

Maple Court Academy

Beverley Drive, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent ST2 0QD

Inspection dates

20–21 January 2016

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	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good academy

- The highly effective senior leadership team has rigorously tackled the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has significantly improved and pupils' attainment is rising quickly.
- Leadership responsibilities are distributed to an effective team of middle leaders and subject leaders. This team provides good support to help teachers improve their practice.
- Children settle quickly into the Reception classes. They are taught well and get off to a good start with their learning.
- Teachers across the academy keep a close check on what pupils can do. They plan lessons carefully to close the gaps in pupils' knowledge that are the legacy of previous weaknesses. Outcomes are now improving speedily.
- Pupils have made rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics since the previous inspection. This good progress continues.
- Pupils behave very well. They are polite, courteous, friendly and respectful. Pupils adhere impressively to the academy's rules.
- Pupils' safety and well-being are central to the academy's culture. Staff are vigilant in identifying all potential risks and taking whatever measures are necessary to protect pupils.
- The academy is taking deliberate and effective action to promote pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils are developing attitudes and understanding that will enable them to take part positively in modern British society.
- The College Academies Trust has set a clear vision for the academy to provide an excellent quality of education for its pupils. The trust and the local governing body hold leaders rigorously to account for delivering this strategic plan.

It is not yet an outstanding academy because

- Leaders have, rightly, prioritised improving pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics from the previously very low levels. As a result, there has been limited focus on raising standards in a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils' work in mathematics does not demonstrate that they are able to reason mathematically with confidence.
- Some children in the early years do not spend as much time practising writing and mathematics skills as others.

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?

