

The Ferns Primary Academy

Plodder Lane, Bolton, Lancashire BL4 0DA

Inspection dates

8–9 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal and other leaders, including governors, are passionate in the pursuit of excellence for their pupils and staff. They give an extremely clear lead on school improvement.
- Leaders and managers have worked effectively to improve teaching and learning, which are now good. A calm and purposeful atmosphere permeates the school, allowing learning to flourish.
- Governors consistently challenge the school and hold senior leaders to account to ensure improvement for pupils. They know the school very well.
- Staff know the pupils well. Teaching assistants are highly skilled and give good, effective support to ensure that all pupils can thrive.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years, make good progress and are increasingly well prepared for when they start in Year 1.
- Pupils in key stage 1 this year made accelerated progress and as a result, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are expected to be in line with national expectations in 2016.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are excellent. Pupils are extremely polite and courteous to each other and to adults.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and appreciation of British values are promoted very well. This is shown by their exceptionally keen attitudes to learning, respect and consideration for others and a willingness to accept responsibility, such as on the school newspaper, eco committee or school council.
- The curriculum is vibrant and well planned and the use of specialist teachers in music and sports contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The use of the pupil premium funding is effective and strengthens disadvantaged pupils' academic achievement, personal development and well-being.
- Pupils' safety is paramount. Systems in place are rigorous and regularly checked to keep pupils as safe as possible.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While outcomes for pupils are at least good, occasionally the most able do not have work which is sufficiently challenging. Opportunities are not always provided for pupils to use the skills they are learning in ways that challenge their thinking further, thus enabling them to achieve their highest potential.
- Tasks and activities in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics do not enable pupils to draw on and apply all the different skills they have.
- Recent school systems to track the progress of pupils are not fully understood and used reliably by all staff.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it generates outstanding outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring that tasks and extension activities planned for the most able pupils consistently challenge their thinking and deepen their learning
 - ensuring that tasks planned in subjects other than English and mathematics enable pupils to extend, draw on and apply their skills and knowledge.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that assessments of pupils' progress entered onto the academy's tracking system are reliable and accurate for all year groups and classes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The principal, assistant headteachers and governors are ambitious for the school and work effectively as a team to bring about continuous improvement. A culture of high expectations permeates the school, in which good teaching and learning can continue to improve and flourish.
- Middle leaders are involved in reviewing pupils' work and analysing pupils' performance. They are on hand to advise and work alongside staff in their areas of responsibility and share this work across the school. As a result, they play an effective part in school improvement.
- Senior leaders have an accurate, insightful view of what the school does well as a result of rigorous and regular monitoring of the school's performance. They identify and tackle areas that require further development and their drive and determination for the school to be the best it can be is relentless.
- Systems for checking the quality of teaching are also rigorous. Leaders regularly collect information from lesson observations and scrutinies of pupils' books. Staff have to account for the progress of their pupils at regular meetings with senior leaders. Despite teachers knowing their pupils well, the fairly recently initiated tracking system to assess pupils' progress is not yet fully understood and used with equal reliability by staff. Consequently, teachers can be too cautious when recording progress. This can, at times, mask the actual progress pupils make.
- Staff performance is led effectively. Staff have challenging targets for pupil progress and their own development, linked to school priorities.
- The curriculum, including the early years, is interesting and well planned. However, the tasks and activities sometimes given to pupils can lack opportunities for the pupils to explore their skills in ways to present and organise their work and to apply their skills and knowledge. The curriculum is supported effectively by a range of sporting and other after-school clubs, which pupils appreciate. Leaders ensure that pupils are well-prepared for life in modern Britain through assemblies, carefully chosen literature, trips and week-long events involving all classes, to which parents are invited. Pupils learn about people from other countries and faiths through lessons and discussions.
- The school is a warm, welcoming haven and is committed to promoting equality and diversity. This strong, caring ethos, both for pupils and their families, supports pupils' personal development and well-being very effectively and ensures that all pupils are able to thrive. Pupils of all ages have a clear understanding of the importance of caring for each other and celebrating their differences. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is encompassed very well by the rich curriculum. A plethora of trips, visits and visitors enrich the curriculum even further, giving pupils a wealth of life experiences beyond the local community.
- Physical education (PE) and sports funding is used effectively to raise pupils' awareness of health and exercise. Specialist coaches work alongside school staff and the school has provided many additional opportunities to enhance pupils' sporting skills. Pupils now take part in sporting competitions and enjoy the successes they are having when they participate.
- The school's use of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used well. As a result, there are very few gaps in the performance of disadvantaged pupils across the school. Leaders have prioritised additional staff to give high levels of small group and individual support for pupils at risk of falling behind. This is effective because staff are highly skilled, have strong subject knowledge and feel valued as 'part of the team'.
- Leaders collaborate well with other academies in the Northern Education Trust. The trust also provides valuable support and challenge.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are knowledgeable about the school and offer challenge and support in equal measure. They are committed to providing a caring school where children learn important values, while promoting effective learning.
 - Governors request and receive valuable information from the leadership team about the performance of their school. They have high expectations for the quality of teaching. This means they have been careful to appoint the best teaching staff they can.
 - Governors carry out the performance management of the principal effectively and are involved in the decisions of performance-related pay for teachers. As a consequence, they are fully aware of how staff are helped to develop their skills.

