

The Palmer Primary Academy

70 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, Berkshire RG2 7PP

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2017

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the previous inspection, school leaders and governors have brought about considerable improvements to the school. In close cooperation with the academy trust, the leadership team has been strengthened and provides a clear direction to the work of the school.
- Ambitious leaders have introduced a planned programme of training. This has improved the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good across the school.
- Teachers plan imaginative activities for pupils that inspire pupils to work hard. Consequently, pupils achieve well across the school in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve at least as well as other pupils. This is because they receive effective support that is directed towards their specific learning needs.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. They are welcomed in to a stimulating environment where staff provide activities that help them to reach a good level of development.
- Inclusion is a strength of the school. All pupils are equally valued and treated fairly. Adults care for pupils and consequently, pupils feel safe in school.
- Pupils behave well in class and around the school. They get on well together and they appreciate the help and support provided by staff.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra activities. The quality of sport and physical education is good and helps pupils to develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles.
- School leaders and governors have an accurate view of what the school does well and where further improvements are needed. They have appropriate plans in place, with clear actions for development.
- Some subject leaders are new to their roles and have not yet had time to show the impact of their work. They do not all ensure that subjects other than English and mathematics are taught in sufficient depth.
- Just occasionally, a few teachers do not adhere to the school's marking and feedback policy and this slows progress for some pupils.
- At times, work provided for pupils is not challenging enough and it does not help them to extend what they already know and understand.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - pupils gain a depth of knowledge, skills and understanding in all subjects
 - all subject leaders have the skills to check on the work of other staff and provide guidance and support when required.
- Bring all teaching up to the standard of the best by ensuring that:
 - feedback, in line with the school's policy, is provided to pupils about their work and addresses weaknesses in basic literacy skills and handwriting
 - work is provided for all pupils that is challenging and is matched to their learning needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- 'Enquiring Minds for Inspiring Futures' is the ethos that underpins the school's work. Leaders are highly ambitious and have high expectations for staff and for pupils. They have created a culture in which staff strive to create experiences that successfully develop pupils' personal and academic skills within a happy and safe environment.
- In partnership with the trust, leadership has been strengthened and this has been instrumental in bringing about improvements since the previous inspection. School leaders have a very clear view of where the school's strengths lie and they know exactly what to do to develop the school further.
- Leaders recognised that standards were not good enough and set about improving pupils' rates of progress by improving the quality of teaching across the school. This has been largely successful as evidenced in the good progress that pupils make in English and mathematics across the school.
- Teachers have welcomed the training, support and guidance that have helped them to become better teachers. One member of staff wrote: 'The school has improved so much since the last inspection and I am so proud to be part of it. The staff are all supportive and we work well together, putting the children's learning at the heart of what we do.'
- The quality of teaching has improved significantly and is good, with strengths in all key stages. Leaders check the quality of teaching by visiting classrooms formally as well as informally. They provide training, often with the support of the trust, to help teachers to reflect on their work and improve their skills.
- School leaders, under the guidance of the executive headteachers, are reflective and analytical and encourage all staff to be the same. There is a climate of mutual trust and respect in which staff are motivated, enthusiastic and keen to take risks and try new ideas. Consequently, many of the activities provided for pupils are creative and inspire them to work hard.
- Good use has been made of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Staff identify the specific barriers that they have to learning and leaders have employed additional adults to help them with their learning. Leaders have also used some of the funding to help with costs of uniform, school trips and breakfast club. This has helped to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the same opportunities as their classmates and, consequently, they achieve well.
- Staff have embraced the higher expectations for the new English and mathematics curriculum. Although other subjects are taught, they often lack the depth and breadth that would help pupils to deepen and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding of the wider world. However, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively through the activities provided in the curriculum for English.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including many sports clubs, available for pupils. School leaders supplement the sports premium to fund a dedicated team of physical education specialists who provide coaching for teachers as

well as teaching pupils a variety of sports. The leader is passionate and enthusiastic and this impacts positively on pupils' attitudes to physical education. They thoroughly enjoy taking part in sports and have had success in local teams and in the wider community.

- Pupils have a good understanding of British values, including democracy, respect and the rule of law, because these are promoted well through school assemblies and through the school's own values. Pupils demonstrate respect and tolerance for those from other backgrounds and beliefs. They say that all pupils are treated equally and that discrimination on any grounds is not tolerated.
- Some leaders are relatively new to their roles. Although they have had training both from school leaders and the trust, they have not yet sharpened their skills to identify specific areas of weakness in some aspects of their subjects. Consequently, some weaknesses, for example in the way some new staff fail to follow the school's policy for marking and feedback, go unchecked.

