

Palmers Cross Primary School

Windermere Road, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV6 9DF

Inspection dates

12 to 13 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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

- Leaders have brought about many improvements to the school. Since the school reopened as an academy, the curriculum, quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour have all improved. These positive changes have served to lift academic standards and improve school life.
- Standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 have risen. In 2018, progress across key stage 2 was very strong and was in the top 3% of schools nationally. At the end of Year 6, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards for their age in reading, writing and mathematics were all above average.
- Across the school, teaching is good. Work is usually pitched just right for pupils' different abilities, and teachers offer lots of encouragement to spur pupils on.
- At times, a few pupils make mistakes that go unnoticed or teachers do not ask the right questions in order to check what they understand. In some cases, resources to support learning are not ideal.
- Teachers in the early years classes respond quickly to children's needs. Classrooms are full of purposeful, exciting things to do, and children learn quickly and enjoy school.
- The school is a calm and orderly place to work and learn. Pupils are attentive to their teachers and friendly to one another. They behave well.
- Safety routines are efficient. Problems are sorted out quickly, and pupils feel safe in school.
- The speech and language resource base provides effective support for pupils' complex needs. There is scope to strengthen this provision as leaders' expertise increases.
- Most teaching in English, mathematics and science builds logically on pupils' previous learning. The curriculum includes a broad range of other subjects but, in some, planning for progression as pupils move up through the school could be improved.
- The quality of writing produced by some of the most able pupils is excellent.
- The direction provided by the multi-academy trust (MAT) has strengthened governance and leadership. Senior staff, trustees and governors bring informed ambition and consistent expectations to all aspects of the school's work. New leaders are still settling into their roles and are benefiting from guidance provided by colleagues from other trust schools.
- Staff morale is high.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve teaching and learning by making sure teaching staff:
 - find out what pupils know by asking the right questions at the right time
 - notice when pupils have made mistakes or do not understand, so that they can give them the guidance they need at the right time
 - ensure that resources to support learning are suitable.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - continuing to provide new leaders with support and encouragement as they get to grips with their roles
 - improving whole-school planning for progression in learning in foundation subjects such as history, geography and physical education (PE)
 - improving leaders' expertise and oversight of the speech and language resource base.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Joining Elston Hall multi-academy trust (the MAT) has strengthened school leadership. The trust's leaders have established systems, routines and clear lines of communication and accountability. This has raised expectations, improved behaviour and lifted academic standards.
- The head of school provides good leadership. She has an informed understanding of the quality of teaching and the school's effectiveness. Together with other senior leaders, she is quick to praise successes and equally quick to point out where further improvements can be made. Team spirit is good, and staff morale is high.
- Many leaders have recently been appointed to their current posts and are still getting to grips with their new responsibilities. During this time, they are working alongside leaders from other schools to hone their skills. The leaders of special educational needs, for example, are still exploring ways to improve provision in the resource base. Nevertheless, these leaders have already shown what they can do. They make regular checks on teaching in different subjects. They lead training and make sure staff see and learn from effective practice in this and other schools.
- Pupils study a full and appropriate curriculum. In pupils' books and on classroom walls, there is plenty of recent work across a wide range of subjects. The sequence of learning in English, mathematics and science is well-organised and ensures that pupils cover everything they need to know before moving up to secondary school. In science, the school has just been awarded a national quality mark in recognition of the learning and leadership in the subject. In non-core subjects such as history, geography and PE, pupils get a lot of work done but new learning does not always follow on logically from what has gone before. Leaders are working on improving planning in these subjects.
- While progression in PE could be tightened up, there are many different activities on offer, both during and after the school day. The primary school PE and sport funds have been used very well to bring expertise into school and increase participation and competition. Leaders check that no-one is missing out, and they target some activities at pupils who would benefit from being more active. Funding for special educational needs and that received to support disadvantaged pupils is also put to good use.
- In addition to sports, there are plenty of other after-school clubs. Science, cookery, art and book club, for example, run at different times during the year and complement classroom learning.
- Parents are pleased with the school. Many of those who spoke to inspectors or entered responses on Parent View described it as a welcoming, calm and purposeful place. Inspection evidence supports this view. Inspectors also found that leaders place a high value on staff and pupils' well-being and, to this end, the school successfully promotes mutual respect and trust between all in the school community. These qualities help pupils to make the most of school and to become responsible members of British society.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. The local governing body, trustees and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the MAT all understand their different roles and work well together for the good of the pupils. Their plans and records of their meetings show that pupils' achievement, well-being and safety at school are at the heart of their decision-making. They oversee school improvement in a systematic and supportive way. They have shown that they can lead and empower others to take on new responsibilities, making sure that they get the guidance they need to succeed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- As with other aspects of the school's leadership and culture, there are systematic and organised routines in place. Everyone knows what to do to keep pupils safe, and they respond to concerns. Unexplained absences are followed up quickly, and the school works with other organisations to support pupils and their families when necessary.
- Leaders and administrative staff make sure that all the proper checks are carried out on employees and visitors. Staff and pupils' records are stored securely but are readily available when needed. The site is kept secure and is well maintained. The site manager is quick to spot what needs doing and gets it done.
- Medicines are kept in the right place, and many staff have first-aid qualifications.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good. In all classes, teachers have good subject knowledge and treat pupils with firm, kind respect. In response, pupils listen carefully to staff, get on with their work and are keen to do well.
- From the moment the school doors open, not a moment is lost. Pupils come straight in to class and settle to purposeful early morning tasks, such as practising arithmetic, spellings, or checking earlier work. This calm, consistent routine across the school sets the tone for the rest of the day.
- A notable feature of teaching is the way staff use simple but very effective techniques to keep everyone's attention and get them to contribute. At the beginning of lessons, teachers routinely check what pupils know by bouncing questions around the class, so that different pupils add to, build on or respond in some way to something another pupil has said. This brisk, good-humoured start to many lessons keeps everyone alert and interested in learning. It also helps teachers to find out what pupils have remembered and what they need to learn next.
- Indeed, in most lessons, pupils learn a lot. In Year 3, for example, pupils show an impressive knowledge of how and when to use rhetorical questions and hyperbole and have produced some top-quality writing. Further up the school, the quality of pupils' creative and persuasive writing, in particular, is indicative of ambitious teaching that stretches the very brightest pupils to excel.

