

Delce Academy

The Tideway, Rochester, Kent ME1 2NJ

Inspection dates

8 to 9 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Trust leaders and governors have not ensured that much-needed improvements to leadership, teaching and learning have been made swiftly and emphatically. As a result, standards have declined.
- The new executive headteacher has set about making improvements but these have not yet had time to take effect.
- Middle leaders have been given insufficient time to carry out improvements to teaching and learning. Consequently, their efforts have had limited effect.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in key stages 1 and 2 are weak. Teaching is poorly planned and does not meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils underachieve. Teachers' low expectations and frequent staff turnover compound the problem.
- Leaders have not planned the curriculum well enough to ensure that pupils build their knowledge, skills and understanding over time.
- Teachers in the main school do not have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These pupils make weak progress from their starting points.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils' learning is not used well. The gap between their achievement and that of their peers is widening.
- Sometimes the behaviour of a few pupils disrupts learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Staff follow safeguarding procedures well. They work hard to keep children safe at school.
- Pupils enjoy a range of activities that promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Early reading, writing and mathematics are taught systematically in the Reception class.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
 - improving the trust's support and challenge for the school
 - developing the skills of the local advisory committee in holding school leaders to account
 - providing senior and middle leaders with appropriate training and ensuring that they are not distracted from work to improve the school
 - making sure that teaching, learning and assessment are monitored carefully, and that this leads to appropriate support and challenge for staff to bring about rapid and sustainable improvements
 - ensuring that the curriculum is sequenced so that pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well across all subjects
 - improving the impact of the pupil premium spending on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes
 - improving the provision for pupils with SEND
 - ensuring that staff are well trained to deal with challenging behaviour and low-level disruption and that behaviour systems are effectively used.
- Improve pupils' progress across the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in each year group
 - making sure that teachers understand the steps pupils need to go through to develop and consolidate their understanding and skills in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that teachers can accurately assess pupils' learning and use the information to plan activities that meet pupils' needs, particularly for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Since the last inspection, leaders and those responsible for governance have been ineffective in ensuring that pupils have received an acceptable quality of education. Leaders and governors have been slow to implement plans to raise standards. As a result, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, do not make enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school's leadership over time has been turbulent. The new executive headteacher has only just joined the school. Although staff and governors have high hopes for the changes that she will bring, there has been no time as yet for there to be a noticeable effect on teaching and learning.
- Pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of their learning, whether that is the move to the next class or to secondary school.
- The head of school, who has been in charge since last September, has not had sufficient training to support her in leading the school effectively.
- Leaders recognise the need for urgent improvements to teaching but have been hampered, until recently, by high staff turnover. Staff training has not had a marked impact on teaching.
- Middle leaders have also suffered from a lack of training. They have not had enough time to monitor the quality of teaching or plan necessary improvements.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has not been used effectively. Although these pupils do receive additional support, it has not been successful in improving their progress.
- Leaders have not made adequate provision for pupils with SEND in the main school. As a result, these pupils have failed to make sufficient progress. Leaders recognise that provision has been poor and there has been insufficient training for teachers to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. The specialist provision leader has recently taken on the wider role within the main school. It is, however, too early to see any impact on provision.
- The curriculum covers an appropriate range of subjects, but learning activities are not sufficiently focused on building and consolidating pupils' depth of knowledge and understanding.
- Parents and carers told inspectors that they had lost faith in the leadership of the school. Several said that they felt that the trust had let the school down. Parents are deeply concerned by high staff turnover, standards of behaviour at the school and the lack of communication from the trust and school leaders.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in key stage 1 and 2 is covered within the curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to consider the school's core values through assemblies and a range of wider activities. However, pupils are not routinely encouraged to reflect on these values outside of assemblies. Pupils are not explicitly asked to apply these values to their own attitudes towards learning.

- It is recommended that newly qualified teachers are not appointed.

