

The Oak Tree Academy

Newham Grange Avenue, Stockton-on-Tees, TS19 0SE

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In the early years, from starting points in the Nursery class that are below those typical for their age, children's overall progress requires improvement, particularly in the Reception class. As a result, not all children are well enough prepared for Year 1.
- The quality of phonics teaching (the sounds that letters make) has not been good over time. As a result pupils' reading skills are not as high as expected nationally.
- Not enough pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils requires improvement. Consequently, the attainment gaps that exist at the end of Year 6 have not closed fast enough over time.
- The achievement of those pupils with special educational needs and that of the most able requires improvement.
- Over time, teachers have not used the information about pupils' progress to match activities closely enough to pupils' abilities.
- Insufficient opportunities have been provided for pupils to correct and improve their work so they can make rapid progress.
- The indoor and outdoor areas in the early years do not provide enough opportunities for children to use their new skills of reading, writing and number.
- Over time, senior leaders have not set robust enough improvement targets and ensured the work of the academy has been checked rigorously enough.
- Governors have not always actively enough held the academy to account for its performance.
- Positive action taken to strengthen teaching has not had sufficient time to have the full impact in eliminating the legacy of pupils' underachievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal and Trust directors share the same high ambitions to secure academy improvement quickly. As a result, the legacy of pupils' underachievement is being diligently tackled and the school is improving.
- Older pupils in Key Stage 2 sometimes make good progress, especially in their writing.
- Good resourced provision enables pupils with moderate learning difficulties to achieve well.
- The interesting curriculum enriches pupils' learning well.
- The academy provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils' behaviour is good because they are clear about the boundaries set for their conduct. They feel safe and enjoy academy life. This is reflected in their low absence rate and constantly improving attendance.
- Relationships with parents are strengthening quickly as their confidence grows in the academy's performance.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons and seven paired observations were carried out with senior leaders. Detailed work scrutiny was carried out with senior leaders. In addition, the inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and undertook walks around the academy in order to check the quality of what is provided for pupils.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils and had discussions with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, staff, governors, parents, the primary director of the Trust and the academy improvement adviser.
- Inspectors also examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the academy's view of how well it is doing, the monitoring of staff performance, the academy's improvement plan, and records relating to pupils' progress and behaviour.
- The inspectors took account of the 23 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Julie Deville	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is larger than the average-sized primary school and caters for pupils aged from three to 11 years.
- The Oak Tree Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2013. When its predecessor school, The Oak Tree Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2012, it was judged to require special measures.
- A very large majority of the pupils are of White British backgrounds with very few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is higher than the national average.
- Currently, there is a well above average proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding. This funding is to support those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The academy has specialist local authority funded provision for 10 pupils in Years 3 to Year 6 who have moderate learning difficulties. This is known as resourced provision.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Children in the Nursery attend part time for either morning or afternoon sessions. Typically, the children in the Nursery progress to the Reception Year, where they attend full time.
- The academy provides a breakfast club each day for pupils.
- Cheeky Monkees is a privately run, after-school childcare provision located on the site, but is not managed by the governing body. It is subject to a separate inspection. Reports for this setting may be viewed at <http://gov.uk/ofsted>
- Since the academy opened, there have been significant changes in staffing at all levels.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good, in order to accelerate progress and raise attainment throughout the academy, by:
 - raising the expectations further of what pupils of all ages and abilities can achieve
 - making certain the good quality of information on pupils' progress is always used to shape and adapt tasks to closely match their abilities and needs
 - ensuring that marking consistently helps pupils to improve their achievement
 - improving the teaching of phonics to enable pupils to enhance their reading skills through making sense of words accurately and quickly.
- Strengthen leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - sharpening the checking skills of leaders, managers and governors so that they have an accurate grasp of the stage of development, progress and achievement of all groups of pupils
 - establishing a clear-cut, whole-academy strategy for improving the quality of teaching and classroom support that has a relentless focus upon quickening progress and raising achievement
 - including measurable yardsticks and explicit timescales in academy improvement planning to speed up the pace of improvement and ensure that the impact of actions is accurately measured.
- Improve the quality of learning in the early years by:
 - ensuring that all teaching and classroom support maintains a relentless focus on continually extending children's skills, experience, knowledge and understanding
 - making certain that there are ample opportunities for children to practise their early reading, writing and number skills, whether indoors or outdoors.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The Principal, capably supported by a committed team of managers and staff, has created a strong ethos and positive learning environment in which pupils behave well and are happy, safe and secure. Nevertheless, despite the recent appreciable improvements in pupils' outcomes that have been gained from a very low base, these improvements are at the early stages of impacting on pupils' higher achievement.
- Together with the Principal and senior leaders, the academy sponsor and improvement adviser have an accurate and insightful view of current performance, including that of the governing body. The academy sponsor and improvement advisor are extremely proactive and resolute in addressing weaknesses, providing robust challenge and taking any action necessary to further strengthen leadership at all levels.
- Teaching and learning is competently led and managed. At times, staff skills and talents are nurtured well by senior leaders. Yet, the leadership of teaching requires improvement because a robust, whole-academy strategy has not been fully embedded to ensure that pupils' progress and achievement improves quickly and consistently. The best practice that exists in the academy is not currently shared widely enough. Although performance management ensures that there is no automatic pay progression, opportunities are missed to set more challenging targets for teaching and classroom support staff improvement.