Governance of the school

- The academy shares a governing body with two other academies within the REAch2 Academy Trust because of previous difficulties in recruiting governors. An external and experienced chair of governors was appointed to lead the new governing body from September 2016. Under his leadership and together with support and training from the trust, governors, in a short time, have got to grips with how well the school is performing. They provide a good level of support and challenge to school leaders. Governors share the ambitions of school leaders and say they want to provide the best start in life for the pupils so that they develop a lifelong love of learning.
- Some governors are relatively new to their roles and they are taking an active role in checking the performance of the school. They say that information provided by leaders is clear and transparent so they know how well pupils achieve. Governors visit school regularly and believe that pupils behave well and are safe in school. They say leaders are vigilant and that safeguarding is a high priority across the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has dedicated a large proportion of leadership time to ensuring that pupils are safe in school. There are five designated safeguarding lead officers who have all had recent and up-to-date training. All staff have been trained and are confident that they know the correct procedures to be followed where a pupil is at risk from harm. Leaders are tenacious in following up actions to ensure that pupils receive the right support in a timely way.
- Procedures for checking visitors to school are robust as are systems to check the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff and governors have been thoroughly checked and this information is carefully recorded. All statutory requirements are met. The school policy for safeguarding is comprehensive and provides clear guidance to staff regarding their duty to safeguard pupils. It makes clear that all staff have a moral as well as a legal responsibility to keep pupils safe.

- School leaders work in close cooperation with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe. For example, they have held workshops for parents on the potential dangers from modern technology. Staff understand their duties around issues such as radicalisation, online safety and other possible dangers associated with modern culture.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is typically lively and engaging and promotes within pupils a love of learning. Teachers use interesting methods to capture pupils' imagination and make learning fun. For example, they use video clips, role play and the outdoor environment to add to pupils' enjoyment of learning.
- Most teachers know their pupils well and so they provide learning activities that build on what pupils already know and understand, enabling pupils to make good progress. Teachers usually link learning to the previous lesson and so pupils build their skills and knowledge systematically.
- Well-trained teaching assistants provide good support to pupils in class. They break down learning into more manageable steps and so pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities develop their confidence to take part in lessons. This helps them to make progress at equal rates to other pupils.
- A strong feature seen in most classrooms is the opportunity pupils have to talk about their work and share their ideas. This helps them to explain their thinking and to develop their ideas. Teachers are skilled at asking pupils questions that probe their understanding and deepen their knowledge.
- Most teachers have good subject knowledge owing to recent training they have received. This helps them to explain clearly to pupils what they are to learn and so pupils progress well. Teachers demonstrate and model what pupils need to do and ensure that they all understand their work. In mathematics lessons, teachers provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to use practical equipment to help them to learn.
- Most teachers provide feedback, in line with the school's policy, to pupils both in the classroom and when looking at work in their books. This helps to move pupils' learning forward rapidly. There is a culture within classrooms that it is acceptable to make mistakes and that this can lead to improvement in learning. Just occasionally, some teachers do not pick up pupils' basic errors in spelling, punctuation and the formation of handwriting and this slows progress for some pupils.
- Teaching of both reading and writing is good. Teachers use reading to provide good models of language to pupils and this in turn enhances the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils are taught how to construct their writing and provided with plenty of help and support to edit and so improve their work.
- Although most teachers have high expectations, the level of challenge provided for pupils is not always appropriate. This results in some pupils having work that is too easy and for others, it is too hard. This prevents them from making the rapid progress that they should.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. All pupils, regardless of circumstances, are warmly welcomed into school – reflecting the school's commitment to inclusion. The school provides good-quality care to all pupils, especially to those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable.
- Pupils are confident, self-assured and have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy school and they appreciate the range of activities and experiences that staff provide for them.
- Pupils get on well together, regardless of background, and they are proud that the school has pupils from many different parts of the world. They respect each other and they understand that people from other backgrounds may have views and beliefs that differ from their own.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know about different forms of bullying, including that related to modern technology. They say that bullying is rare but that adults respond quickly should an incident arise. Pupils are taught within the curriculum as well as in assemblies to stay safe from external dangers, including roads and railways.
- Pupils appreciate staff and know that adults in school will listen to them and take their concerns seriously. They say that adults treat them fairly and equally and that discrimination on any grounds is unacceptable.
- Staff have created a calm and orderly learning environment with stimulating displays of pupils' work. Classrooms are bright and attractive and well organised to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The outdoor area is furnished with raised beds in which pupils grow fruits and vegetables. This helps them to understand the need to eat nourishing food that will help them to be fit and healthy.
- Parents who completed the survey or who spoke to inspectors agreed that their children are happy, safe and well looked after in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, friendly and helpful towards each other and adults in school. They behave well in lessons and respond quickly to teachers' instructions.
- The school has a small number of pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour in school. Staff provide help and support to these pupils in various ways so that they are ready to learn. School records show a marked reduction in the number of reported incidents of poor behaviour and there have been few exclusions in recent years.
- Owing to actions taken by school leaders, the number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing. Attendance has improved and is broadly average for primary schools.