Governance of the school

- The Castle Trust leaders claim high ambitions for Delce Academy but have not provided adequate support to ensure that the school improves. Since the last inspection, the trust has failed to strengthen leadership and teaching. This has damaged pupils' progress.
- The local advisory committee has recently increased its efforts to hold leaders to account. The chair of the committee, since her appointment in September, has insisted on greater monitoring by governors. This is especially successful in the use of sports premium funding. However, governors still lack sufficient urgency to raise standards in the school.
- Minutes from meetings show that the local advisory committee is increasingly aware of the decline in standards. They have been frustrated by the lack of attention paid by the trust to the school. For example, the agreement at the beginning of the academic year to have joint chairs of governors and board member meetings for the two schools in the trust has not yet been honoured. Consequently, valuable time in which to tackle the school's problems has been lost.
- Governors are acutely aware of the failure to use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to secure improved outcomes for these pupils. However, they have not held leaders to account for this poor performance or for the use of public monies.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Checks on suitability of staff to work in a school are carried out thoroughly and recorded accurately.
- All relevant training has taken place and is up to date.
- Staff are fully aware of safeguarding matters and have a well-developed sense of 'it could happen here'. In discussion with inspectors, they conveyed a strong sense that 'no issue is too small to pass on'. School records show that staff are quick to report any concerns and are alert to any changes in individual pupils' behaviour or circumstances.
- Staff ensure that referrals are followed up and are tenacious in working with other agencies to provide help to vulnerable pupils and their families. The designated safeguarding lead and the home school support officer show a strong knowledge of the local community and child protection issues. This means that they are well-informed and therefore ready to act on issues that emerge.
- The culture of safeguarding permeates throughout the school, with pupils talking confidently and knowledgeably about how to keep themselves safe online, for instance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching is weak in key stages 1 and 2. Teachers' assessment of what pupils know and understand is not effective. They are not sufficiently skilled in checking accurately what

pupils understand and can do. Too often activities are planned without next steps of learning in mind. Over time, this means that pupils' needs are not met.

- Some teachers focus on what they intend pupils to learn and structure learning activities more precisely. Overall, though, teaching lacks challenge and a clear purpose, resulting in pupils' fragile knowledge and understanding. There is not enough effective teaching to support pupils to catch up and compensate for weak teaching.
- Too frequently, learning is disrupted by the challenging behaviour of a handful of pupils because teachers lack the skills and confidence to deal with it.
- Pupils with SEND are not well catered for in teachers' planning and delivery. This is because teachers do not know how to meet the needs of these pupils. Consequently, pupils with SEND often struggle with the learning tasks and do not make adequate progress.
- In the resource-based provision, 'The Bridge', pupils are taught in a nurturing environment which parents value. There is, however, insufficient focus on learning outcomes.
- The marked variability in teaching and consequent lack of continuity in pupils' learning has been made worse by the high turnover of staff over time. Leaders have made efforts to train new teachers as they start at the school but have been overwhelmed by the scale of what they need to do.
- Leaders understand the importance of literacy and have introduced a structured phonics programme. This has started to have a positive impact for younger pupils. The school's guided reading strategy, however, is inconsistent in its quality due to staff turnover and inexperience. Consequently, older pupils' progress in reading is slow.
- There are pockets of stronger teaching in English and mathematics than elsewhere in the school, but these are isolated and therefore have only limited benefit for pupils' learning.
- In mathematics, there is too little challenge. Some teachers do not carefully pick up and correct misconceptions.
- Physical education (PE) teaching is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy, and parents value, the opportunities offered by the PE teachers and coaches.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Most pupils are welcoming to visitors and demonstrate confidence when speaking about their experience of school.
- Typically, pupils are courteous towards each other and staff. They are encouraged to consider the core values of the school: respect, perseverance, aspiration, honesty and positivity. However, although pupils can speak about these values, their understanding of them is not routinely reflected in their conduct, particularly among the older pupils.

