

Harpenden Academy

Vaughan Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 4EN

Inspection dates	17–18 September 2015
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The variable quality of teaching means that some pupils make less progress than they should.
- In the early years, activities are not planned to challenge children sufficiently, or ensure that their literacy and mathematical skills are fully developed.
- Not enough emphasis is placed on promoting pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Assistant teachers are not used well enough in lessons to support the learning of pupils who need additional help.
- Weaknesses noted in the last inspection, particularly pupils' progress in writing and the lack of challenge provided for more-able pupils, remain.
- Time in lessons is not always used effectively to ensure that pupils are suitably challenged and work hard.
- Pupils do not have regular opportunities to practise their handwriting, spelling and grammar, or write at length in different styles. Pupils are not provided with clear advice about how to improve their writing.
- Newly appointed senior and middle leaders are not yet carrying out their roles fully. This includes reviewing the progress made by all pupils.
- Improvement plans lack clear, measurable targets against which to check whether senior leaders are taking the right actions.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal provides the school with clear, coherent leadership.
- Safeguarding arrangements have been strengthened since the last inspection. All pupils are kept safe.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of senior leaders and governors, and the ambition and aspirations they have for the school.
- The new leader of the early years is clear about what improvements are needed and is providing

- The move to new, purpose-built premises this year has been managed well by senior leaders. Pupils now have an excellent environment in which to learn and play.
- Pupils are happy, enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They are encouraged to be confident, to behave well and to respond positively to the expectations of staff.
- effective support to enable staff to improve their teaching.
- Governors show an understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are holding leaders accountable for securing improvements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good by:
 - routinely observing lessons and providing newly appointed teachers and those known to need further development with clear advice about what you want them to do to improve their teaching
 - providing training for all staff on how to make full use of assistant teachers in lessons, and monitor the impact this has on pupils' learning and progress
 - using time in lessons more effectively so that most-able pupils are always suitably challenged and expected to work as hard as they can
 - planning regular opportunities for pupils to practise their handwriting, spelling and grammar, and to write at length in different styles
 - ensuring that pupils are given clear guidance on how to improve their writing
 - ensuring that teachers use the information gained from day-to-day assessments to plan activities that are suitably challenging for children in the early years.
- Raise achievement throughout the school by:
 - ensuring that literacy and numeracy are taught systematically and effectively
 - using assessment information to plan learning that challenges more-able pupils to work hard and make rapid progress
 - sharing the best practice in teaching that exists in the school in the teaching of literacy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the revised roles and responsibilities of senior leaders drive improvement in pupils' achievement
 - embedding new procedures to systematically review the progress made by individual pupils and checking that teachers use this information to coordinate further support for those who need it
 - providing training and support for middle leaders, particularly the joint leaders of literacy, to enable them to contribute fully to school improvement
 - ensuring that improvement plans have clear, measurable targets to evaluate the impact leaders are having on raising achievement
 - monitoring and reporting upon the impact of leadership in the early years.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Staffing changes, and preparing the school for its relocation to new premises, have absorbed much of senior leaders' and governors' time. This has diverted attention from tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The recently appointed principal has tightened up procedures. Safeguarding is secure and meets all requirements. Policies and procedures for safeguarding have been updated, and expectations of staff and pupils are much higher. Senior leaders meet and greet pupils on arrival each morning and mingle with pupils and adults in the playground.
- The principal is providing the school with the clear, coherent leadership it needs to improve. She and her senior leaders are demonstrating that the school has the capacity to improve. Senior leaders' understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school is accurate and acknowledges that it requires improvement. Improvement plans state what leaders will do to improve the school but lack clear, measurable targets to hold them accountable for the improvements made over time.
- Senior leaders have quickly gained the full commitment of all staff. They are working as a team to generate improvements and raise achievement. In a short space of time they have ensured that pupils settle into their new surroundings quickly and understand the new routines and procedures.
- The curriculum does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to learn essential literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently, outcomes for pupils by the end of Key Stage 1 are not as high as they should be. Pupils' books show that not enough attention is paid to improving basic handwriting, spelling and use of grammar.
- New buildings and facilities have enabled the school to broaden its curriculum and provide pupils with weekly opportunities for outdoor learning, physical education, art, music and personal, social and health education. Pupils enthuse about these experiences and the increased range of enrichment activities for them to engage in after school.
- Opportunities to promote fundamental British values and prepare pupils for life in modern Britain are highlighted throughout the curriculum plans but this is a new focus and is not firmly established. The teaching of some British values, such as tolerance and respect, are reinforced through the school's own set of values, which all pupils understand.
- Pupils' social and moral education is strong; they are taught about right and wrong, the importance of democracy, listening to different views and the need to care for others. Less is done to promote their spiritual development and understanding of other cultures. A new policy has been implemented this year to improve this.
- The calm, caring and supportive ethos this promotes helps pupils to feel happy, safe and behave well, and also fosters good relations with parents and carers.
- Senior leaders' monitoring includes scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of teaching. New arrangements are in place to lead the development of literacy, mathematics, behaviour and special educational needs. Procedures to monitor the effectiveness of staff and enable senior leaders to hold them accountable are new and not firmly embedded.
- The coordination of extra support provided for pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs has been strengthened this year. The coordinator has time to liaise with parents and monitor the impact of support provided. During the inspection, several letters were received from parents praising the quality of care and additional support provided for their children.
- The physical education (PE) and sport premium funding is not used well enough. It is used to employ sports coaches to deliver the PE curriculum during teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time. The coaching is effective and pupils enjoy participating in PE. However, senior leaders cannot demonstrate how these arrangements are either additional or sustainable, as required by the government.
- Very few pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The very small amount of pupil premium funding is used effectively to enable pupils to participate fully in enrichment activities and, where needed, receive additional support outside of lessons.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Major changes in staffing, senior leadership and the school's relocation to a permanent site have

