick Green Primary Academy

Tithe Barn Road, Stockton-on-Tees TS19 8WF

Inspection dates

14–15 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since her appointment in September 2018, the principal has provided strong and purposeful leadership. She sets high expectations for all aspects of school life, which are shared and understood by all. This is a rapidly improving school where staff morale is high.
- Subject leaders are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They have a good understanding of where practice is effective and what needs to be done to improve further.
- The quality of teaching across the school is good. Teachers' secure subject knowledge, alongside consistent approaches to teaching and learning, is ensuring that current pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders use firm procedures for tackling pupils' absence. While there is an improving picture of pupils' overall attendance rates, and a reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school, rates of attendance fall short of national averages.
- Children in the early years settle quickly into their surroundings because of the strong relationships that are soon established. Occasionally, Nursery staff intervention in free-play activities does not move children's learning on as effectively as it could. This is particularly the case during outdoor activities.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Their movement around the school is orderly and well managed. In lessons, pupils conduct themselves well and demonstrate positive attitudes to their work, to each other and to adults.
- Leaders' meticulous approach to monitoring the work of the school ensures that pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is improving strongly, particularly at the higher standard.
- Overall, current pupils' outcomes are improving. However, there are some remaining differences between the attainment of boys and girls. These stem from previously weaker teaching and a weaker curriculum. They are most evident in pupils' writing outcomes, particularly in lower key stage 2.
- Leaders have begun the process of curriculum review. They have a shared and exciting vision for its development that prioritises developing pupils' enquiry skills and extending pupils' vocabulary. It is due for implementation in September 2019.
- Pupils study a broad range of subjects, but activities that pupils complete are mainly concerned with the accumulation of knowledge, with fewer opportunities for pupils to acquire and improve their subject-specific skills. This limits the proportion of pupils who have a deeper understanding in a range of subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by making sure that:
 - curriculum plans are completed and introduced to ensure progression and application of both knowledge and skills in a range of subjects beyond English and mathematics
 - efforts to improve pupils' attendance and reduce incidents of persistent absenteeism are continued, so that rates of attendance are in line with national averages.
- Improve pupils' outcomes further by:
 - ensuring that pupils receive opportunities to practise and develop their subject-specific skills alongside their acquisition of subject-specific knowledge, so that pupils' learning is deepened across a range of subjects
 - ironing out the remaining differences in boys' and girls' attainment, particularly in writing
 - ensuring that there is greater consistency in the quality of early years staff interventions during children's free-play activities, particularly when outdoors.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The enthusiasm, ambition and commitment of the principal is praiseworthy. She is an exceptional leader. Since her appointment in September 2018, she has galvanised the staff team and brought much stability, following a period of considerable staff changes. Staff value her leadership greatly and share her ambition for the future. As a result, this is a rapidly improving school, and despite the number of changes implemented recently, staff morale is high.
- The principal's approach to improvement planning is meticulous and measured. It is based upon sound research findings and recognised good practice providers. Changes are implemented with a degree of urgency, but also with staff workload and staff confidence in mind. In doing so, and with the support of able and knowledgeable senior leaders, she has ensured that there is a consistent and coherent approach to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics across the school. Teachers are therefore confident to plan lessons that build pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding effectively.
- Leaders monitor the effectiveness of their actions regularly to ensure that desired changes are securely in place. Any practice falling short of leaders' expectations is professionally challenged, through coaching and mentoring approaches, until it meets their exacting standards. This ensures that leaders have an accurate view of the strengths in practice, and where to focus future priorities.
- Development plans are consequently focused and precise in the actions identified to tackle current improvement priorities. Success criteria are closely linked to improving pupils' outcomes. Termly milestones reflect the interim measures with which leaders can base their evaluations and shape further actions. Historical reading outcomes were variable, so leaders have overseen a major focus on effective and consistent teaching approaches to this subject. This has been successful. As a result, pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in reading, are improving strongly.
- Subject leaders are knowledgeable and diligent. They have been empowered to drive through improvements in their areas of responsibilities, and have embraced their roles assuredly and with much enthusiasm. This is increasing leadership capacity to build further upon existing improvements.
- Leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is spent wisely. They identify accurately the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils. Accordingly, they have adjusted teaching approaches and the curriculum to place greater emphasis upon extending pupils' vocabulary and using high-quality texts and stories as a stimulus for learning. This is improving the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils across the school. Differences in the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those of their peers remain, however, as a result of historically weaker teaching.
- Additional funding to promote physical education and sport has increased pupils' access to a wider range of after-school clubs and competitions. This is contributing to pupils' understanding of physical health and well-being.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is very knowledgeable and

