

Heron Park Academy

Dallington Road, Hampden Park, Eastbourne, BN22 9EE

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Teaching is not consistently good enough to make sure that all pupils that have previously fallen behind are catching up as quickly as they could and achieve well.
- Too often, all pupils do very similar work, which does not meet the different needs of the most able and those working just below the levels that they should be for their age.
- At the end of the academy's first year, not enough pupils left Year 6 working at the levels expected for their age and too few of the most able were reaching the higher levels that they should.
- Teachers' marking does not help pupils to improve their work regularly enough.
- Changes in staffing at class and leadership level have hampered the pace of improvement since the academy opened.
- Key academy leaders are relatively new in post, so there has not been enough time for changes to have always secured consistently good practice.
- Governors do not use the information available about the academy's performance to make sure leaders are doing the right things to bring about improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy is moving in the right direction under the current senior leaders. The quality of teaching and pupils' achievement is improving.
- Vital improvements to pupils' attitudes and behaviour are helping them to make quicker progress. Pupils feel safe and enjoy school.
- Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage where teaching is good.
- The range of activities, both in and out of lessons, promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The academy trust has played a key role, including the recruiting of key leaders who are now driving improvements.
- Staff are building stronger links with parents, finding different ways to engage them in their children's education.

Information about this inspection

- As part of the evidence gathered to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, inspectors made a total of 21 visits across all 12 classes and a sample of additional-help groups. During these visits, they balanced observing what was happening at the time with talking to pupils and looking at their work to get a bigger picture of what teaching is typically like.
- Further discussions were held with pupils, either in groups or informally across the school day. Inspectors also spoke with staff, a range of school leaders (including the executive headteacher and the interim head of school), representatives of those responsible for the academy’s governance arrangements (including the local advisory board and academy trust) and parents.
- A total of 40 responses to the Parent View online survey were considered alongside 29 surveys completed by staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the academy’s documentation, including information about the attainment and progress of current pupils, records of the academy’s own monitoring and evaluation of how well it is doing, surveys completed by parents, behaviour and incident logs and minutes of meetings held by those responsible for the academy’s governance.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Velia Hartland	Additional Inspector
Bill James	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Heron Park Academy is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The academy opened in September 2012 and is sponsored by, and part of, the Aurora Academies Trust. The Trust operates four academies in East Sussex. An executive headteacher has been responsible for three of these academies, including Heron Park, since April 2013. In addition, an interim head of school has been in post since February 2014.
- The academy receives additional government funding, known as pupil premium, for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in local authority care or for children of service families, for nearly half of all pupils. This is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities supported at school action level is well above average. The proportion supported at the school action plus level, or with a statement of special educational needs, is broadly average.
- The academy did not meet the government floor standards in 2013, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure consistently good teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 to ensure that pupils of different abilities achieve well and reach the levels they should by:
 - using information about what pupils already know and can do more effectively, especially in mathematics, to move their learning forward at a good pace
 - setting consistently high expectations across all subjects and classes
 - making better use of questioning to deepen and challenge pupils' thinking at their differing levels
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write for extended periods to develop their stamina and skills
 - ensuring marking frequently helps pupils to improve their work or move on in their learning, and ensuring pupils use it well.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management by:
 - involving academy leaders below the most senior team more in the drive to secure consistently good or better teaching and pupil progress
 - summarising data about the progress of individual pupils to give a sharp and precise overview of the proportions that are making enough progress, including different groups
 - setting clear, measurable targets for improvement wherever possible, including regular milestones that can be used to check progress
 - increasing the challenge provided to academy leaders by the local advisory board of governors, including through better use of data about pupils' achievement
 - evaluating the impact of specific additional interventions, including those supported by pupil premium funding.

A review of governance and the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils do not make good progress consistently enough. There are variations between classes and subjects.
- In 2013, although the academy had been open for less than a year, too few pupils left having achieved the levels they should in reading, writing and mathematics to be adequately prepared for secondary education. Significantly fewer most able pupils than seen nationally reached the higher levels at either Key Stages 1 or 2. While still below national figures, greater proportions of current Year 6 pupils are working at or beyond the level expected.
- A substantial proportion of children begin Reception Year without the range of knowledge and skills that would usually be expected for their age. Adults waste no time in identifying areas of need and good teaching in Early Years Foundation Stage is helping children to quickly catch up and fill those gaps.
- There are clear signs that this is already having a positive impact in Year 1. The proportion of pupils currently working at the expected levels in terms of their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics), though still below previous national figures, is much closer than last year.
- Rates of progress across Key Stages 1 and 2 are improving and standards are rising from low starting points. There are pockets emerging where rapid progress is sustained over time, but this is inconsistent.
- Improvements in reading are moving more quickly than in mathematics. Pupils' enjoyment of reading and their engagement with the frequent opportunities to read across the day and beyond with the 'reading challenge' is clearly evident.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics, and learn a wide range of skills and processes. However, as topics are revisited, these do not always increase in difficulty at the right pace to help pupils of differing abilities learn and move on as quickly as they could, including the most able. Gaps in the knowledge and skills of some pupils still hinder quicker progress.
- Pupils are using an increasingly rich vocabulary in their writing. They are also improving their use and range of punctuation and learning how to write in different styles. However, they are not always given sufficient time to write for long enough to develop and sustain their skills.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 last year, pupils eligible for pupil premium funding attained slightly higher levels than their peers in mathematics, but were over a year behind in reading and approximately 16 months in writing. Additional funding is thoughtfully targeted to tackle a wide range of needs. Increasingly, current pupils are making progress that is similar to, and sometimes better than, that of their peers and there are signs that any gaps between them are closing.
- Strengthening leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities following the recent appointment of a new leader is also lifting their achievement so that it is similar to that of other pupils.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers do not use data and other information about what pupils already know and can do well enough to meet their differing needs in whole-class teaching or individual work. Teachers do not always demand the very best from pupils. Expectations vary between some classes and tend to be higher in literacy and numeracy than in other subject areas.
- Pupils enjoy lessons, are eager to do well and keen to learn. They recognise that teaching is improving and more engaging and are proud of their individual next-step targets: these are regularly reviewed and revised. Frequent checks by teachers about how well pupils are doing against assessment criteria show accelerating progress for increasing numbers of pupils.
- Teaching and tasks are usually pitched at an age-appropriate level: they help pupils to catch up with where they should be, but rarely stretch the most able sufficiently. Teachers miss

