

Harpenden Academy

Vaughan Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 4EN

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership is highly effective. The positive impact that leaders have had on improving the school is very clear. The school is now securely good and improving.
- The school's curriculum is strong and well planned. The curriculum meets the needs of current pupils very well.
- The school provides particularly well for pupils' social and emotional development and their mental-health needs. This is a key strength of the school.
- The quality of teaching is now consistently good. Staff know pupils as individuals and meet their needs well.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. The proportion that reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is above average.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils are cared for well and taught, systematically, how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations.
- Pupils behave well in their classrooms and during breaktimes. They listen carefully and follow the school's rules.
- Outcomes have improved greatly since the school opened as part of the Scholars' Education Trust. Progress is now in line with the national average and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics combined is above average.
- Pupils' attainment in writing is less strong than in reading and mathematics. Pupils do not apply their spelling and grammar knowledge well enough. Some of the youngest children do not form letters correctly and muddle capitals and lower-case letters.
- The quality of teaching in writing has improved. This has not yet had enough impact on outcomes.
- Pupils make strong progress across a wide range of subjects. However, few pupils make substantial and sustained progress across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes in writing, so that pupils attain as well as they do in reading and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - the effectiveness of the way that writing is taught continues to improve
 - pupils apply their knowledge about spelling and grammar in their written work
 - the youngest children form letters correctly, and use capital and lower-case letters accurately.
- Increase the proportion of pupils, throughout the school, that make substantial and sustained progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The predecessor school went through a continued period of great turbulence, from its inception to the point of its academisation under the Scholars' Education Trust, in September 2016. The predecessor school had five headteachers during the four years that it was open.
- The current headteacher joined the school when it reopened as part of the trust. She has provided much-needed stability and clear direction. The headteacher has high expectations and wants the very best for pupils. Her vision is shared by the school's other leaders. As a result, the school has improved greatly and is now on a clear upward trajectory.
- Leaders have an excellent understanding of what effective teaching and learning looks like. They identify the key strengths of what they see in classrooms, as well as the areas that could be improved. Leaders are not afraid to hold difficult conversations. Where necessary, they have made difficult decisions in order to improve the quality of teaching, in the best interests of the school and its pupils.
- Leaders have a clear rationale for their curriculum, which has been developed to meet the needs of the school's current pupils. Leaders have identified four 'curriculum drivers': global knowledge, resilience, first-hand experiences and values. These principles are specific to the school's current pupils. Leaders use the principles to guide them in formulating a curriculum that is best suited to the pupils who currently attend.
- Leaders place a strong emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a key feature of the school. From the time they join the school, pupils are gradually taught to take responsibility and to become independent learners. Leaders take pupils' social, emotional and mental-health needs very seriously too. They ensure that individual pupils are provided with the support they need. Leaders ensure that pupils are helped to develop key life skills, such as resilience and how to be assertive.
- Subject leadership is developing very well. Leaders are very effective in monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in the subjects that they are responsible for. This is helping them to bring about improvements. Leaders show a good understanding of their individual roles.
- The leadership of English and mathematics is very strong. Leaders have excellent knowledge and understanding of these subjects. They have taken a wide range of suitable actions that have had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes in the school.
- Leaders made reading a priority and took highly effective action to improve it. For example, scrutiny of pupils' reading records showed that too few pupils were reading regularly at home. In response, to encourage families to share books at home, the school filmed members of staff reading stories aloud. These videos were uploaded to the school's website and have now been viewed almost 800 times in total.
- The school receives a small amount of pupil premium grant funding, as there are very few eligible pupils in the school. Leaders have ensured that there is a highly

individualised approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils, according to their identified needs. The pupil premium grant is spent effectively, for example to address issues of equality of access to extra-curricular activities.

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is led and managed well. Leaders' detailed knowledge about the needs of individual pupils means that they put the right measures in place to support them. This enables pupils with SEND to attend and enjoy school, as well as making good progress.
- Pupils have a strong 'voice' in the school. They are given regular opportunities to make their feelings about the school known. Leaders listen to what pupils say and, where appropriate, take action in response to what they hear. The school's 'family group' system is used well to encourage this, with pupils from every year group meeting together, twice per half term, to discuss specific questions. Toward the end of the academic year, these meetings are run by the Year 6 pupils, who have been taught how to do so by staff.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society. Leaders ensure that pupils are given opportunities to learn about important issues such as tolerance and the rule of law. For example, when they were in Year 5 the current Year 6 pupils took part in a six-week course to become 'mini-police'. They worked with police officers to tackle illegal parking around the school and were presented certificates, by the chief constable, in recognition of their work.
- The trust's central leadership team supports school-based leadership well. The trust provides a range of services centrally, including finance, buildings, estates and information technology. This approach is effective in releasing the headteacher, and other school-based leaders, to focus on improving teaching, learning and outcomes.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body knows the school very well. Governors have an excellent understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They have a realistic view about where the school is now and what still needs to be done.
- Governors have a good range of skills that enable them to fulfil their roles well. For example, one member of the local governing body is a qualified social worker, who uses their knowledge and expertise to take a lead on safeguarding. This helps the local governing body to have confidence that safeguarding arrangements in the school are effective.
- Some aspects of governance are the responsibility of the trust's central leadership team. These leaders have excellent knowledge about school leadership, enabling them to hold the school-based leaders fully to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's designated safeguarding leads have a strong understanding of their roles and of current guidance about safeguarding. This enables them to fulfil their roles effectively.