experienced. More lately, she has been able to take on greater decision-making responsibilities. As such, she has put a more systematic approach to evaluating provision in place, with stronger accountability and greater oversight. Staff access a comprehensive training programme. This ensures that they have greater skill and confidence to adjust activities to meet the needs of pupils with many differing and complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Strong and positive working relationships with external agencies are ensuring that pupils access additional support in a timely manner. The tenacity of the SENCo means that more pupils are now in receipt of additional funding to support their needs.

- Pupils study a range of subjects, which are supplemented by enrichment events such as 'science week' and 'one-world week' to enhance their learning. However, current plans focus upon pupils acquiring subject-specific knowledge, with fewer opportunities to develop their subject-specific skills.
- Leaders are in the process of redesigning their curriculum approach, including that for pupils' personal development. They have engaged with stakeholders to produce an exciting and ambitious curriculum plan that is reflective of pupils' needs. It acknowledges the development of pupils' subject-specific knowledge and skills with equal weighting, and promotes rich vocabulary. Its implementation is due in September 2019, so no impact measures are available against which to evaluate its success.
- The trust offers a range of effective and regular support and challenge to leaders. There are regular opportunities for subject leaders to meet and to discuss their approaches to teaching and learning, which means that there is a continuous focus upon improving practice.

Governance of the school

- Governors are skilled professionals who use their wide-ranging skills to challenge school leaders effectively. They share the principal's ambition for improving the overall effectiveness of the school.
- Governors have a good grasp of the school's performance. This is because of the secure programme of monitoring that is embedded into their cycle of responsibilities, and the regular and detailed reports they receive from leaders. As a result, they are able to challenge school leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All employment checks are undertaken on those adults wishing to work at the school to ensure that they are fit to do so.
- Staff undertake regular training to ensure that they are up to date with the most recent legislation and important localised information and challenges.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Staff know their pupils and families exceptionally well. They are vigilant in noticing any changes in pupils' behaviour and demeanour. Any concerns are reported quickly and record-keeping is detailed, maintaining an accurate chronology of events.
- The designated safeguarding staff go above and beyond that which would be expected

of them, to ensure that pupils are kept as safe as they can be. They meet weekly to ensure that there is close supervision of all casework. They have developed strong working partnerships with a range of professional partners to ensure that all pupils, and particularly the most vulnerable pupils, are supported successfully.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Weaker teaching of the past, which led to weaker pupils' outcomes, has been eliminated. This is because of the unequivocally high expectations from leaders, well-focused professional development and opportunities for teachers to share good practice. Leaders have focused their efforts upon developing a consistent approach to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics and have done so successfully.
- Staff enjoy their teaching and pupils enjoy their learning. In all classes, pupils are highly engaged in their activities and work effectively with their peers. Pupils routinely welcome visitors into their lessons and are keen to share their work and to talk about their learning. This is contributing to pupils' improving outcomes.
- Teachers' questioning is used well. It is pitched according to pupils' needs and abilities, and is used to check pupils' understanding, to extend pupils' thinking and to ensure that more pupils are involved in their learning by sharing their ideas.
- Since September 2018, a new approach to the teaching of phonics has been implemented. This is highly structured and consistently taught across the early years and key stage 1. The regular review of pupils' outcomes ensures that those pupils in need of additional support are identified quickly and interventions organised accordingly. Current pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 screening check are broadly in line with the national averages. Those pupils in Years 2 and 3 who fell short of the required standard, when they were in Year 1, are now catching up quickly and are increasing their confidence to use their phonics knowledge independently.
- Pupils are reading more widely as a result of leaders' focus upon promoting the joy of reading. A recently refurbished library and investment in new reading books are adding to pupils' enjoyment and enthusiasm to read more. This is best exemplified by the marked increase in the number of books purchased at the most recent book fair compared to previous years.
- The teaching of reading comprehension is equally successful. Following the disappointing pupils' progress outcomes of 2018, at the end of key stage 2, leaders constructed a systematic whole-class approach to the teaching of reading comprehension. All teachers prioritise extending pupils' vocabulary and developing pupils' wider reading skills. They have done so successfully. As a result, pupils across the school are making good progress from their starting points. More pupils are reaching the higher standard than was previously the case.
- The teaching of writing is also highly structured to enable pupils to be successful. Quality texts are used to provide a stimulus for pupils to write. Teachers use writing frames and scaffolds to help pupils organise their writing accurately. Work to extend pupils' vocabulary is enabling pupils to become more adventurous in their word choices. This is leading to much success, particularly in increasing the proportion of pupils writing successfully at the higher standard. However, the legacy of previously weaker teaching and a weaker curriculum mean that there are some remaining gaps in

