

Rivers Primary Academy

Mersey Road, Blakenall, Walsall, WS3 1NP

Inspection dates 18–19 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Early years provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Since the opening of the academy, the trust has provided excellent support to the senior leaders and academy governors. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are good.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is outstanding. Pupils feel extremely safe and are taught well how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the academy.
- Children get a good start to their education in the early years. They are happy and enjoy their learning.
- Teachers give good quality feedback that helps pupils with clear next steps on how they can improve their work.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Academy governors are very committed and carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough pupils reach the higher levels in mathematics. This is because they need to improve their reasoning and problem-solving skills in this subject.
- Despite the school's best efforts, attendance is below average. A few parents are not fully aware of the importance of their child's attendance at school on their education.
- The roles of the middle leaders are still in their early stages of development. Therefore it is too soon to see any impact from their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. Some of these were jointly observed with the headteacher. Also a whole-school assembly was seen.
- Inspectors looked at a variety of work in pupils’ books with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with staff holding key responsibilities, members of the academy governing body, groups of pupils and representatives from the Windsor Academy Trust.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents including: minutes from the governing body meetings; the school’s evaluation of its own performance; leaders’ checks on the quality of teaching; and information relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors analysed the 33 responses to the staff questionnaire. They took into account the school’s recent parental survey. There were too few responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be considered.
- On the second day of the inspection pupils in Years 5 and 6 were away on a school trip.

Inspection team

Sharona Semlali, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Rivers Primary Academy converted to become an academy on 1 November 2013. When its predecessor school, Green Rock Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be inadequate.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The academy governing body is managed by Windsor Academy Trust.
- Children in the early years attend full time in both the Reception and Nursery classes.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to give extra support to those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics, reading and writing at the end of Year 6.
- The academy manages its own breakfast club.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in mathematics by ensuring that teachers help pupils, particularly the most able, to improve their problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Improve the attendance rate by ensuring that all parents are made fully aware of the negative impact of their child's absence from school.
- Develop the roles of the middle leaders so they can help to enrich the provision for subjects other than English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is well supported by a very able deputy headteacher and a committed board of academy governors who have the full backing of the trust. Since the opening of the academy, they have been relentless in their drive to secure significant improvements, and to continue to strive for excellence. As a result, leaders have created a welcoming and happy atmosphere where pupils flourish. Also, they have been effective in ensuring that the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils are good. The school's survey shows that parents are pleased with all aspects of the academy's work.
- The systems in place that check the quality of teaching are rigorous and robust. All teachers' pay is directly linked to pupils' outcomes. The trust provides excellent bespoke training opportunities for teachers to help them to improve their practice. This has helped to increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching since the academy has opened. Newly qualified teachers are also well supported.
- Senior leaders have excellent tracking systems in place to check pupils' progress. All of this helps leaders to respond quickly to pupils' needs and intervene when necessary. The academy is fully committed to ensuring that all of its pupils have an equal opportunity to achieve well. It does not tolerate any form of discrimination.
- Senior leaders are highly skilled and knowledgeable. They have made a massive impact in making improvements in their areas since their appointments, particularly in pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. However, the middle leaders have only been appointed recently and are still in the very early stages of developing their roles. It is too soon to see their impact on the provision of those subjects other than mathematics and English.
- The funding for disadvantaged pupils is tracked meticulously. Part of the spending is used to fund a Saturday club and employ additional staff to help pupils work in smaller groups. It is proving effective in closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates.
- The sports premium is used effectively to develop teachers' skills, and to employ additional qualified sports coaches so that pupils have access to high quality lessons. Pupils take part in more competitive sports and are involved in a wider range of inter-school tournaments.
- The curriculum provides for a good range of subjects and meets pupils' needs and interests well. Since the opening of the academy, provision is now good, particularly in reading and writing, and in personal, social and health education. Pupils enjoy reading for pleasure, and they exhibit a good degree of stamina in writing for long periods of time. Pupils support each other well during lessons. Provision in mathematics is secure for the development of numeracy skills. Senior leaders have rightly identified that sufficient emphasis is not always given to fostering pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills, especially for the most able.
- The curriculum fosters British values and promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils are taught to appreciate the richness and diversity of British culture through some of the themes in assembly. These include, 'why do we all live together?' and 'people are equal'. Values are promoted well through celebrating a range of festivals. The importance of democracy is reflected in the way pupils conducted their own elections, linked with the recent General Election. Pupils investigate moral and ethical issues through discussing global issues such as 'World Water Day'.
- All aspects of safeguarding are robust and meet statutory requirements. This is because the academy gives safeguarding a high priority to ensure that its pupils are safe.
- The trust provides excellent support, such as in its provision of suitable training for all staff. It is highly effective in helping the academy to foster strong collaborative relationships between staff and pupils with other academies in the trust. Pupils are strongly encouraged to develop their own leadership skills. For example, those pupils who are 'learning ambassadors' from the different academies in the trust are working together effectively to help improve the quality of teaching and learning for everyone.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The academy governors carry out their roles effectively. They are very committed and dedicated, working extremely hard to ensure that they have the relevant and necessary skills. They attend a considerable amount of training and have completed a review. They have high ambitions for the academy and are very keen that all of their pupils achieve well. The academy governors are good at looking at pupil performance data and asking the leaders challenging questions. They are well informed through making regular visits and noting the accurate and very informative reports given to them by the headteacher and other leaders. All of this helps them to have a clear overview of the academy's strengths and the areas that need improving. It also keeps them in touch with knowing what the quality