- The school uses an electronic system to record concerns about possible abuse or neglect. These records are kept well and show that staff raise concerns appropriately. Records also show that the designated safeguarding leads take suitable action, when necessary, to protect children.
- Staff receive regular training in safeguarding. They have the up-to-date training they need to enable them to be vigilant and to report concerns promptly. Appropriate systems are in place to enable them to do so.
- The school's single central record of pre-appointment checks meets current requirements. Leaders have ensured that all the necessary checks are carried out on staff, volunteers, contractors and governors before they are allowed to work with children. Systems around the safer recruitment of staff are robust and well organised. Leaders have a good understanding of safer-recruitment practices.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has improved greatly since the predecessor school was inspected in September 2015. Leaders have ensured that teaching is now consistently good and that it is continuing to improve.
- Specific actions taken by leaders have had a direct, positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. For example, leaders were not satisfied with the quality of science teaching. In response, they introduced a commercially produced scheme of work and this has been highly successful. Teachers are now more confident in teaching science and pupils show a great love of, and interest in, the subject.
- Relationships between pupils and the adults who work in the school are very strong. Staff know pupils well and this helps to make classrooms positive and welcoming environments, where pupils feel comfortable and ready to learn.
- Strong systems are in place for identifying the individual needs of pupils with SEND. Teachers work closely with the special educational needs coordinator to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to meet these needs. For example, good-quality support is put in place to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental-health needs. These strategies are effective and enable pupils with SEND to make good progress.
- Teachers plan lessons, and series of lessons, effectively. They ensure that pupils are given opportunities to develop and consolidate their knowledge and understanding. This helps to ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Throughout the school, teachers use the same system to offer pupils the right level of challenge for their individual needs or abilities. Teachers use their strong knowledge about pupils to guide them towards one of four levels of challenge: paddling, snorkelling, diving and scuba-diving.
- Teachers have strong knowledge about a range of subjects, including science and computing. This enables them to explain concepts clearly and answer questions fully. As a result, pupils understand and remember what they are taught.
- Teachers focus well on developing pupils' vocabulary, including subject-specific vocabulary. Leaders have put measures in place to enable parents to support their children's vocabulary development. This approach is working well.

- Spelling and punctuation have not been taught effectively over time. The teaching of writing is improving but is not yet as effective as in other subjects. Progress has been made in this area and this is evident in the results of the national grammar, punctuation and spelling test. However, these improvements have not fully translated into pupils' written work. There remains a legacy of underachievement in some pupils' writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school's focus on developing pupils' social, emotional and mental-health needs is a particular strength. Pupils are understood as individuals. Leaders and staff do everything in their power to support pupils' individual social, emotional and mental-health needs. As a result, pupils develop well as happy and successful human beings.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are very strong. The atmosphere in classrooms is very positive. Teachers know pupils well and this helps to create positive learning environments, where pupils feel happy, secure and well liked.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet. Leaders have ensured that safety is taught systematically and there is clear progression as pupils move through the school.
- Pupils are taught about safety issues at a level appropriate to their age. For example, Year 6 pupils visit the 'crucial crew' and learn about issues related to crime, while children in Reception visit the fire station to learn about people who help us. There is a strong focus on e-safety.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They show a keen interest in the subjects that they learn about. For example, pupils willingly volunteer to answer teachers' questions, doing so competently and confidently.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. They listen to each other, showing respect for each other's views, and managing discussions well. Pupils enjoy coming to school and appreciate the support that they receive from their teachers.
- Bullying is extremely rare. In a meeting with one of the inspectors, pupils stated emphatically that there is no bullying at all at Harpenden Academy. This response was typical. Pupils know that they can talk to any adult if bullying should ever occur. They know that staff will always help them and that problems are sorted out quickly when they do occur.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They listen carefully and respond quickly to instructions. The school's rules are simple and easy to remember. They are reinforced frequently and even the very youngest children know the rules well.

