

# Molehill Primary Academy

Hereford Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 7ND

## Inspection dates

9–10 December 2015

## Overall effectiveness

**Requires improvement**

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an academy that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is uneven from class to class and so pupils are not always building on their previous achievements.
- By the end of Year 6, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are too low and too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good or better across the academy because not all teachers have high expectations for what pupils can achieve.
- Work is sometimes not demanding enough to challenge most-able pupils so they do not always achieve as well as they could.
- Pupils occasionally lose their focus on learning when teaching does not fully engage or motivate them. Sometimes they do not persevere with their work or show interest in following teachers' suggestions to improve.
- In the early years, activities are not always planned to meet children's needs and interests and so the progress children make is not always as rapid as it could be.

### The academy has the following strengths

- The executive principal, senior leaders and governors have worked very effectively and made significant changes to secure improvement.
- The quality of education has improved. Pupils are making better progress as a result of the improving quality of teaching. Standards are rising, particularly in Key Stage 1, although still below average.
- Staff morale is high. All share leaders' relentless and determined drive to provide the best possible learning and experiences for pupils.
- Attendance has improved and is now average.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the academy and they are polite, friendly and respectful.
- The number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced considerably.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and ensure that pupils feel safe and secure in school.
- The provision in the early years ensures that children are happy and safe and enjoy their learning.

## Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the academy no longer requires significant improvement.

### What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by:
  - ensuring that pupils make the same fast progress in all classes to enable them to catch up in their learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by:
  - raising expectations for what all pupils can achieve
  - providing more demanding work to challenge most-able pupils and give them time to complete it
  - building on pupils' increasingly positive attitudes to learning so that all pupils are keen to learn, to behave well in class and improve their work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The rapid and highly effective action of the executive principal since September, and her work as lead principal of the three cluster schools prior to this, have brought about significant improvements in teaching, pupils' progress, attendance, safety and behaviour.
- Robust monitoring and evaluation quickly identified significant weaknesses that had persisted for some time and resulted in significant underachievement for pupils. Not enough teaching is yet good and standards remain below average by the end of Key Stage 2. Leaders' high expectations, however, are ensuring that pupils are now making better progress to help them catch up with gaps in their learning.
- Leaders use the information from the checks on the academy's performance to inform the plans for improvement. These are sharply focused and provide a clear steer for further rapid improvement. Expectations for staff, pupils, leaders and governors are indicated with robust deadlines to ensure that further success in pupils' achievement is rapid and secure.
- The executive principal has, with the board of governors and the Leigh Academies Trust's development group, secured the confidence of staff and pupils in the leadership of the academy. There is now a shared sense of purpose, drive, enthusiasm and determination to continue and increase the pace of improvement. Staff morale is high. One member of staff expressed a view shared by many with the comment, 'The atmosphere in this school has changed enormously. The children and staff have a greater sense of purpose and there is a general calmness in the school.'
- The collaborative working culture across the three primary schools in the cluster ensures that leaders of subjects and those with other key areas of responsibility at all levels are increasingly effective and influential. One leader commented, 'The executive principal is inspirational and allows us to thrive as leaders. We are empowered to make changes.' In addition, leaders with proven track records of skills and expertise support all staff across the cluster and at Molehill have had a significant impact in securing improvement, for example in teaching and learning.
- Leadership in the hearing impaired unit is effective and ensures that pupils' needs are met well and that they are appropriately supported when they learn in class with other pupils.
- Leaders at all levels, are, however, fully aware that there is not yet enough consistently good or better teaching to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can. There are rigorous systems to ensure that pupils' progress and the quality of teaching are regularly and accurately checked. Where weaknesses are identified, teachers receive appropriate support and guidance and underperformance is challenged. As a result, inadequate teaching has been eradicated and progress is improving.
- The management of teachers' performance is closely linked to pupils' progress and teachers know that they are accountable and have challenging targets for pupils' achievements.
- The strategic work of the trust and the collaboration with the other schools in the cluster have had very positive benefits for leaders, staff and pupils in forging improvement. New appointments have been made for January 2016 to further increase the leadership capacity.
- The academy fosters good relations between all its pupils and between pupils and staff. Equality of opportunity is promoted and embedded in the academy's values and so all groups have the opportunity to make similar progress. Pupils are accepting and tolerant of difference and diversity within the academy. Leaders ensure that pupils learn without fear of discrimination of any kind. A testament to this is the considerate and caring way in which pupils learn and play with pupils from the hearing impaired unit. Pupils are effectively prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is promoted effectively through the teaching and the academy's values. Cultural development is evident in pupils' enjoyment and participation in a range of art, music and sporting opportunities. Pupils have less awareness of cultural diversity beyond the academy and local community.
- The subjects taught are broad and balanced with an appropriate emphasis on literacy and mathematics. A new curriculum has recently been introduced. It is starting to provide more opportunities to link subjects across the curriculum to promote more purposeful and exciting learning. In particular, there are increased opportunities for pupils to write in subjects other than English to develop and apply their writing skills.
- The curriculum is enriched by extra activities that inspire and motivate pupils as well as giving them opportunities to learn new skills. The range of clubs and the level of participation have increased significantly since September.