of teaching is like throughout the academy. The academy governors are aware of the differing lines of demarcation between their responsibilities and those of the academy trust, and that it is the other committees in the trust that deal with rewarding good teaching and tackling underperformance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is also the view of the academy governors, staff and pupils. Pupils listen attentively to their teachers and concentrate well on their tasks. Pupils say that they find most lessons interesting. This has contributed to the improvements in behaviour, especially in the current academic year. A small number of pupils present challenging behaviour, but this is dealt with effectively by staff.
- In lessons pupils show high levels of respect and willingly accept differences of opinions. They collaborate constructively on shared tasks. In the playground, they talk and play together amicably. Pupils take great pride in wearing their uniform. Also they take great care and are proud of the learning environment, which is kept very tidy and clean.
- Pupils talk about British values and say that this has been a clear focus for their learning. They have elected 'class ambassadors' for each class who help pupils to know the importance of having the correct attitudes to learn. Playground leaders help younger ones at break times. They say they enjoy helping others.
- Despite the academy's best efforts to work with parents and improve attendance, it is still below average. This is because a few parents are not aware of the detrimental impact that irregular attendance is having on their children's education.
- The breakfast club creates a positive and caring atmosphere. It gives pupils a healthy and settled start to the school day.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. All safeguarding training for staff is fully up to date. All policies in relation to child protection and safeguarding are regularly updated on the website to keep staff and parents fully informed. The policies include references to keeping pupils safe from child exploitation, extremism and radicalisation.
- Highly stringent procedures and training are in place for recruiting and vetting of new staff. Induction procedures are extremely robust and ensure that new staff are quickly made aware of their responsibilities for the protection of all pupils.
- Case studies demonstrate the academy's tenacious and highly effective work with external agencies to ensure that appropriate support is provided to pupils whose personal circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Pupils say they feel extremely safe in the academy. They have high levels of understanding of the different types of bullying, including cyber bullying. Pupils say that bullying is rare in the school, and that if it does happen they are confident that adults will deal with it effectively.
- The curriculum is extremely good at ensuring that pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from an early age. For example, children in the early years relish the opportunity of actively going around their learning environments checking to see that all of the equipment is safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Senior leaders and the trust have rightly placed a lot of emphasis in helping teachers to improve their practice since the opening of the academy. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve, with an increasing proportion becoming outstanding.
- Teachers role model their spoken language well to pupils. They give pupils clear instructions and explanations. Pupils respond well to their questions in full sentences which is quickly helping to build their oral skills. Teaching assistants are well briefed to support pupils' learning. They do this effectively in lessons and when they are working with small groups.
- Numeracy skills are taught well. Teachers' good use of resources and skilful questioning help pupils to make good progress with their key number skills. However, the development of the breadth of learning in relation to pupils' reasoning and problem solving is still in its early stages, particularly for the most-able pupils.

