

Star Academy, Sandyford

Burnaby Road, Sandyford, Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST6 5PT

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2019

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Previous leaders and governors have not made sure that the good standard of education provided at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Results at the end of key stage 2 in reading and mathematics are uneven, particularly for the most able and low-attaining pupils.
- Instability in staffing affected the school's ability to respond to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Effective action to tackle these and other weaknesses in provision and outcomes began only very recently.
- The quality of teaching is uneven in key stages 1 and 2. Lessons are not planned carefully enough to help lower-attaining pupils acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills expected for their age. In a few lessons, these pupils do not work hard enough. There are too few opportunities for the most able pupils to achieve greater depth of understanding in reading and mathematics.
- In a few classes, teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough. They do not give pupils enough firm guidance about how to behave. Basic routines for learning are not well established or insisted on.

The school has the following strengths

- A review led by the trust in 2108 found that the school's performance was faltering. The trust acted swiftly to appoint a new executive principal.
- The executive principal is well supported by a hard-working and committed staff. Ambitious expectations, better staff training and more reliable assessment of pupils' learning are improving teaching.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced.
- Early years provision is good. Children in Nursery and Reception classes make good progress across the different areas of learning. Leadership of the early years is effective.
- Year 1 pupils do well in the phonics screening check. Most achieve the standards expected for their age. Handwriting is taught very well.
- The school is inclusive and promotes equality of opportunity well. It supports parents and/or carers effectively. The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - providing more opportunities for most-able pupils to achieve greater depth of understanding in reading and in mathematics
 - planning more activities that build up the knowledge, understanding and skills of low-attaining pupils so that more achieve the standards expected for their age.
- Improve pupils' behaviour in a minority of classes by establishing much firmer guidance and by applying routines for learning more consistently.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership at the school is effective. A new executive principal was appointed to lead this school and another local primary school in the trust from 1 September 2018. At the same time, a new local academy council was formed to oversee the work of both schools.
- The appointment of the new executive principal has galvanised the work of the school. Her fierce ambition for all pupils and passion for education are inspiring teachers and other staff to reset their expectations and improve the quality of their work. Some new staff have been appointed, including an experienced academy principal, and staffing in the school is stable.
- Senior leaders, governors and trust officers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. A review of the school, done by the trust in summer 2018, concluded that most aspects of the school needed significant improvement. Since then, urgent action has been taken to raise expectations across key stage 1 and key stage 2. Targets set for pupils are now more ambitious, teachers have had additional training and assessment is robust and reliable.
- Leaders are now taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. In addition, they are tackling other weaknesses that have led to uneven outcomes for pupils. A new programme of work to improve reading is strengthening pupils' progress. Teaching of reading is improving, and pupils have access to higher-quality texts. An extensive programme aimed at improving reasoning in mathematics has begun. These changes have been supported by staff, pupils and parents.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils focus on reading, writing and mathematics in the morning. In the afternoon, they undertake 'learning challenges' across the different foundation subjects, often supported by educational visits and extra-curricular clubs and activities. For example, pupils are taught Shakespeare as part of a Royal Shakespeare Company initiative, which broadens their experiences and raises their aspirations.
- Additional funding is used well. It helps to provide additional support and intervention for pupils, including by extending opportunities for physical exercise through dance. Pupils with SEND are supported well.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is effective. Pupils learn to appreciate the world they live in and respect other cultures and beliefs.
- The trust provides good support and robust challenge to school leaders. It has provided advice on assessment, SEND, pupil premium, leadership and governance. Trust peer reviews of the school helped to identify where improvement was needed.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school is effective. The local academy council is keen and hardworking. Many of the council members are new to Star Academy. However, they

bring relevant skills and qualities to the role, including experience of governance at a neighbouring academy and expertise in child protection and human resources.