- Improve outcomes for pupils across a range of subjects by making sure that:
 - pupils across the academy make good progress in a wide range of subjects, that are not confined to just English and mathematics
 - pupils in Years 1 to 6 demonstrate that they can reason mathematically
 - all children in the Reception classes spend an equal amount of time practising their writing and mathematical skills, in addition to time they choose voluntarily to spend on these activities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The College Academies Trust sets a very clear vision for all its educational providers: to champion the life chances of learners in the community it serves. This vision is systematically implemented in Maple Court Academy. As a result, pupils now receive good-quality education in a safe environment in which their best interests are uppermost.
- Senior leaders have created a culture in which staff are determined to make a difference to the well-being and outcomes of each and every pupil. For example, the spending of pupil premium funding (extra money from the government to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority) is rigorously overseen to ensure it benefits eligible pupils. The impact of this funding is tracked across the entire trust. Consequently, the trust is able to monitor how well families benefit from the extra support given to individual pupils.
- Since the Principal, vice-principal and assistant principals took up their posts in September 2014, the academy has undergone substantial change which has led to significant improvement. These leaders have systematically tackled weaknesses. In the first instance, they ensured that pupils' behaviour improved. Subsequently, senior leaders have rigorously addressed the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This is now good, and outcomes, while still requiring improvement, are improving rapidly.
- Senior leaders, well supported by governors and trust leaders, have taken brave and decisive action, where necessary, to ensure the quality of teaching meets their exacting requirements. For example, with five teachers having left the academy in recent months, leaders insisted that only the best candidates be appointed in replacement. This led to substantial turbulence until the current, stable staffing could be achieved. Nevertheless, leaders ensured that the quality of teaching continued to improve even while many classes were taught under temporary arrangements.
- Leadership has been enhanced by the appointment of an effective middle leadership tier. These 'directors of learning' support senior leaders by coaching teachers to implement new ways of working. As a result, teachers' practice has continued to improve and senior leaders have been able to maintain an up-to-date, accurate picture of the quality of teaching in each class.
- Subject leaders, too, now make a positive contribution to raising standards. These leaders have accurately identified what needs to be done to improve outcomes in their subject. They have set action plans and begun to implement necessary changes. Nevertheless, it is still too early for these actions to have led to good outcomes in some subjects.
- The vice-principal has overseen the implementation of a new curriculum. This approach presents subjects in an interesting way that makes learning meaningful to pupils. Pupils speak with great enthusiasm about the new topics and exciting experiences they have. These experiences and the wealth of extra-curricular activities available support pupils' progress and personal development well.
- Effective use of the primary school sports funding has raised pupils' interest in physical activity. More pupils now engage in a wider range of sports and activities. The academy has experienced a greater degree of success in competitive events. The teacher responsible for this funding has a clear strategy for strengthening this initial success by securing teachers' confidence and skills in teaching physical education effectively in future, without needing to rely heavily on specialist sports coaching.
- Deliberate and effective action is taken to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is evident through the academy's rules, the effective policies on anti-bullying and the many opportunities provided for pupils to engage with cultural experiences. This approach builds curiosity, creativity and resilience, which equip pupils well for the challenges and experiences they will encounter at the next stage of their education, and prepare them for later life as citizens of modern Britain.
- **The governance of the academy**
 - Governance is a key strength of leadership. Governors are keenly aware of their responsibilities and ensure that these are carried out meticulously. For example, governors frequently check the implementation of the academy's policies for safeguarding and child protection.
 - Governors rigorously hold academy leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes. Every two weeks, an executive group of governors and trust representatives reviews the academy's progress towards meeting challenging targets for improvement that are linked to pupils' progress.
 - Governors ensure that procedures for managing staff performance, including that of the Principal, are robust. Staff are appropriately rewarded for good performance and underperformance is tackled rigorously.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are continuously on the look-out for warning signs about the well-being of pupils. The inclusion leader is at the forefront of ensuring that staff are trained to a high level in all aspects of child protection. Procedures for identifying, recording and following up concerns are vigilant and well understood by all staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved considerably since the last inspection. Standards are rising as a result.
- Teachers set tasks that are well informed by assessment of what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. For example, in mathematics lessons, teachers meticulously analyse where pupils are struggling and provide individual challenges to rectify misunderstandings. This means that teachers are successfully tackling the substantial gaps in pupils' knowledge that result from the legacy of poor teaching that was prevalent in the academy until recently. Pupils are now making good progress.
- The high-quality training and support given to teachers have improved their own understanding of the technical aspects of language and mathematics. As a result, teachers are more skilled at teaching pupils to use complex sentence structures in their writing. Consequently, the quality of pupils' writing is much improved. Similarly, pupils are now taught to use correct technical vocabulary when performing mathematical operations.
- In lessons, teachers skilfully question pupils to check their understanding of the task set. This helps teachers adjust the lesson to provide additional support, or inject greater challenge as needed to ensure pupils learn well. This dialogue is clearly recorded in pupils' books to help pupils reflect on the improvements made. Teachers provide similarly effective support and challenge when they mark pupils' work, which helps pupils to make faster progress.
- Teachers place great emphasis on improving pupils' basic skills. The effective teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) in the Reception classes and Years 1 and 2 helps pupils to read confidently and make plausible attempts at spellings when they are writing. Older pupils' spelling and handwriting are improving from very weak beginnings as a result of the high value placed on these aspects by teachers.
- The approach to teaching is very inclusive. The individual challenge, support and feedback given to pupils ensure all groups learn equally well in lessons. For example, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported in lessons, and so learn as well as other pupils.
- Teachers set interesting homework that reinforces what pupils learn in lessons. Pupils have a degree of choice about which activities they complete. This motivates them to try hard and complete required tasks regularly and on time.
- From September 2015, teachers have begun to use the newly implemented curriculum to plan effectively in a wide range of subjects. As a result, teaching is improving for subjects other than just English and mathematics. This good teaching is beginning to lead to improving outcomes in a wider range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. This is because pupils' well-being is firmly at the heart of every aspect of the academy's work. Pupils and parents value the care and support they receive. Relationships between the academy and families are tremendously strong. Families feel they can talk to staff about any problems. They say the academy will act immediately upon issues and that this leads to quick improvements.
- Staff understand that pupils' physical, social and emotional needs must be met in order to overcome barriers to learning. Support for pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable is exceptionally good. For example, pupils' experiences in the 'Maple Tree' nurture unit help them make impressive progress in building emotional health and well-being which, in turn, supports them in making progress in their learning.