- Governors say they are well-trained and well-informed. Consequently, they feel able to challenge leaders on the progress that pupils, including disadvantaged children, make.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school takes its responsibilities in keeping pupils safe very seriously. Staff receive training in safeguarding and radicalisation, which has heightened their understanding of the danger and risks posed to pupils. Leaders have ensured that all staff are highly trained in keeping pupils safe and the school is relentless in ensuring that pupils are safe beyond the building. For instance, staff and pupils have been trained in staying safe when travelling to and from school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Leaders, including governors, have been successful in improving teaching since the last inspection. Teaching staff share the vision held by the leaders and governors of the school. They are committed to helping all pupils achieve as well as they can. Staff respond well to challenges and have embraced the new ideas that have come their way. Consequently, teaching is consistently good, with some that is outstanding.
- Staff have a number of ways to make sure that all pupils feel supported and valued. They expect pupils to contribute to lessons and to respect the views of others.
- There is a comprehensive marking policy in place, which teachers follow successfully. This frequently helps pupils to know what they are doing well and what they need to do next to improve.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and of reading is good. There are flexible groupings across the early years and key stage 1, which allow children to move around as they grow in confidence and ability. Books and stories play a major part in learning across a range of subjects and topics to ignite pupils' interest and love of reading.
- The most able pupils progress well in their reading, writing and mathematics. However, in some lessons, extension tasks do not always sufficiently challenge their thinking or offer them opportunities to apply the skills they have learnt.
- Learning is often enjoyable. Teachers work hard to provide tasks in English and mathematics that engage and motivate pupils to learn. In other subjects, activities do not always allow pupils to use their skills and imagination in presenting their work in different ways.
- Teachers often use questioning skilfully to develop pupils' thinking skills and deepen understanding. This also provides pupils with the opportunity to articulate their learning and to respond to the views of others.
- Teachers use homework well, often linking it to individual lessons or topics. Pupils say they enjoy the homework they are given, more so when parents also get involved.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school is warm and welcoming. This calm and harmonious environment helps pupils to develop into sensible, respectful individuals. Pupils relish the roles of responsibility such as head boy and girl, school councillors, the eco committee and the school newspaper workers. The interview process for the newspaper and the election of school councillors from each class helps pupils develop the British values of democracy. They also develop a very good understanding of the rule of law, respect for each other and being fair to everyone.
- Pupils also show compassion and initiative in raising funds for charity. For example, coffee mornings and sport initiatives have taken place to raise money and develop pupils' moral and spiritual compass.
- Pupils understand there are many religions and cultures in modern British society and that everyone deserves respect. One pupil voiced the thinking of many in saying, 'We are all unique and have our own ideas on things.'
- The curriculum is used to prepare pupils well for playing a responsible role in society by engaging in frequent learning linked to British values. For example, pupils made poppies and some attended the Remembrance Day event in Bolton, reinforcing pupils' understanding of the losses and impact of war within the world.

- The school uses enterprise skills to drive up pupils' own skills and build pupils' independence and confidence.
- Pupils, parents and staff agree that bullying is not an issue. Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms that bullying can take and the different ways it can happen, by text or cyber bullying. They know what to do if it happens to them.
- The comment from pupils, heard many times by the inspectors, 'If you have a problem, tell a teacher or adult and they sort it out', shows that pupils trust staff and feel very safe in the school.
- Pupils who may be vulnerable, and their families, receive extra support from staff and external agencies, so they can participate fully and progress as well as their classmates. For example, leaders use the school minibus to collect pupils who need temporary support with travel arrangements.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils talk freely about the time behaviour was a problem, but it is a problem no longer. The consistency with which the school's behaviour policy has been applied has resulted in pupils developing a keen awareness of their own self-discipline. As a result, lessons are calm and purposeful and pupils are able to learn without disruption.
- Excellent learning behaviour has helped to accelerate progress. Whatever the task, pupils work diligently and show a genuine pride in their work. They mix happily together, are always smiling, polite and helpful. They show real consideration for each other, both in the classroom and at more unstructured times in the playground and are keen to earn their 'golden time' each week.
- Pupils have a keen sense of right and wrong and are very aware that they are responsible for their actions.
- Since the time of the previous inspection, attendance has improved significantly and is now average, with little persistent absence. Attendance has a very high profile within the school, with a number of rewards in place for 100% attendance. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils and families understand and value regular, punctual attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils get a good start to their education in the early years. Progress is good, with more children, year on year, reaching a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class. This means that an increasing proportion of children are well prepared for Year 1.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving the national expectation in the phonics check in Year 1 improved on the previous year and was in line with the national expectation.
- Pupils in Year 2 over the last three years, despite their lower than average standards in statutory assessments, are now making accelerated progress and are catching up quickly. In Year 2 this year, pupils have made good progress from their starting points on entry to Year 1. As a consequence, standards in the statutory assessments of reading, writing and mathematics are at national expectations for the first time since the last inspection.
- Progress accelerates across key stage 2. As a result, by the end of Year 6 in 2015, attainment was nudging above national expectations in reading and mathematics. In writing, it was at the expected standard. This represents at least good progress from pupils' starting points and for many, exceptional progress. The school's predictions for 2016 suggest attainment will rise again. This positive picture means that pupils are well prepared for their next stage in learning by the time they leave Year 6.
- Pupils are helped to do well in mathematics because, generally, most lessons are challenging and teachers provide work that motivates pupils to learn. Pupils do well in reading because they are encouraged to read with parents at home and have opportunities to read to adults in the school on a regular basis. The teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar is having a positive effect on pupils' writing skills.
- In 2015, the most able pupils reached the higher levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Currently, across the school the most able make similarly good progress to their classmates, although sometimes opportunities are missed to add further to the level of challenge and stretch pupils' thinking.
- Pupils for whom English is an additional language make similarly good progress to their peers because of the effective and skilful support they receive, both in small groups and as individuals. Although there were too few pupils from any one heritage to make comparison statistically viable, collectively in the 2015 tests at the end of Year 6, these pupils attained better than their classmates in mathematics and writing and in line with their classmates in reading.