- Overall attendance has improved since the school opened. There have been significant improvements in the attendance of pupils with SEND. This has been achieved by improving the quality of teaching, so that pupils want to come to school, and engaging better with parents.
- A range of effective strategies are used to secure good attendance. These have had a particularly strong impact on reducing the amount of persistent absence. Persistent absence is now well below the national average. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Published assessment information shows that outcomes are improving in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 was above the national average at the expected standard in reading and mathematics in 2018, and similar to the national average in writing. Progress was average in all three subjects in 2018. It should be noted that the progress data related to fewer than half of the pupils in the group.
- In 2018, the proportion of Year 6 pupils that reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was above the national average, having been well below average in 2017. Similarly, pupils' attainment in mathematics was above national average in 2018, having been below it the previous year.
- The school's own assessment information shows that most current pupils are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics and some are making even better progress. This good progress is clearly evident in pupils' exercise books.
- Pupils make good progress in learning phonics. Results of the phonics screening check are very strong, with almost all Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard for the last two years. When pupils do not reach the expected standard, appropriate measures are put in place to ensure that they do so in Year 2.
- Pupils read confidently and fluently. They use their strong phonics skills to read unfamiliar words. Pupils are given texts to read that are appropriate for their age and ability. Most pupils read for pleasure outside school.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points. For example, they read confidently and fluently. Overall, there remains a difference in attainment, with disadvantaged pupils attaining less well than their peers. The actions taken by leaders are starting to diminish this difference.
- Pupils with SEND also make good progress, particularly in mathematics and reading. Progress in writing is less strong but improving. Improvements in pupils' confidence and resilience are clearly evident over time.
- Pupils make good progress across a wide range of subjects. The work in their exercise books is of good quality and reflects the range of topics that they learn about. Pupils talk knowledgeably about topics such as volcanoes and earthquakes. They know and remember a range of key facts. They use this knowledge to talk about subjects with maturity.
- Pupils' work in science is strong and scientific rigour is evident. Leaders have put a

range of strategies in place, including the introduction of a new scheme of work. This has had a notable impact on improving pupils' love of science and their scientific outcomes.

- Writing is relatively weaker than other subjects. Some pupils' use of grammar, and the accuracy of their spelling, is not as good as it should be.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision is led well. Leaders have a good understanding of the provision's strengths and weaknesses. The impact of the actions they have taken is clear in the improved provision. Leaders' self-evaluation about the early years is accurate.
- Relationships between adults and children are strong. Children are happy, settled and relaxed in their classroom. Staff have created a welcoming environment for the youngest children in the school. As a result, the children in the early years develop into confident young learners. They enjoy their learning and are keen to talk to adults about what they are doing.
- Children behave well and follow adults' instructions quickly. They listen carefully to what adults say and this helps them to know what they should be doing next. The children behave very well and are kind and caring towards each other. The children know the school's rules, 'be kind, be safe, be respectful', and understand that this is what is expected of them. They respond accordingly.
- The children make good progress during their time in the early years. By the end of the Reception Year, all children are beginning to write meaningfully. Some children are able to write longer pieces of writing, with correctly spelled words and in demarcated sentences. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been above the national average for the past two years.
- Children show a keen interest in books and reading. They have learned to tell stories, using pictorial story maps to keep them on track, and do so expressively. Children choose to share their story-telling with each other and with adults. Some children are already competent readers, able to read simple stories accurately without the need for adult support.
- Staff know the children very well. They are alert to individual children's particular needs and this helps them to provide the right support at the right time. Staff ensure that they plan for a wide range of learning opportunities in order to meet children's needs.
- The early years provision is well equipped. The classroom is spacious and well organised. The children know where everything is kept and what they are allowed to help themselves to. This encourages them to become independent as learners from an early stage.
- Some children's handwriting is less well developed than others. In some cases, children do not form letters correctly and use capital letters where lower case is needed.

School details

Unique reference number	143648
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10087458

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Geoff Newman
Headteacher	Lisa Davies
Telephone number	01582 716910
Website	www.harpendenacademy.co.uk
Email address	office@harpendenacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- A full inspection of the predecessor school was carried out on 17 to 18 September 2015. The overall effectiveness of the predecessor school was judged to require improvement. The predecessor school was also judged to require improvement at an earlier inspection, in March 2014.
- The school joined the Scholars' Education Trust, and re-opened as an academy free school, in September 2016. The current headteacher joined the school at the same time.
- A local governing body is responsible for the day-to-day strategic leadership of the school. The board of trustees has ultimate responsibility for the governance of the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. Inspectors observed parts of lessons, some jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils' work, including their exercise books and their art work. They talked to pupils about their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of the school's documents including assessment information. They checked the school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other documentation concerned with the safer recruitment of staff and volunteers.
- Meetings were held with: trustees, governors, senior leaders, other staff and a group of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. Inspectors considered 149 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and two letters from parents.
- Inspectors took account of 26 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Constable

Ofsted Inspector

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