- Systems to check and assess pupils' progress, achievement and attainment are robust, but the skills of leaders and managers to pinpoint strengths and areas for improvement are not fully developed. Opportunities are missed to ensure that improvement targets are both challenging and measurable. Consequently, the evaluation of pupils' performance and the quality of teaching is sometimes over generous.
- Middle leaders are increasingly confident and skilled at checking the performance in their areas of responsibility. Even so, they are not yet rigorous enough in checking the impact of the actions they take to improve the outcomes for all pupil groups.
- The interesting and at times rich curriculum is thoughtfully tailored to meet the experiences and interests of pupils. It is securely rooted in the development of the principal British values, such as fair play, tolerance and respect. Resourced provision is well matched to the wide-ranging needs of individual pupils. This makes certain that they make good progress.
- The academy is firmly committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. It is successful in tackling any form of discrimination and works tirelessly to raise pupils' aspirations and self-esteem. Nevertheless, pupils do not achieve equally across all ages and abilities.
- Leaders work hard to ensure that pupil premium funding is used effectively. For example, they provide interesting experiences, such as participating in the National Shakespeare Project. However, although attainment gaps are closing, they are not closing quickly or consistently enough because pupils' progress requires improvement.
- Primary school sport funding is used well to promote healthy lifestyles and develop pupils' sporting skills. As a result, participation rates in sport are first-rate, including in lunchtime and after-school activities. Better-trained staff foster higher levels of skill and offer wider sporting opportunities. Effective partnership working provides opportunities to develop more advanced skills, such as in sport leader training.
- Safeguarding and child protection meet requirements. Procedures are firmly established and much effective practice is adopted in the day-to-day management, care and protection of pupils, especially those potentially vulnerable.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body have demonstrated a good deal of commitment to improving the quality of pupils' education. Working alongside leaders and managers, governors regularly check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress information. They take advantage of the good training provided by the local authority.
 - Governors keep a check on the impact of pupil premium funding and recognise that improvement is needed to close attainment gaps. They understand the value of linking teachers' performance to pay progression but have not ensured that management arrangements include measurable targets. Despite their efforts, governors do not always have an accurate enough view of the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, the level of challenge that they provide is sometimes variable.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are welcoming, polite and happy. Relationships with staff are relaxed and friendly, including in the very well attended, busy breakfast club. The large majority of pupils are keen and interested in their learning. Their positive attitudes help to contribute to their improving progress in lessons.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and at social times. The dining hall is well organised and pupils enjoy the opportunities to talk to their friends. Older pupils are encouraged to adopt sensible, thoughtful and helpful attitudes in their play with younger pupils. In lessons, disruption of any sort is very infrequent, although now and then pupils lose concentration when activities do not capture and hold their interest well enough.
- Pupils in the resourced provision demonstrate good levels of self-control. They follow routines well because they are interested and keen to learn, and develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff.
- At times, excellent provision is made to modify the behaviour of individual pupils with often complex behavioural needs. Staff are highly skilled at nurturing good habits to enable them to manage the rigours of whole-class working.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. This is underpinned by often high quality work with specialist agencies to care and protect pupils, including those potentially vulnerable or extremely anxious.
- In discussions, pupils demonstrate a good awareness of the various forms that bullying can take, including cyber bullying. They report that, in the event of any inappropriate behaviour, staff take effective action to resolve any problems, especially those the pupils are not able to resolve themselves.
- Persistent absence, which at one time was high, is now well below national averages. Attendance has improved steadily year-on-year since the academy opened and now is close to the national average. This is the consequence of the academy's determined drive to raise family aspirations, improve the quality of pupils' learning and ensure that the systems for checking attendance are rigorous.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not been consistently good enough over time to ensure that pupils of all abilities achieve well, especially in the early years and Key Stage 1. Activities have not always been matched well enough to pupils' individual abilities, given the good progress information available. Consequently, knowledge and understanding have not been consistently built upon or at sufficient pace.
- There are a few good examples of staff significantly raising the demands they make of pupils, such as when two pupils successfully gained the highest level in mathematics for the first time at the end of Year 6 in 2014. However, not enough staff have challenged pupils sufficiently over time to extend their knowledge and deepen their understanding quickly. Consequently, too few pupils exceed what is expected of them.
- When rates of progress are too variable and achievement is not high enough:
 - expectations of what pupils can achieve from their various starting points are not consistently high enough
 - the level of challenge presented to pupils is too variable and opportunities are missed to adapt and modify tasks to fill gaps identified in pupils' skills and experience
 - opportunities are not taken to practise essential speaking, reading, writing and number skills in all subjects
 - marking of pupils' work does not sufficiently help them to improve their achievement.
- In activities where there is a good match to pupils' ability and interest, progress is faster and achievement more consistent; for example, Year 6 pupils wrote a detailed and easy-to-read instruction manual. The imaginative planning of tasks that capture pupils' interest adds that extra spark to learning. Questioning continuously probes, consolidates and stretches pupils' thinking. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly. Any gaps or misunderstandings in pupils' learning are quickly identified and addressed.
- Regular, encouraging marking is established but does not always demand corrections or provide improvement guidance. The accuracy and layout of pupils' work in books is much improved in Years 4, 5, and 6, but the quality remains too variable in other year groups and pupils are not challenged enough to