limited the governing body's capacity to secure long-term improvement. At the time of the last inspection in March 2014, the school was judged to require improvement. This is still the case.

- Governors have increased their involvement in the strategic development of the school and raised their expectations and accountability of senior leaders. They are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have a clear vision for its development. No teachers moved up the salary scale last year, other than a few who were promoted to new posts.
- Governors communicate their ambition for the school and promote its caring and supportive ethos with parents.
- They ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are effective, including completing all pre-employment checks and the single central record.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Although some teaching is good, some is less effective and pupils therefore have an inconsistent experience. Over time, senior leaders have not monitored teaching thoroughly and have not accurately gauged its overall effectiveness. They are at the early stages of coordinating training and support for those staff who need it most in order to gain greater consistency in the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors noted significant variation in the quality of planning and assessment, the provision made for more-able pupils and in the quality and quantity of pupils' writing. Planning in Key Stage 1 is generally better than it is in Key Stage 2, but at times, too many activities are planned without time for pupils to reflect upon what they are doing or to consolidate their learning.
- Assessment information is not used effectively to plan learning for pupils of all abilities. Opportunities to explore complex language or explain new words or phrases are not always taken by teachers. Not all teachers provide enough challenge for more-able pupils. Some of these pupils take their time and progress steadily rather than at the speed they are capable of, and others finish their work quickly. Inspectors noted that, in most classes, pupils are capable of working harder and achieving more than they currently do.
- Results in national tests over the past two years support the school's view that the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is effective. Pupils have regular opportunities to read by themselves, but the quality of teacher-led group reading varies widely. Some of it helps pupils to read fluently and with confidence, some of it does not do this well enough. Not enough is done to share best practice.
- Pupils do not regularly complete extended pieces of writing, or have opportunities to write in different styles, so their writing remains underdeveloped. Pupils are not always informed as to how to improve their writing.
- Mathematics teaching is generally effective, mainly because more time has been spent developing it by an established subject leader. However, it is not consistent. This year, far fewer Year 2 pupils attained the expected level in national tests in mathematics compared to the previous year. Some of the work in books completed by older pupils in Key Stage 2 this term is far too easy for pupils of this age.
- The coordinator of special educational needs knows the particular needs of pupils and has shared this information with teachers to help them intervene and support pupils' learning. Support in lessons is less effective because teacher assistants are not always deployed effectively. Less-able pupils with limited literacy skills are often left to work by themselves even though they are struggling to understand what to do.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- A revised behaviour policy and higher expectations of pupils are contributing to much better behaviour and pupils' more positive attitudes. Regular use of praise and encouragement by staff helps to keep pupils interested and engaged in their learning. Throughout the inspection pupils were well-behaved, courteous and friendly. Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally good.
- Pupils are punctual and attend school regularly. Effective monitoring procedures are in place to follow up

promptly any lateness or absence. When they arrive with their parents each morning, pupils are enthusiastic and eager to get started. They respond positively to staff, referring to them by their first names.