- Most of the time, efficient teaching, assessment and questioning in class mean that work is pitched just right, and pupils are kept occupied with constructive tasks. However, here and there, pupils start off well but then get stuck, confused or finish work quickly and wait for more. Mostly, this is because staff have not asked the right questions at the right time and have misjudged where pupils are in their learning. At other times, resources to help pupils are not ideal. During this inspection, for instance, some key stage 1 pupils found it hard to complete a piece of writing because they had little to help them with their word choices. Elsewhere, some older pupils made mistakes in their mathematics work, while others managed it easily. This is not commonplace but, when it does happen, teachers could pick up on it sooner.
- Teaching in the speech and language resource base meets pupils' needs, particularly the teaching done on a one-to-one basis. Pupils' needs are managed effectively, and bespoke support from school staff and visiting experts is clearly moving them forwards in their learning and behaviour. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to show that the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved over time. As leaders' experience and expertise grow, teaching and assessment of pupils with SEND could be improved further. Currently, some resources and activities do not help pupils to make the most of lessons. Some tasks occupy pupils but distract them from learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident in lessons and friendly to one another throughout the school day. They know that other pupils and adults in school will help them if they have a problem. Around the school, there are lots of signs that remind adults and pupils what to do if they have a concern.
- Staff teach pupils how to act responsibly and stay safe in different situations. In addition, pupils have led activities to teach others about responsible behaviour. In Year 5, for example, pupils have reminded parents about the importance of safe driving and parking at the start and end of the school day. Pupils have also led an assembly about internet safety, which was attended by pupils, staff and parents.
- Pupils know that bullying is not acceptable. They also understand how it differs from occasional disagreements. When any upsets do happen, staff support pupils to reflect and learn from the experience so that they develop empathy and self-esteem.
- The school is a highly supportive community where pupils are encouraged to do their best and be proud of their achievements. During this inspection, parents and staff came together to enjoy a short guitar concert put on by pupils and their music teacher. The performers were evidently encouraged by the respectful appreciation shown by their peers and adults. This is indicative of the school's culture of recognising and applauding effort and commitment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons, at clubs, breaktimes and when moving around the school. They understand and follow the school's rules, which are simple, fair and promote self-respect, respect for others and the school. Parents, staff, governors and pupils all say that behaviour at the school has improved a lot in recent years. During this inspection, the school was certainly a calm and orderly place and other evidence indicates that this is typical.
- Attendance has also improved over the past three years and is in line with the national average. School starts punctually in the morning, and almost all pupils arrive on time every day.
- The MAT employs a behaviour and emotional support leader. This leader regularly works with pupils, staff and parents in order to support the school's consistent and constructive approach to managing pupils' behaviour and needs. This successful work means that any incidents of poor behaviour are managed well, and there have been no exclusions.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since the school opened as an academy, standards have risen each year. In 2018, the proportions of Year 6 pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar were all above national figures. These worthy results were achieved because pupils made exceptionally strong progress across key stage 2. When they left Palmers Cross Primary, they were well prepared for learning at their next school.
- This increased progress is undoubtedly the result of good teaching, which has conquered any earlier underachievement and is now enabling pupils of all abilities to fulfil their potential. In English, mathematics and science, pupils are doing well. New work builds securely on previous work, and current pupils are making good progress in every year group.
- There are no significant differences between the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school.
- Some of the work completed by the most able pupils is of a high standard. In upper key stage 2, the very best writing is excellent because talent is nurtured and pupils are given opportunities to excel.
- Pupils with SEND also do well. In the speech and language resource base, pupils receive effective support. The quality of one-to-one teaching, in particular, enables them to move forward securely in their learning. Even so, there is scope to improve provision and boost progress for these pupils.
- In all subjects, pupils experience feelings of success. However, in foundation subjects, such as history, geography and PE, progress is sometimes held back because work is not always covered in the most logical order.