- The academy is making effective use of the primary physical education and sport funding. The funding is spent in a range of ways to enhance the existing provision for physical education. These include membership of the Maidstone School Sports Partnership, which helps to enhance the skills of pupils and teachers and therefore improve outcomes for pupils. There is increased pupil participation in a wide range of sporting activities as well as support to include hearing impaired pupils.
- The academy uses the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively. It is carefully targeted to provide a range of additional support as appropriate to the needs of pupils. Leaders consistently check that the support is making a difference. Pupils are making similar progress to others and the attainment gaps between other pupils in the academy and other pupils nationally are beginning to narrow.
- Very few parents responded to the academy's own survey at the end of the last academic year and even fewer to the online questionnaire, Parent View, so it is difficult to draw conclusions from their responses. Most of the parents who spoke to inspectors valued the improvements that have recently been made. The most positive responses overall were that parents feel their children are happy and safe at school. Leaders took account of parents' suggestions in their own survey and took appropriate action. For example, there are now many more after-school clubs and children in the Reception Year are now taught in two classes instead of one.
- **The governance of the academy**
  - Governance has strengthened significantly since the academy became part of the Leigh Academies Trust. Governors are actively involved in the academy and share the ambition and determination of the executive principal to continue to improve the academy. They are fully aware of the next steps they need to take to eliminate the inconsistencies in teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation of the academy's performance are clearly defined across different levels of governance. Governors are well informed about all aspects of the academy's work by leaders and through their own visits. There is a good level of professional and educational expertise which enables governors to provide a good level of strategic work and challenge to leaders as well as to support and hold leaders to account. Progress information is analysed in detail and questions are asked where weaknesses are identified. Governors fully support the executive principal in expecting nothing less than good or better teaching and actions to tackle underperformance. Governors know that performance management and a robust training programme are helping to improve the quality of teaching and standards, and that pay progression is linked to pupils' progress. Governors have a very clear understanding of the spending of additional funding, and check to ensure that it is making a difference for pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures are well known and implemented by all staff to keep pupils safe. Procedures to check staff suitability are systematic and robust. Governors check safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are complete and meet statutory requirements.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because despite increasingly good teaching, inconsistencies remain across the academy.
- Although there have been improvements in teaching, not all teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils, particularly the most able. Work for most-able pupils is not always sufficiently demanding to enable them to make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- Marking is usually helpful. Most pupils are given time to respond to teachers' comments and, as a result, they improve their work. However, the quality of marking is not yet consistent in all classes. Occasionally pupils are not encouraged to use teachers' comments to help them improve so they make repeated errors in their work.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, committed and keen to take advice and learn from and with leaders about improving the quality of their teaching.
- Classrooms are generally attractive and well organised. Teachers and pupils make good use of displays of work in progress to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers make sure that pupils know what they are learning and what they need to do to be successful. Pupils know their targets for learning and say that this helps them know what they need to concentrate on to do better.