opportunities to use questioning more skilfully to probe and challenge pupils' thinking.

- The quality of marking is inconsistent and not good enough overall to promote rapid progress. It does not regularly show pupils how to improve their work or move on in their learning more quickly. When it does, pupils are not always given the opportunity to respond or follow the advice, so the impact is lost.
- The positive contribution of teaching assistants improves the quality of learning for targeted pupils, such as those with special educational needs or the small proportion that speak English as an additional language. Additional-help sessions for small groups or individuals are well planned and focused on particular needs, such as gaps in phonics knowledge.
- Adults carefully track children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage in order to provide the teaching and experiences needed to prepare them adequately for Key Stage 1. Teaching focuses both on the development of essential skills such as literacy and numeracy, and also the personal, social and emotional skills needed to support rapid progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils recognise and are proud of how much behaviour has improved and parents who responded using Parent View or the academy's own survey mostly agree that behaviour is good.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are a key part of their improving achievement. Polite and friendly, most pupils mix and behave consistently well indoors and out, including during wet-weather break-times and on occasions when not taught by their usual teacher.
- Pupils understand the clear system of sanctions and rewards. A very few remaining inconsistencies in the use of this, and pupils' occasional loss of focus when teaching is not good, are part of the reason that behaviour is not outstanding. Despite a strongly improving picture indicating good behaviour in recent months, a small minority of parents and support staff are still to be convinced that the new system is working.
- Taking account of the full range of evidence, there are few cases of bullying. Pupils understand what bullying is and the different forms that it can take. They are confident that adults listen to them and deal with these concerns appropriately.
- A relentless drive to reduce absence means that current attendance has considerably improved compared to last year and is running close to national figures. Careful analysis of figures for different pupils is part of the academy's drive to secure equal opportunity and access to education and ensure there is no discrimination.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe in school and most parents agree. Pupils develop an increasing awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including when using new technologies.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Changes to personnel in all of the key senior leadership positions in the short time that the academy has been open have slowed the overall pace of improvement.
- The support and challenge provided by the academy trust has been crucial, especially in finding and appointing key academy leaders. The passion and enthusiasm for improving the education of pupils from the hands-on Chief Executive Officer of the trust is evident, and sets the tone and expectation that is beginning to raise standards.
- Under the experienced, reflective and knowledgeable executive headteacher, the relatively new senior leaders, including the interim head of school, are uniting as a strong team. Consequently, there are clear signs that the pace of improvement is beginning to increase, for example the significant improvements in behaviour. The quality of teaching is also improving as a result of the priority given to the training and development of teachers based on individual and academy-wide needs.

- Changes in teaching staff have hampered leaders' efforts to have secured consistently good teaching. Weak teaching is not tolerated, but the potential of leaders working under the senior team in helping to secure this crucial consistency has not been exploited fully.
- The academy's plans for improvement identify relevant areas to tackle in the drive to raise standards. They sometimes include ambitious and measurable targets, but the plan does not always precisely identify by how much the academy aims to improve particular performance measures and by when. It also lacks enough measurable steps along the way that leaders can use to check that actions are making enough difference.
- Effective systems are in place to frequently check whether each pupil is making enough progress and plan what to do where they are not. However, this information is not always analysed and summarised well enough to give leaders at all levels a sharp and precise picture of how well different groups of pupils are doing overall and compared to each other.
- Links between the range of subjects and the underlying approach to learning through answering key questions have played an important part in improving pupils' engagement and enjoyment. This promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, including regular celebration events involving pupils and parents. Year 4 pupils have benefited from using a webcam to talk with children at a school in India, an opportunity soon to be extended across the academy. Leaders rightly have plans to make sure basic literacy and numeracy skills are better promoted in other subject areas to support the drive to raise standards.
- The use of additional funding to provide a specialist sports coach is not only increasing pupils' participation rate and quality in terms of physical education, but also promoting personal qualities and skills such as teamwork and taking responsibility. Consequently, this is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and abilities within and beyond the classroom.
- Academy staff place a high priority on building links with parents and work imaginatively to do this, using a wide variety of approaches. There are clear signs that parental engagement is rising.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The local advisory board of governors has a sound knowledge of the quality of teaching and how well pupils in the academy are doing. Governors are supportive and regular visitors to the academy. The board is well informed about the drive to improve teaching and eradicate any underperformance, although overall legal responsibility is retained by the academy trust board, including for staff pay. Governors question leaders about the performance of the academy, but their grasp of available data about pupils' achievement is not strong enough for more rigorous challenge. The impact of pupil premium spending is checked against pupils' overall progress, but academy leaders and governors have not formally evaluated which spending choices make the most difference. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

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	138390
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	426371

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	322
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Rolfe
Headteacher	John Greenwood (Executive Headteacher) Raja Ali (Interim Head of School)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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