- Senior leaders have had a big focus on improving pupils' writing. Pupils are given good opportunities to write in different subjects. This has been effective in helping them to develop their writing skills, which is strongly evident from the displays around the academy and in their books. As a result, standards in writing have notably improved.
- Reading and phonics (the sounds that letters make) are taught well. As a result pupils who are at the early stages of reading quickly develop the necessary skills to work out unfamiliar words in their books. Pupils benefit from daily quiet reading sessions which are also helping to build up their reading skills. Reading is strongly promoted throughout the academy. For example, displays show pupils reading in unusual places around the school. Pupils strive to become the 'reader of the week' in order to get a new book because they enjoy reading for pleasure. The above average results from the reading screening check for pupils in Year 1 in 2014 reflect the improvements in reading.
- Work in pupils' books shows that teachers' marking helps to give pupils clear next steps on how to improve their work. Pupils respond well to the 'quality time' given to them by their teachers, acting on the guidance they have received to help them improve their work. Some pupils have become adept at evaluating their own learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils make good progress in all year groups, and attainment has continued to improve quickly since the academy opened.
- In the 2014 published results at the end of Year 6, overall attainment was below that achieved by pupils nationally. Currently, overall attainment is on track to be broadly in line with other pupils nationally. This is a considerable improvement on standards reached previously.
- The proportion of pupils who made better than expected progress from their differing starting points in reading and mathematics, last year, was above average. Progress in writing was average, but steps have been taken to redress this and progress is currently improving.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make at least good progress. This has notably improved over this academic year when compared to the previous year. The leader of the special needs provision has established strong links with external agencies, and works closely with them to address the more complex needs of some of the pupils. Also there is regular training for those teaching assistants that work closely with these pupils in small-group situations.
- From below average attainment in the 2014 national tests, the most-able pupils have made good progress. The school's performance information shows that the proportion of pupils on track to achieve Level 5 in reading and writing is now broadly average. This is a good improvement, as their previous lower standards were due to pupils' catching up from underperformance in previous years. The proportion of pupils that are on track to achieve the higher levels in mathematics is improving but is still below average. This is because the most-able pupils are not always given sufficient challenge to stretch their reasoning skills.
- The attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in the different year groups throughout the academy are closing quickly. In some year groups, such as in Years 5 and 6, disadvantaged pupils are doing better than their classmates.
- In all year groups disadvantaged pupils make good progress in relation to other pupils nationally from their different starting points. Their rate of progress was generally better in reading when compared to their classmates and others nationally.
- In the 2014 national tests, there were some wide gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. This was due to the overall attainment of all pupils in the academy being below that of other pupils nationally. The widest gap at the time was in mathematics, where disadvantaged pupils were around five terms behind others nationally. They were three terms behind their classmates. In reading, they were around two terms behind their classmates and others nationally. They were around four terms behind their classmates in writing, and five terms behind others nationally. Since the opening of the academy these gaps have been closing quickly. The few remaining gaps in attainment are mainly due to some of these disadvantaged pupils also having very complex special educational needs.

The early years provision**is good**

- Children achieve well in the early years. They join the Nursery class with skills and knowledge that are below those typical for their age, particularly in communication and language. The staff have an astute understanding of how young children learn. They provide a rich range of learning opportunities to foster children's basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, and in their personal development. As a result children make good progress in all aspects of their learning. By the end of the Reception Year the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is now above average. They are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Teaching is good. Staff plan effectively to capture children's imagination. They provide ample opportunities for children to develop their speaking skills and become confident learners. For example, at the time of the inspection, children were highly engaged in developing their speaking and listening skills while making different recipes in the mud kitchen. Others were trying to describe the unusual colours in the blocks of ice that stimulated their curiosity.
- Relationships between staff and children are constructive and supportive. Children know that all of the adults take good care of them. This helps them to feel safe and secure in their learning environments. As a result children behave well and respond quickly to instructions. There are lots of smiles and laughter from all the children as they enjoy their learning.
- The leadership of the early years is a key strength. The leader provides an excellent role model through his teaching and high expectations. He has notably improved the provision. Relationships with parents are good. 'Stay and play' sessions are arranged for parents, which help them to be aware as to how they can support their children at home.

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	140196
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	450262

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wayne Palmer
Executive Headteacher	Keith Sorrell
Headteacher	Jane King
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01922710164
Fax number	01922712225
Email address	postbox@rivers.walsall.sch.uk

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