pupils' writing skills. This is most evident in lower key stage 2, where fewer boys than girls are reaching the expected and higher standards.

- More recently, and following a review of pupils' books, leaders have timetabled additional discrete lessons for English grammar, spelling and punctuation. Inspectors reviewed pupils' books to measure the impact of leaders' actions. It is very clear that pupils are becoming increasingly secure in the correct use of verb tense, and in using a range of punctuation techniques.
- Leaders have also implemented a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics across the school. Teachers focus upon developing pupils' mathematical fluency and support pupils' understanding with a range of resources. There is equal focus on developing pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills. Occasionally, some of the most able pupils work through easier examples before moving on to more demanding tasks. Through their monitoring, leaders are already beginning to tackle this.
- The quality of teaching across the wider curriculum is more variable. Subjects are taught within a topic, which is primarily history or geography based. While pupils accumulate subject-specific knowledge, they receive fewer opportunities to acquire subject-specific skills at a similar pace. This limits the proportion of pupils deepening their understanding in a range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is good.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet.
- Pupils are aware of the different forms of bullying. They are confident that should they raise any concerns, these would be dealt with straight away. A small minority of parents who spoke to inspectors felt bullying was not dealt with effectively. However, this is not corroborated by a review of bullying logs and in talking to pupils.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed effectively. Throughout the inspection, pupils were observed enjoying their learning and reflecting on their successes. It was a joy to see pupils excited to learn, and showing awe and wonder in the well-considered activities planned by their teachers. This was seen in Year 3 when pupils whooped with excitement as they turned the page of their class story to discover the next antic of their favourite character.
- A programme of assemblies and focused-learning weeks promotes pupils' personal development successfully. This is ensuring that pupils have an increasing awareness of the importance of staying mentally and physically fit and healthy, and of respecting others. Leaders are reviewing the personal and social curriculum as part of their wider curriculum review to ensure a more cohesive approach.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' movement around the school is orderly and calm. Pupils are well-mannered and polite and welcoming to visitors. This is because all staff share the same high expectations for pupils to be respectful.
- The new behaviour policy is consistently applied. Pupils know exactly what is expected of them and, for the most part, comply willingly. Those pupils who demonstrate more challenging behaviours are managed sensitively and appropriately.
- Playtimes are lively, where pupils run off energy and play excitedly with each other. 'Playground buddies' take their roles very seriously and look out for anyone who may be feeling sad or lonely. They patrol the playground to ensure that fruit peel from the daily healthy snack is disposed of appropriately in the bins provided. Anyone not doing so is reminded politely to be respectful of their environment.
- Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They are proud of their achievements and are keen to talk about their work.
- Systems are in place to manage pupils' attendance, but until the appointment of the principal these were not followed up thoroughly to affect positive improvements. This is no longer the case, as all absences are accounted for immediately and any pupil's attendance falling below 96% triggers the school's formal procedures. Consequently, although pupils' absence is still higher than average, it is reducing overall, with fewer pupils frequently absent from school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2016, pupils' combined attainment at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was disappointingly low. Since then, pupils' attainment has improved year on year, and in 2018 it was almost in line with the national average at the expected standard. It remained well below the national average at the higher standard.
- Leaders have built upon these improvements and, currently, increasing proportions of pupils are attaining at both the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. From pupils' starting points that are below those seen typically, this represents good progress.
- Pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 has remained average in writing and mathematics over time. However, in 2016 and 2018, pupils' progress in reading was significantly below the national average. Leaders have worked tirelessly to construct a consistent approach to the teaching of reading that builds pupils' knowledge and skills sequentially. They have had much success and, in all year groups, current pupils' progress and attainment are improving considerably.
- Pupils' attainment by the end of key stage 1, at the expected standard, has been broadly in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics over time. A review of pupils' work in books shows that this is continuing, with increasing proportions of pupils reaching expected and higher standards than in previous years.
- In all year groups, there are considerably higher than average proportions of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders track their progress carefully, and are quick to act when anyone is falling behind in their learning. In some year groups, there are marked differences between disadvantaged pupils' attainment and that of their peers. In some

instances, this is because pupils have combined and complex needs. Equally, there are some legacy issues pertaining to previously weaker teaching and a weaker curriculum.

- Pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points. Leaders use a range of assessment techniques to capture pupils' progress against their personal targets. Such targets within personal plans reflect pupils' needs accurately. Pupils' books show a clear match of provision to need.
- Assessment information indicates that there are wide differences between boys' and girls' writing attainment, particularly at lower key stage 2. A detailed review of current boys' writing books shows that teachers increasingly choose topics that are appealing to boys to try to engage them more readily into the writing process. It is also clear that boys are developing their skills, and becoming increasingly confident to write in a range of styles effectively. However, residual gaps between boys' writing attainment and that of girls remain.
- A review of pupils' work, in subjects beyond English and mathematics, shows that although pupils study a breadth of subjects, their learning rarely demonstrates a depth of understanding. This is because many of the activities are a collation of facts, without developing pupils' subject-specific skills. For example, in geography, pupils found out some facts about South America, but did not develop their mapping skills alongside this. Likewise, in science, pupils often find out lots of facts, but there is limited evidence of pupils developing their science enquiry skills with the same frequency.

Early years provision

Good

- The recently appointed interim early years leader is knowledgeable about how young children learn, and is a skilled practitioner. She is ensuring that planning between Reception and Nursery staff teams is increasingly cohesive, particularly in the indoor environment. As a result, teachers plan activities that are engaging and sustain children's interests.
- Staff are reflective practitioners. They undertake regular training and professional development to continually improve their skills. Staff attend network meetings, within the trust, to review their practice and to moderate their assessment information. As a result, assessment is accurate, and the early years environment is brightly displayed and very well resourced.
- Children behave well throughout the early years because of the strong relationships that exist between the children and their key workers. Such relationships ensure early identification of any emerging and additional needs. All welfare requirements are met.
- The vast majority of children enter Nursery with skills below those typically expected for their age and stage of development, particularly in the area of learning associated with communication and language. Children make good progress in areas of learning associated with personal and physical development and their communication and language skills, and by the time they enter Reception, the vast majority are working within the appropriate age-related expectations.
- Children enter Reception from a range of Nursery providers. In 2018, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development declined from the previous year and fell below the national average. Leaders have reorganised the Reception timetable to

ensure that there is increased focus on teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The teaching of phonics is especially effective, with twice as many children reaching an appropriate level of readiness to start Year 1 compared to this time last year. As a result, children are making good progress from their varying starting points.

- Leaders have invested in resourcing the shared early years outdoor provision. It is now an enticing area, with lots of planned opportunities to investigate and explore. However, during children's free-choice play opportunities, the quality of staff intervention, particularly in Nursery, is variable. Staff do not use these opportunities to extend children's learning or probe their thinking consistently. Consequently, during such activities, children tend to lose their interest and their progress slows.

School details

Unique reference number	139392
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10087629

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	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	288
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Irene Lawson
Principal	Kate Davies
Telephone number	01642 677968
Website	www.hardwickgreenacademy.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@hardwickgreenacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2015

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- An above average proportion of pupils have been identified with SEND. A higher than average proportion of pupils are disadvantaged and are entitled to free school meals.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has increased its admission limit and is increasing the number of pupils who attend year on year.
- The school is part of the Enquiry Learning Trust.
- The principal was appointed in September 2018. At the same time, two assistant principals were appointed to cover during the absence of the substantive vice-principal.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited teaching sessions across a range of subjects from Nursery through to Year 6. The majority of these visits were completed together with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors talked to pupils about learning and behaviour, both formally and informally. They looked at pupils' work in books.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, senior and subject leaders and members of the trust, including the chief executive officer. A telephone discussion was held with a member of the governing body.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including assessment information, self-evaluation documentation and improvement planning. Safeguarding records and training logs were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day, as well as taking account of the three responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, along with the 84 responses to the school's own parental consultation.

Inspection team

Diane Buckle, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Zoe Carr	Ofsted Inspector
Julie McGrane	Ofsted Inspector

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