- Most parents, staff and governors agree that pupils behave well.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils work hard and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. At the end of Year 6 in 2016, pupils' progress was significantly above average and in the top 10% of all schools nationally in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress was significantly above average in writing, although it was not in the top 10% of all schools. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Disadvantaged pupils made equally good progress to reach standards that were above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. This reflects not only the good teaching they receive but also the effectiveness in the way in which the additional funding is spent.
- Work in pupils' books and assessment information recorded by teachers shows that pupils currently in school make good progress from their starting points in each of the three subjects. The most able disadvantaged pupils make particularly good progress to reach standards that are at least in line with all pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils are offered a greater level of challenge in class and this helps them to make good progress. However, there are times when this level of challenge could be raised further in order to extend their knowledge and understanding even further.
- Staff are particularly skilled in identifying the specific difficulties that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities present. School leaders use funding allocated for special educational needs to provide specialist support to meet the needs of these pupils. For example, they have recruited a speech and language therapist to support language development for those pupils who struggle with this aspect of their development. This has helped those pupils to develop their spoken and written skills and make rapid progress.
- In Year 1, pupils consistently do better than other pupils nationally in the Year 1 phonics screening check. This is because they are taught phonics systematically and accurately. This holds them in good stead for learning to read across key stage 1. By the end of Year 2, pupils have developed a range of skills that help them to enjoy their reading. Just occasionally, the books provided for them are too easy and offer too little challenge for them.
- Pupils, including boys, love reading and they enjoy a wide range of books available in school. By Year 6, they read fluently, confidently and with good expression. They respond to questions about the text that require them to infer, to predict and to form opinions about what they have read. Year 6 pupils speak knowledgeably about a variety of books and authors that they enjoy.
- Pupils write frequently both in English lessons and in other subjects. This helps them to apply their skills and consequently they make good progress. Work in their books shows that there are good links between reading and writing and so their skills are reinforced across both subjects. Pupils have a good vocabulary and use imaginative language to express their ideas. While most have a good grasp of basic skills and

write neatly, there are times when their errors are not picked up through teachers' feedback and this slows their progress.

- Pupils enjoy the challenge of mathematics lessons. They are interested and they make good progress. Pupils have a good grasp of basic arithmetic that they use to solve real life problems and carry out investigations. This in turn develops their reasoning skills and this helps them to master concepts at a deeper level.

Early years provision

Good

- Children are well prepared for Year 1. This is because they make good progress in both the Nursery and Reception classes from relatively low starting points to reach a good level of development across all areas of learning. Children behave well and they get on well together.
- Children are warmly welcomed into a safe and stimulating environment where they receive good-quality care. There are good relationships between staff and children and this promotes children's social and moral development effectively. Consequently, children are motivated, happy and keen to learn.
- There is a good balance of activities that are led by adults and those that children select for themselves. Just occasionally, some children spend too long without adult help to support their learning and this slows their progress because children's misconceptions are not addressed quickly enough.
- Adults make accurate assessments of children's progress and this enables them to plan their next steps. Staff have high expectations for children and expect them to progress across all areas of learning. Children listen carefully to adults and they respond to the high expectations adults have for them.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. This is because staff provide carefully planned interventions based on an accurate assessment of children's needs.
- The early years leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths of provision and has well-founded plans for further improvement. The staff work closely as a team and they know the children well. All statutory requirements are in place and children are safe.

School details

Unique reference number	139653
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10032835

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	455
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Leeper
Executive Headteachers	Salimer Ducker and Robert Wyld
Telephone number	0118 9375481
Website	www.thepalmeracademy.com
Email address	admin@thepalmeracademy.com
Date of previous inspection	2 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with the Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school and pupils are taught in single-age classes. There is provision for children in the early years in the Nursery and two Reception classes.
- There have been significant changes to the leadership team and to the teaching team since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is larger than usual and over half of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is higher than usual.

- The school has a smaller than usual percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards. These set the minimum expectations for pupils' learning and progress.
- There is a breakfast club and an after-school club for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils working in 22 lessons, most of which were observed jointly alongside school leaders. They looked at work in pupils' books and they listened to pupils reading in Year 2 and Year 6. They observed pupils' behaviour in class and as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, teachers and groups of pupils. Inspectors also met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body and a representative from the REAch2 academy chain.
- Among the documents scrutinised were school improvement plans, information regarding pupils' learning and progress and minutes from governors' meetings. Inspectors also looked at records relating to pupils' behaviour and school leaders' checks on the quality of teaching. Information showing how the school safeguards its pupils was also scrutinised for compliance.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents by analysing the 39 responses to the online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking informally to parents during the inspection. The views of staff were considered by analysing the 16 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Joy Considine, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Debra Anderson	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Crouch	Ofsted Inspector

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