- The school are quick to identify any pupils who are in danger of falling behind. Staff make effective provision for these pupils, including extra support. This also includes pupils who have special educational needs or disability. As a result, these pupils make similarly good progress to their peers.
- There are no significant gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates across the school this year. By the end of key stage 2 in 2015, disadvantaged pupils made significantly more progress than their classmates in mathematics and similar progress in reading and writing. Against all pupils nationally, disadvantaged pupils in the school made better progress and attained as well as all pupils nationally in mathematics. However, their attainment in reading and writing, compared to all pupils nationally, showed they were three months behind in reading and five months behind in writing.

Early years provision

is good

- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points, where often their skills and understanding are much less well developed than typical for their age. The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development by the time they left Reception in 2015 was below the national average. This figure is increasing year on year and is predicted to be in line with the national average in 2016. Overall, increasing proportions of children are well prepared for transition to Year 1.
- Highly positive relationships exist between staff, children and parents. This helps children to settle quickly, become confident learners and build a positive attitude to school. During the inspection, children worked happily and cooperatively together.
- Focused and incidental assessments are made regularly to ensure that children are making the progress they should. Children with additional or special educational needs or disability are quickly identified and prompt action is taken to ensure that their needs are met.
- Funding to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils is well used to provide extra support which not only improves their learning, but also builds their confidence. As a result, their progress is similar to that of their classmates.
- The basic skills in reading, writing and number are promoted effectively. Opportunities for children to write, and count are plentiful around the early years setting.
- The setting is clean and colourful, with interesting displays and activities for children to choose.
- The leadership and management of the early years are good. Close liaison between all adults ensures that information is shared regularly in order to ensure progression in children's learning. Staff have a firm commitment to securing the very best outcomes for the children.
- There are good systems in place to forge positive links between home and school as well as providing a good record of the progress of each individual child.
- Teaching in the early years is typically good. Interaction between children and adults is effective. Adults are skilful in knowing just when to intervene and when to stand back, and praise is used well to build children's self-confidence, resilience and a 'can do' attitude.

School details

Unique reference number	138399
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10012208

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	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steven Dale
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Debra Murphy
Telephone number	01204 4333019
Website	www.thefernsacademy.org
Email address	murphyd@thefernsacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2014

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding given to the school for disadvantaged pupils who qualify for free school meals or for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Two-thirds of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils from multi-ethnic groups is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The school meets the government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The Ferns Academy opened in September 2012. It is a sponsored academy and is part of the Northern Education Academy Trust
- The school provides a breakfast club and after-school facilities.
- The school website does not fully meet requirements on the publication of statutory information on pupils' attainment at key stage 2, including the percentages of pupils attaining the higher level 5 in reading, writing and mathematics, links to the school and college performance tables and some out-of-date policies that do not reflect the current practice of the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a wide range of learning activities across both key stages, in the early years and in a range of subjects. Five of the observations were jointly undertaken with the principal and other senior leaders. Pupils' books from different groups and subjects were looked at.
- Discussions were held with the principal, two deputy headteachers and other school leaders.
- Inspectors met with four members of the governing body. A meeting was also held with the director for school improvement representing the academy trust. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils and spoke to pupils informally throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors considered parents' opinions through the 55 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with the freetext platform. Inspectors conducted informal discussions with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors reviewed the 13 staff questionnaires. There were no pupil surveys returned during the inspection.
- The inspection team studied information about achievement and the assessment of learning. They examined any records relating to behaviour and attendance and looked at a range of other documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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