improve their presentation.

- There are good examples of well-targeted help and support by teachers and support staff for individual pupils, such as in the resourced provision. This enables them to make good progress, especially in their social and emotional development. However, support for learning for those with special educational needs, including in the early years, is not well enough targeted to enable pupils to make consistently good progress.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement still requires improvement because, despite recent good improvement, progress is too variable across all subjects and key stages. Variable expectations of pupils' performance lead to inconsistent patterns of progress and achievement. As a result, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, although improving, is still below average overall. The most-able pupils and those who are disadvantaged do not achieve well.
- In the 2014 Year 1 national phonics screening check, too many pupils failed to reach the expected standard. However, inspection evidence points to a rise in the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in this year's check. Not all pupils who resit the phonics check in Year 2 reach the expected standard. Despite improvements, the teaching of letter and sound relationships, particularly in the early years and in Year 1, has not been systematic and effective enough.
- Although pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 is improving, attainment remains below average overall.
- Attainment in the Year 6 national tests in 2014 was below average in writing and mathematics, and low in reading and spelling, punctuation and grammar. Positive action taken to improve attainment has led to faster progress in all subjects for the current Year 6. There is evidence of rapid improvement in pupils' reading and writing skills, but their attainment in these skills remains marginally below the expected level overall. The proportion of pupils on track to make more than expected progress, though rising, is still below average.
- The progress of disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and the few who speak English as an additional language, requires improvement. This is because intervention and support programmes, although increasingly more precisely targeted, are not yet focused accurately enough upon each pupil's exact needs. Those pupils who have special educational needs in the resourced provision make good progress as a result of well-directed intervention and support.
- The demands made of the most-able and talented pupils are increasing, but are not yet consistently high enough. Not enough activities encourage pupils to think critically, reason, make deductions and explain their solutions. As a result, not enough of the current Year 6 pupils are on course to achieve the highest levels.
- In the 2014 tests at the end of Year 6, disadvantaged pupils were close to three terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Compared with their classmates, gaps were over one term in reading, writing and mathematics, but in line in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In the current Year 6, gaps in comparison with other pupils nationally are on track to reduce in all subjects, with gaps just over one term in reading and writing. Gaps in mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar look set to be marginally improved. The variable pattern of progress and attainment, confirmed by inspection evidence, reflects the inconsistent pattern of challenge in teaching and learning. As a result, the progress of disadvantaged pupils requires improvement when compared with other pupils nationally.
- Staff are working conscientiously to foster a love and enjoyment of reading but pupils' reading skills, particularly those of younger pupils, still require improvement. While older pupils are happy to talk about what they enjoy reading, not all are especially knowledgeable about popular authors and themes.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Children enter the Nursery with skills below those typical for their age. Speech, language and number skills are sometimes weak. Although progress in the Nursery is sometimes good, achievement by the end of the Reception Year still requires improvement, despite an increasing proportion of children now reaching the expected level for their age. Consequently, not all children are well enough prepared for Year 1.
- Even though progress is faster in the Nursery, a big improvement on the low levels of progress when the

academy opened, children's progress overall requires improvement. This includes for those children who are the most able and those with special educational needs. Children's skills in blending letters and sounds together to make sense of words are a weakness because teaching does not yet develop these skills thoroughly or fast enough.

- Teaching requires improvement. This is because there is not a relentless enough focus on children's learning in all activities, including in their play, to build carefully and consistently upon their essential skills, such as in speaking, listening, reading, writing and number.
- Behaviour is good. There is a firm focus upon building early confidence, fostering good self-control and nurturing independence. The caring atmosphere reinforced by the good quality relationships with staff, helps to foster children's positive attitudes to learning.
- Regular observations and checks on children's development and well-being are well embedded in daily routines. Positive links with parents make certain that they are involved in their children's learning in positive and constructive ways.
- Despite the quality of what the academy provides in the early years improving year-on-year, leadership and management require improvement. This is because there is not a sharp enough focus on ensuring that all children progress quickly to enable them to achieve as well as they can. Good day-to-day management ensures that all children are safe, secure and well protected.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139959
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	450311

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	434
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Hart
Principal	Beth Atkinson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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