- The academy seeks and uses every opportunity to support pupils and their families to engage with school life. For the most part, this is very effective. The rate of attendance has increased and is now the highest in the academy's history. Leaders know that the stubbornly lingering, persistent absence of a few pupils is the reason that pupils' personal development and welfare cannot be judged to be outstanding. Staff are working intensively with the small number of families who still struggle to ensure that their children attend regularly. For example, a proportion of the pupil premium is used to fund a breakfast club for eligible pupils whose attendance is persistently low. These pupils are collected in the school minibus and enjoy a pleasant, sociable experience over breakfast before starting lessons. This is notably increasing the attendance of this group.
- Staff are skilled in helping pupils to stay safe. For example, pupils know about the dangers of using the internet and social media. All staff have been well trained in keeping pupils safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Leaders have referred pupils to Channel (the government's strategy for supporting pupils thought to be at risk of radicalisation) where necessary.
- All pupils spoken to are adamant that there is no bullying in the academy at present. They say that when, on occasion, it has happened, staff have dealt with it quickly and effectively, helping the victim feel safe and the bully to appreciate the negative impact of their actions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have an impressive understanding of what the academy's rules mean and how they are underpinned by the academy's values. Pupils' stringent adherence to this code means they conduct themselves well at all times — in lessons, in corridors and in the playground.
- Leaders' close tracking and analysis of behaviour are used to tweak and refine systems for implementing the academy's behaviour policy. As a result, behaviour has continued to improve from the high standards noted at the previous inspection. The number of pupils who remain on 'green cards' for good behaviour throughout the term has increased, while the number who require specific support to manage their behaviour has reduced notably.
- Sensitive and effective support helps most pupils manage their anxieties well and so adhere to the academy's high expectations for behaviour. A few still struggle, on occasions, to overcome their emotional difficulties when faced with challenging situations. The academy's zero-tolerance approach to serious misdemeanours results in a higher than average rate of fixed-term exclusions. This is why pupils' behaviour is not judged to be outstanding. Leaders are working on implementing the next step of their strategy, which aims to reduce this number.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Since September 2014, leaders have prioritised the improvement of pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills. This is entirely appropriate, as pupils' attainment in these subjects was very low and these skills are necessary to help pupils learn effectively. Nevertheless, this focus has resulted in limited progress in other subjects. Consequently, while now good in English and some aspects of mathematics, outcomes in other subjects require improvement.
- Pupils now have a secure knowledge of how numbers work. They apply these skills in discussion in mathematics lessons. However, there is limited evidence that pupils use their knowledge to reason mathematically in challenging intellectual contexts. As a result, pupils demonstrate limited mastery of mathematics.
- Pupils write using a range of interesting sentences and adventurous vocabulary choices. They use these skills well to support their learning in other subjects.
- Pupils now read fluently and accurately. Younger pupils tackle unfamiliar words confidently, using their secure phonics knowledge. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about books they have read and the rewards they receive for completing online challenges about reading.
- The results of the 2015 national tests for reading, writing, mathematics, and spelling, grammar and punctuation at the end of Key Stage 2 painted a picture of a legacy of severe underachievement. The pupils in Year 6 appear to have made little progress from Year 2 and were a long way behind pupils in other schools. This information is a reflection of the historic situation and not indicative of the current quality of education.

- The positive trajectory of progress has been sustained this year. Almost all pupils in the academy are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This means that attainment continues to improve. More pupils are now reaching the standards expected for their age. This proportion is greatest in the Reception classes, and Years 1 to 3. It is steadily increasing in Years 4 to 6. This demonstrates that standards are likely to rise further over the next few years and should soon be in line with, and possibly above, the national average.
- Historical differences in outcomes between different groups of pupils are reducing. For example, in the 2015 national tests for Year 6 pupils, disadvantaged pupils outperformed other pupils in the academy. Nevertheless, their performance was a long way behind other pupils nationally. They were over a year behind in mathematics and reading and almost two years behind in writing and the test for grammar, punctuation and spelling. Evidence from this inspection shows that there is now little difference between the performance of disadvantaged pupils currently in the academy and their classmates.
- Outcomes for all groups of pupils are improving well in English and mathematics. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from the well-tailored extra help they receive in lessons. The most-able pupils are now beginning to attain the higher standards of which they are capable. Pupils who receive specialist support for their social or emotional difficulties are catching up with other pupils.