- Council members meet regularly and receive regular and robust updates on pupils' progress and the school's performance. This enables them to ask searching questions of school leaders and hold them to account.
- The local academy council's relationship with trustees is productive and clearly defined. Council members value the support the trust gives them. The trust delegates significant responsibility to the council but monitors school performance through a well-organised reporting system.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is well led. Pupils' welfare, including safety, is a key priority for the school. Suitable training is given to staff, which helps them to discharge their responsibilities well. Liaison with other agencies is effective and leaders are persistent when following up issues.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including through regular safeguarding 'theme weeks'. They learn to look after themselves in an age-appropriate way, including when talking to others, meeting strangers or when using the internet. Attractive displays reinforce these messages around the school.
- Leaders ensure that any risks to pupils, including when going on educational visits, are properly evaluated. Records of bullying and unkind behaviour are kept meticulously. Although a few pupils say there is some bullying, it is treated seriously and dealt with appropriately.
- Staff have received training to ensure that they are able to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Safeguarding procedures and policies are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is uneven. Although much teaching is very effective, learning activities in some lessons fail to support pupils in achieving well.
- In these instances, lessons are not planned carefully enough to ensure that pupils are supported and extended, given their starting points. For example, not all teachers show pupils what is expected of them, how they might approach a task or how they can access help when they are stuck. As a result, pupils are not given the consistent help they require to build the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to tackle more difficult tasks.
- Where teaching is weaker, lower-attaining pupils do not achieve the standards expected for their age and most-able pupils do not exceed the standards quickly enough. In a few lessons, particularly at key stage 2, teachers do not give pupils enough guidance about their behaviour. On occasions, this leads to lower-attaining pupils being unnecessarily disruptive. In the poorest examples, it leads to these pupils doing little work.

- More broadly, not all teachers routinely insist on a common set of behaviour standards, for example when listening on the carpet or asking questions. As a result, pupils do not move quietly and quickly from one activity to another. The lack of well-established routines for learning leads to some unsettled behaviour and unnecessary distraction. In a few lessons, additional adults do little more than help to manage behaviour.
- Pupils make most progress in those classes where teachers plan effectively and build on pupils' previous learning. In such instances, teachers anticipate how pupils might respond and where they might struggle. They support and extend pupils' learning by asking searching follow-up questions. They organise the work of additional adults well and ensure that pupils are given specific help at particular times.
- Leaders are aware of these issues, including the need to review the work of additional adults, and are tackling them with urgency. They have set higher expectations for teachers and pupils. New academic targets have been introduced for pupils and more regular and thorough checks are being made on pupils' progress.
- Teachers are working hard to improve their teaching. In nearly all instances, relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Teachers know the pupils well and share senior leaders' ambition for them. Teachers have a sound grasp of the subjects they are teaching. Teachers make very good use of the themes identified as part of the curriculum and plan work, including educational visits, around them.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics are strengthening the curriculum to improve the teaching of reading and extend pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics. They are introducing more training for teachers and providing greater support for planning work for pupils. While still being developed, these initiatives are leading to better teaching and stronger progress.
- Handwriting is taught very well across the school, particularly in key stage 1. Pupils are helped to make secure progress and use uniform letters to produce clear and joined-up handwriting.
- Teaching promotes equality of opportunity effectively. Teachers often ask questions, and foster thinking, about the different choices that pupils will have over their lives. They are careful not to limit pupils' ambitions.
- Teachers and their assistants cater well for the physical and emotional needs of pupils in their classes. Pupils with SEND, and those who speak English as an additional language, benefit from carefully organised interventions, which help them make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- A caring ethos pervades the school. All staff are committed to the pupils' welfare. The school is a caring community, which involves parents and carers well. Pupils enjoy learning about the need for compassion and respect for others, including by working with the Dalai Lama Institute.

- The breakfast club provides a good start to the day for many pupils. It is followed by welcoming and structured registration time, which includes an opportunity for pupils to read and begin to learn. Teachers and other staff know pupils well and are alert to their needs and any difficulties they may be facing. Where required, staff are swift to refer pupils and/or their parents and carers to other agencies for support.
- Pupils have ample opportunities to assume responsibility, including as 'learning leaders' and school 'ambassadors'. Pupils learn to care for themselves, including by eating healthily, and show a good understanding of the difficulties faced by disadvantaged members of the community. The reading scheme helps to extend pupils' awareness of different cultures. Pupils are taught about many of the issues facing Britain today and what it means to be good citizen.
- Pupils grow in confidence during their time in school. Most talk to visitors and other adults with assurance and enthusiasm. For example, older pupils recently led a discussion with teachers from local secondary schools about the work they are doing on Shakespeare. Pupils are proud of their school. By the time they are in Year 6, most pupils have developed into confident learners, ready for secondary school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Most pupils are polite, attentive and hardworking in the majority of classes. Where learning routines are well established, and insisted on, behaviour is often excellent. However, pupils' behaviour requires improvement in too many other classes.
- In such instances, pupils are not given firm enough guidance on how to behave, and inappropriate behaviour is challenged either too late or ineffectively. The lack of a commonly applied set of routines across the school makes it unnecessarily difficult for pupils to acquire good behavioural and learning habits in classrooms. A few parents expressed concern about pupils' behaviour.
- Pupils usually behave well when they are supervised outside of class, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils are very supportive of the reward system, which encourages good behaviour.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. A small number of pupils have irregular or poor attendance. The school works effectively with many of these pupils and their families to improve attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- National test results at the end of key stage 2 show that pupils do not do as well as they should. In reading, Year 6 pupils did poorly in the 2018 tests. Over the past three years, too few pupils have achieved good enough test results in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Current Year 4 and Year 6 pupils are doing well. They are making good progress in filling gaps in their reading for understanding and reasoning skills in mathematics. However, these gaps are still evident in much of the work being done by other pupils in the school, including some pupils at key stage 1.