- The teaching of reading has improved and pupils' skills are improving. Skilled and confident phonics teaching in Year 1 is giving pupils the secure foundation they need to read and write successfully. Pupils enjoy group reading activities. Year 6 pupils were tackling challenging texts to develop a depth of understanding of characters and plots. They spoke enthusiastically about their favourite authors, giving considered reasons for their opinions.
- Teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning, working in class and with small groups or individuals outside the classroom.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

### Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Some pupils have yet to understand the need to try their hardest with their work, go the extra mile when asked to investigate or be willing to persevere and follow suggestions for how to improve.
- However, many pupils are beginning to demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and want to do well. The academy is successfully starting to raise pupils' self-esteem and aspirations, and promote a sense of belonging to the school community. The introduction of a school uniform has helped to do this.
- Staff look after pupils well and give high priority to their welfare needs.
- Pupils are polite and friendly and respectful of adults and each other.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media.
- Pupils understand what constitutes bullying as opposed to just 'falling out with friends'. They are confident that, should any problems arise, they could talk to their teachers who would deal with any problems effectively because they would listen and help them. All parents who responded to the academy's recent survey agreed that their children do not have any problems with bullying and the academy provides a safe environment in a happy atmosphere.
- Leaders have worked well with parents to improve attendance, which is now average.
- The breakfast club provides a safe and sociable start to the day.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although most pupils behave well in the majority of lessons, occasionally, when teaching does not fully engage or motivate, pupils lose their concentration and their focus on learning which slows their progress.
- Pupils say that behaviour has improved and that there is a calmer atmosphere in the academy than previously. Records show that this is the case. There are far fewer incidents of inappropriate behaviour than in the past and the number of exclusions has reduced significantly. One pupil said that he used to lose his temper and get into trouble but now, 'The school has taught me how to behave in a calmer way.'
- Behaviour in the playground, at lunchtimes and during assemblies is good, and pupils play and learn happily together. The majority of parents who responded to the academy's survey agree that behaviour in the academy is good.

## Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because it is uneven across the academy and, although improving, pupils are not making rapid enough progress to catch up from low starting points. A legacy of weaker teaching and staffing disruption means that some underachievement remains, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Progress is improving in reading, writing, mathematics and a range of other subjects as pupils become more confident and self-assured learners. Progress overall has accelerated for all pupils in recent months because of higher expectations and aspirations of leaders. Leaders have correctly identified, however, that many more pupils need to make even faster progress to catch up and achieve the expected standards.

- In 2015, standards by the end of Year 6 were considerably below average in reading, writing and mathematics and had dipped from the previous year in mathematics and reading, but had shown a slight increase in writing and grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- In 2015, standards by the end of Year 2 were also considerably below average but showed an improving and upward trend over the past three years in reading, writing and mathematics from their low starting points at the beginning of Year 1.
- Across the academy, work in pupils' books, leaders' checks on progress and the new assessment system are all showing that pupils are now making faster progress, which is much closer to and sometimes above what is expected. Based on their current progress, and with the increasing strengths in teaching and learning, pupils' attainment is on track to increase by the end of the year.
- The academy has focused on writing and providing many more opportunities for pupils to write across a range of subjects as well as in English lessons. The impact of this was seen in 2015 in the considerable increase from the previous year in the proportion of pupils who made the expected progress by the end of Year 6. Pupils are continuing to enhance their writing skills through opportunities to rehearse and talk through ideas before writing them down. This is also helping to improve pupils' language skills.
- Improvements in pupils' achievement in reading this year have been, in part, due to a greater promotion of reading and enjoyment of reading across the academy, and the introduction of reading challenges which motivate all pupils and especially boys, who were not making as much progress as girls last year.
- In 2015, there was a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level in the Year 1 national check on phonics (the sounds that letters make) although it was still below average. A higher proportion of the current Year 1 pupils are on track to achieve the expected level this year.
- Too few of the most-able pupils make better than expected progress. Expectations are not always high enough to ensure that they achieve well, especially in Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 2 last year, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher level improved from the previous year but was below average. By the end of Year 6, the proportion reaching the higher level dipped from the previous year. Currently, most-able pupils in all year groups respond well to challenges when they are presented to them, which is helping them to make faster progress. Sometimes, however, teachers plan work to develop pupils' depth of learning and understanding but do not give pupils time to complete these activities.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the academy is similar to other pupils in that it is improving but it is uneven across the academy. The gap between this group and other pupils is, however, narrowing and in some cases disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress than others.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils, which means that it is uneven across the academy. The extra support they receive is well organised and closely checked to make sure that it is meeting their needs effectively. Pupils from the hearing impaired unit are included very well in the mainstream classes and their individual needs are met very well. Working with other pupils has helped to improve their social and learning skills, and helped their classmates to understand and accept difference and the needs of others.