- Pupils are confident and self-assured. Their speaking and listening skills are well developed, and many of them show a wide vocabulary when talking with adults and to each other. They display positive attitudes in and out of lessons, including in the outdoor play areas.
- All pupils receive weekly off-site sports coaching, and older pupils attend swimming lessons which help them to lead a healthy, active lifestyle. At lunchtimes, pupils sit together in friendship groups to eat healthy food. They talk enthusiastically, listen to each other's views and remain polite and well-mannered.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel very safe in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Senior leaders have prioritised securing good behaviour on the new school site, and all pupils have responded very positively to this. Staff remind pupils of the school's core values to promote good behaviour. For example, pupils in Year 5 behaved well and took full responsibility for themselves and others when leaving the school together and crossing several roads to get to the nearby sports facility. Once there, they continued to behave well when being taught by an external sports coach.
- Improved policy and procedures and much higher expectations of pupils are enabling staff to manage behaviour much more effectively than in the past. Almost all pupils want to behave well because they enjoy their new surroundings and like the staff who work with them. During questioning, they participate fully. They share equipment and move safely and responsibly around the classrooms and corridors.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel free from all kinds of bullying. They know how to keep safe when using the internet because they have been shown how to use it properly and know what to do if they receive any unwanted messages.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The school's assessment information shows that the majority of pupils made better progress last year compared with the previous year. However, pupils in one class made significantly less progress than expected due to identified weaknesses in teaching. Inspectors' observations of pupils in lessons, alongside scrutiny of their work completed since the start of this term, suggest that, in general, this trend of improved progress continues.
- Senior leaders acknowledge that, based on their starting points, many more pupils should be making better progress. This is partly due to the impact of recent staffing changes and the limited achievement of some pupils who joined the school at times other than the start of each year. Scrutinising pupils' work in Key Stage 2, particularly that of the oldest pupils in Year 5, indicates that the longer they have been in school, the better progress they make, because staff have more time to work with them.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics, is generally secure but the school does not place enough emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy skills across the school. Opportunities to learn and practise basic skills are not regular or systematic. Results in tests and the work in pupils' books show that, based on their starting points, not enough of them make the progress expected of them in writing by the end of Key Stage 1. This year, outcomes in reading are closer to the national average but are low in mathematics and in writing.
- The very small number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds means that reliable comparisons with other pupils cannot be made. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive high quality support for their behavioural and emotional needs, but their overall progress is similar to that of others. Improved procedures are in place this year to ensure that they receive one-to-one support to aid their learning.
- More-able pupils do not achieve well enough. For example, this year the proportions of Year 2 pupils exceeding the expected levels in reading and in mathematics improved but remained low. No pupils exceeded the expected level in writing.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- School leaders have strengthened teaching and the leadership of the early years. A new leader has been appointed and this is beginning to make a difference, most notably to children's behaviour and attitudes. More time is needed before this impacts fully on outcomes and ensures that children are suitably prepared for the next key stage.
- Behaviour is good because it is well managed, and relationships between staff and children are excellent. Children enjoy learning in the stimulating and well-resourced classrooms and outdoor areas. They quickly learn routines, help to tidy up and play together well on 'the mound'.
- Very little information about how children are doing is gathered on a day-to-day basis to ensure that all of them make enough progress. Teachers do not plan activities that challenge all children sufficiently.
- The teaching of phonics is planned well. Most children can identify letters and sounds. They speak with confidence and listen attentively. However, in 2015, less than half of all children achieved a good level of development. Staff acknowledge that children's literacy and mathematical skills are underdeveloped. Current planning and teaching do not sufficiently focus on improving children's outcomes in literacy and mathematics.
- Children with disabilities or special educational needs settle quickly due to the good care and support provided to meet their emotional and behavioural needs. Links with parents are exceptionally good, which helps to identify individual needs and ensure children's safety and welfare. The sharing of 'learning journeys' is beginning to help parents and carers understand how well their children are doing.

School details

Unique reference number	138561
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10006924

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Martin
Principal	Marissa Davis
Telephone number	01582 793840
Website	www.harpendenacademy.org
Email address	info@harpendenacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 March 2014

Information about this school

- It opened in 2012 as Harpenden Free School. In August 2015 it changed its name to Harpenden Academy.
- It moved to new, purpose-built accommodation on 1 September 2015.
- It is smaller than average. Its oldest children are in Year 5.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (government funding for looked after children and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) and the proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs are below average.
- The school was inspected in March 2014 and judged to require improvement.
- A new Principal took over in September 2014.
- Two further monitoring inspections took place in July 2015 due to concerns about safeguarding.
- Eleven new staff joined the school in September 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed nine lessons, two of which were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors listened to three pupils read.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, two groups of pupils, five members of the governing body and a representative from the Department for Education. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with an independent consultant who acts as the school's improvement person.
- Inspectors took account of the 24 responses by parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) before the inspection, and the 90 free text responses and eight letters from parents during the inspection. A further letter was received from the Chair of Governors.
- Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised data about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance; scrutinised pupils' work; and reviewed minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Marianick Ellender-Gele

Her Majesty's Inspector

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