- The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2 is increasing. However, it still requires further improvement. Not all lessons are planned carefully enough to help the most able pupils exceed age-related expectations.
- Pupils do well in the Year 1 phonics screening check. They usually achieve the standards expected for their age. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and widely as they move through the school. As a result, most pupils develop suitable levels of fluency appropriate for their age. They make plausible attempts to decipher and pronounce unfamiliar words. However, many pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 still struggle to infer meaning from, or understand, what they have read.
- In mathematics, pupils are usually confident when handling numbers and doing basic operations. They recall number facts well and can use these to tackle familiar problems. However, too few pupils have well-developed reasoning skills and they struggle to apply their mathematical knowledge in more unfamiliar contexts.
- Pupils achieve similar outcomes in the foundation subjects as they do in English and mathematics. While most pupils achieve the standard expected for their age, many lower-attaining pupils and the most able pupils could achieve more.
- Pupils with SEND benefit from well-taught interventions. They receive specific support that helps them make at least reasonable progress from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils usually make progress in line with other pupils.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make good progress across the different areas of learning.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children join the Nursery and Reception classes with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. Their language and communication skills are typically the weakest aspects of their development. Effective teaching and excellent care help children to make good progress in all areas of learning. As a result, children leave the early years foundation stage ready for Year 1. By the time they leave Reception, most children are working at, or near to, what is expected for their age.
- Leadership of the early years is effective. Since the last inspection, the good quality of education and care has been maintained. All welfare requirements are met, and safeguarding is effective. Children with SEND are supported well and make good progress, including those who have an education, health and care plan. The early years provision is inclusive and promotes equality of opportunity well. Additional funding is used to support children well.
- Early years staff liaise closely with parents and/or carers, including by arranging a series of 'stay and play' days, which help children to grow in confidence and settle in quickly. Staff communicate regularly with parents and act without delay if any concerns arise. Effective relationships with external agencies help to ensure that children and families receive additional or external help when required.

- Children's well-being is a major priority for staff and all welfare requirements are met. Staff in the early years treat children very well. They build very good relationships with children and this helps nurture their development.
- Well-organised indoor and outdoor activities help children to engage across all areas of learning. Children take part in a variety of thoughtful and stimulating activities, which are either led by a teacher, supervised by another adult, or initiated by children.
- An array of artefacts and equipment, including much that is recycled from elsewhere, supports children in exploring their surroundings, practising skills and developing their understanding. Some of this equipment, particularly in the large and imaginative outdoor play area, needs refreshing. In a few instances, staff do not exploit opportunities to ask pertinent questions, or provide enough complex resources, to stretch and challenge the most able children.
- Children behave very well in Nursery and Reception classes. Routines for sitting, listening and moving around are firmly established. Children take turns and are kind to one another. Adults work hard to help children understand what good behaviour is. This helps to ensure that the learning environment is calm, friendly, safe and productive.

School details

Unique reference number	139226
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10086923

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
Chair	Miss Sue Finney
Executive Principal	Mrs Bobbie Caisley
Telephone number	01782 235055
Website	www.staracademy.attrust.org.uk/
Email address	principal@staracademy.attrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 January 2015

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most children start school in the early years in the Nursery class and attend full time from age three.
- Most pupils are White British. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is growing. The proportion of pupils who are Traveller of Irish heritage, Gypsy or Roma backgrounds is very high compared to the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average.
- The school is part of the Academy Transformation Trust. It shares an executive principal with a neighbouring school in the same trust.
- A local academy council oversees the work of the school on behalf of trustees of the Academy Transformation Trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons and observed pupils' learning and behaviour in classrooms. They observed pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors evaluated the quality of work in a sample of pupils' books. They listened to pupils read and spoke with pupils about the quality of work done in lessons.
- The school provided inspectors with a wide range of key documents, including information about safeguarding, governance and pupils' progress in learning. These documents were considered by inspectors.
- Inspectors met with pupils, staff, senior leaders, local academy council governors and a representative of the Academy Transformation Trust. Inspectors also spoke with the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors took account of the 25 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 written comments. Inspectors also considered the 20 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mike Cladingbowl, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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