Early years provision

Good

- Children get a very positive introduction to school life. Well-led provision, good teaching, kind words and purposeful fun activities ensure that children settle in quickly and zip along in their early learning.
- Many children start school with literacy skills below those typically expected for their age. In response to this, the school's Nursery class is a language-rich environment. Whatever children are doing, adults prompt them to talk, listen and put pencil to paper. In their role play, construction and counting activities, to name but a few, children routinely jot down their ideas on paper and begin to make sense of the written word.
- In addition, staff provide many different activities that help children to develop their fine-motor skills and knowledge of phonics. Children quickly come to see themselves as readers and writers.
- Reception teaching builds further on the super start made in Nursery. Sensible routines, constructive activities and an appropriate mix of adult-led and child-initiated learning, both indoors and outside, enable children to stretch their minds and muscles. Whether successfully mastering a letter sound or taking part in an exciting word hunt outdoors, children's joy of learning is apparent.
- During their time in the early years, children develop positive behaviours and attitudes towards school. They feel safe and secure and make good progress. By the time they move up into Year 1, the majority have reached a good level of development and are ready for the key stage 1 curriculum.
- Parents regularly come into class in the mornings to see what their children are doing. They receive and add comments in learning journals that go between home and school and are sent newsletters about classroom topics and events. So far, parents' attendance at workshops and information events has been quite low. School leaders are looking for ways to improve this.

School details

Unique reference number	142684
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10053529

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	225
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chief executive officer	Kevin Grayson
Headteacher	Sunita Collett
Telephone number	01902 558 322
Website	www.palmerscross.org.uk
Email address	palmerscrossprimaryschool@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is a bit smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Approximately half of pupils are White British. Approximately one fifth of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils at the school with SEND is above the national average. The school has a speech and language resource base with capacity for ten pupils with complex needs.
- In 2016, the school became an academy and part of Elston Hall MAT. The MAT's board of trustees is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the MAT's schools. The trustees employ a CEO to oversee and work with all the schools in the MAT. At a local level, a governing body oversees Palmers Cross Primary School.

- The current headteacher took up her post in 2018. An associate headteacher, employed by the MAT, provides some support to the school.
- The school provides before-school childcare at a breakfast club.
- The school has a Nursery class, which admits three-year-olds.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. Inspectors also examined pupils' work in books, on display and considered the school's test and assessment information.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour, and the school's routines, at the beginning and end of the school day. They also observed pupils in lessons, assemblies, before- and after-school clubs, at lunchtimes and breaktimes and when they were moving about the school site.
- By the end of the inspection, there were 15 recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 14 free-text responses. The inspection team considered these and spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day. In addition, inspectors spoke with pupils, staff, school leaders, governors and the CEO and a trustee of the Elston Hall MAT. Inspectors also looked at the 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors examined school documents. These included information about pupils' progress and attainment, evaluations of the school's performance and several policy statements. Records relating to leadership, governance, staff training, SEND, early years, behaviour, attendance, punctuality, exclusions, safety, safeguarding and the quality of teaching were also scrutinised. The school's website was also checked.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Chris Wright

Ofsted Inspector

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