Early years provision

is good

- Ambitious and skilled leadership of the early years has brought clear direction and drive in the Reception classes. This has led to notable improvements in provision. As a result, outcomes for children have improved.
- When children start school, most find it difficult to make their thoughts and feelings known. Many cannot speak clearly. Some struggle to get on with other children or to feel safe with unfamiliar adults. Teachers work closely with staff in the nurture group to effectively support those who find it particularly difficult to cope with starting school. All staff are friendly and approachable, so children form strong relationships with trusted adults. Continuous assessment and modification of planning ensure that children make rapid progress in building personal, social and communication skills.
- Most settle quickly into school life because teachers place great emphasis on helping them learn to follow routines and instructions, to share with others and to take turns. Reception classes soon become orderly environments where children play happily together.
- Teachers use accurate and thorough assessment of children's skills to shape provision in order to tackle weaknesses. For example, at the beginning of this year, children's early reading and writing skills were significantly weaker than those of most four-year-old children. The school day has been modified to provide more time to teach phonics, which is helping children to learn quickly about letters and the sounds they make.
- Children's knowledge, skills and understanding are generally very weak in many areas when they start the Reception Year. If they are to reach the level of development necessary for the start of Year 1, children need to make rapid progress across a range of areas of learning. The proportion who succeed in this is rising. In 2014, only around a third reached a good level of development. In 2015, the figure had risen to around half. Current projections indicate that around two thirds are likely to reach the expected level this year.
- Children have lots of opportunities to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills through their play. Many children choose to do so regularly. Some do not. Teachers sometimes miss the chance to guide these more reluctant learners to try out their skills. As a result, some children make better progress than others in some areas of learning.
- The early years leader ensures that pupil premium funding is used very effectively. Targeted use of resources is helping to narrow gaps in outcomes between eligible children and others.
- Partnerships with parents are strong. Parents value the support they receive in helping their children settle into school. Continuous communication between home and school means that problems or worries are picked up immediately and sorted out quickly.

School details

Unique reference number	139228
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10007005

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	462
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kate Townshend
Principal	Mr Jonathan Baddeley
Telephone number	01782 235095
Website	www.maplecourt.stoke.sch.uk
Email address	maplecourt@sgfl.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 January 2015

Information about this school

- Maple Court Academy is sponsored by Stoke on Trent College as part of the College Academies Trust. In addition to Maple Court Academy, the trust consists of The Discovery Academy, The Excel Academy and Stoke Studio College. The trust has brokered professional development and training for its staff from the Britannia Teaching School Alliance.
- The academy was inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 in January 2015. It was judged to have serious weaknesses because pupils' achievement was inadequate. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the academy in April 2015 to monitor progress. This was the second monitoring visit.
- The academy is larger than most primary schools.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. Almost three quarters are eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs, or who are supported by an education, health and care plan, is broadly average.
- The academy operates a nurture group, known as the Maple Tree, which supports pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The academy runs two breakfast clubs.
- Since the previous inspection, five teachers have left the academy and six have joined.
- In 2015, the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning by visiting lessons in all classes, talking to pupils about their learning and examining the work in their books. Inspectors also heard pupils read.
- Meetings were held with: the Principal; other senior staff; a group of teachers and teaching assistants; the Chair of the Local Governing Body; the Chief Executive of the College Academies Trust; and two groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke informally to other staff around the academy.
- Inspectors conducted a series of walks around the academy to evaluate aspects of its work and observed an assembly.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the academy's checks on how well it is doing and its plans for improvement; leaders' checks on the quality of teaching; information about pupils' progress and attainment; evidence of the impact of the local governing body; and information relating to safeguarding and pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) to enable inspectors to view the results. Inspectors considered the results of the academy's own survey of parents' views and spoke to parents at the beginning and end of the school day.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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