## Early years provision

## requires improvement

- Many children start in the Reception classes with skills and knowledge that are well below those expected for their age particularly in their communication, language, literacy and number skills. In 2014, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development by the end of the early years was below average. In 2015, this proportion improved and was similar to that found nationally, and so children were much better prepared to continue their learning in Year 1.
- Teaching, as in the rest of the academy, is improving. However, it is not yet consistently good. Despite some well-planned, engaging learning opportunities, as seen when children were fully engrossed in a range of interesting activities to develop mathematical skills, activities are not always planned to meet children's needs and interests. Consequently the progress children make is not always as rapid as it could be.
- The early years team has correctly identified that information gathered from observations of children's learning should be used more effectively to move children's learning forward in a purposeful way.
- The team has made significant changes to the Reception classrooms and outdoor area to provide a better environment in which children can learn. This is helping children to make choices and to increase their independence. Sometimes, however, adults do things for the children that they could do for themselves.

- Appropriate emphasis is given to children’s communication, language and literacy development, and most children catch up quickly. Children enjoy writing independently and are proud of their efforts. The potential of the outdoor space and the role play areas has not yet been fully developed to provide more opportunities for children to write independently.
- Leadership of the early years is effective and has led to children’s better achievement because the early years team is supported by an experienced leader with appropriate skills and expertise. The team works closely with early years colleagues in the cluster to share good practice and develop their skills.
- Staff ensure that all the safeguarding and welfare requirements are met and children are well looked after, safe and happy.
- The needs of any children whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, including disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are identified at an early stage so that appropriate support is given.
- There are effective procedures to get to know the children and their families before they start at the academy and staff are always available to talk to parents on a daily basis. Children quickly learn the routines and expectations, and work and play well together. They learn to respect and understand that some children have different needs, which was shown to good effect when children were playing with small bricks with a child from the hearing impaired unit and ensured that he was fully included in their play and learning.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138195
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10007294

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	285
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The academy board
<b>Chair</b>	Graham Clewes
<b>Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge</b>	Debbie Biggenden
<b>Telephone number</b>	016222 751729
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.molehillprimaryacademy.org.uk">www.molehillprimaryacademy.org.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:deborah.biggenden@latrust.org.uk">deborah.biggenden@latrust.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3–4 December 2013

## Information about this academy

- The academy is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The academy includes a specialist unit for pupils with hearing impairment. There are currently seven pupils on the roll and they are integrated into the mainstream classes for almost all of their time.
- The early years education is provided in two Reception classes which children attend full time.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The academy provides a daily breakfast club.
- The academy does not meet the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Until the end of February 2015, the academy was sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust. From the beginning of March, it became a member of the Leigh Academies Trust. The academy is now a member of a local cluster of three of the trust's academies. The executive principal of the cluster has been leading the academy on an operational day-to-day basis since the previous headteacher resigned at the end of the last academic year.



## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 14 lessons. They talked to pupils about their learning and looked at the work in pupils' books. They observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime, and asked them for their views on the academy. Inspectors also heard some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the executive principal, academy leaders, governors and representatives of the Leigh Academies Trust. The inspectors looked at a wide range of documents including the academy's own check on its performance and the quality of teaching; improvement plans; information on pupils' progress; and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 10 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, that included two written comments, and the academy's own survey of parents to which 13 parents responded. Inspectors talked to some parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors also took account of 20 questionnaires returned by staff.

## Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Kirstine Boon	Ofsted Inspector
Anthony Linnett	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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