- Pupils feel safe and are well informed about how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils feel that bullying does happen in school but, mostly, they trust that adults will resolve any issues.
- Parents of pupils who attend 'The Bridge' believe that transition to and from the provision is managed with sensitivity and care.
- Leaders have ensured that there is a wide range of activities on offer to promote healthy lifestyles. Sports premium funding has been used well to provide a wealth of physical activities that a wide range of pupils enjoy and value.
- Leaders recognise that there are currently insufficient opportunities for pupils to take up roles of responsibility or for the majority to be rewarded for their efforts. Pupils told inspectors that they wanted to be more involved in decisions within the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Most pupils conduct themselves appropriately. A small number of pupils, particularly in the older years, find it difficult to manage their own behaviour at times. When this happens, it can distort the picture of behaviour in school.
- In lessons, many pupils are interested in the learning activities. However, when teaching is not effective, some pupils lose attention and disrupt learning by talking over the teacher or distracting other pupils. This has the effect of slowing the learning for the whole class.
- In discussion with inspectors, pupils expressed their wish for their learning to be uninterrupted by poor behaviour and for better and fairer systems of reward to be introduced. Parents also shared this view.
- Fixed-term exclusion rates remain high and are above the national average. A small number of pupils account for most of the repeat exclusions. Leaders are determined to ensure that these pupils receive appropriate support. There have been no permanent exclusions.
- Leaders have worked hard to minimise absence. As a result, attendance rates are improving and are in line with the national average. However, persistent absence rates for disadvantaged pupils remain high.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils' progress and attainment over time are poor. The published outcomes for pupils reaching the end of key stage 2 in 2018 are much lower than national figures in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Current Year 6 pupils' attainment is low in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders forecast that less than half of the current Year 6 pupils will achieve the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Across year groups, current pupils' attainment is low in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress is weak from their starting points. On average, less than half of each year group is likely to reach age-related standards by the end of the

academic year.

- This picture of weak progress and low attainment is especially true for pupils in the main school with SEND and for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils in the resource-based provision, 'The Bridge', improve their behaviour and social skills because of well-targeted support from staff. However, they make weak progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Across the wider curriculum pupils do not systematically develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Work in pupils' books shows that their skills and knowledge are variable and often fragmented and superficial.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- There has been greater stability in staffing in early years than in other parts of the school in recent times. The early years phase leader joined the school in September 2017. The Reception teacher took over the class at the same time. They have established good relationships with parents. Parents value the advice that they receive to develop their child's learning through further activities at home.
- Despite a lack of senior leadership oversight of early years, the early years leader has methodically tackled the improvements needed to the environment and equipment identified at the last inspection, as resources have allowed. She has sensibly sought external advice for her plans. Now, children enjoy their learning because learning environments are richer.
- Personal development in early years is a strength. Staff are clear with children what they expect and set high standards for behaviour and conduct. Safeguarding is effective. Children are supervised in safe and secure learning areas.
- Drawing on her own knowledge and experience, the early years leader has an accurate and clear view of the strengths of the provision and what still needs to improve. For example, this school year she has introduced changes to the way phonics is taught.
- The changes have been well supported by training for staff, so that phonics is being taught systematically and precisely in Reception. This is increasingly effective in improving children's early reading and writing skills. A greater focus on the direct teaching of early mathematics skills is having a similar positive effect.
- Staff plan activities that engage children's curiosity, as seen in children's excitement at the hatching of chicks. However, such activities are not widespread or sustained enough to fully develop children's learning.
- Staff use assessments to determine children's stages of development and where they need to improve. However, staff do not plan effectively so that gaps in development are addressed.
- The weaknesses in the leadership of SEND in the school until recently mean that the development of communication and language for those children whose skills are below what is typical for their age is not planned explicitly enough.
- The phase leader understands what needs to be done to further develop provision but, as with other leaders in school, staff turnover has meant she has had a full teaching

commitment until very recently, which has hindered plans.

- Nonetheless, the clear focus on learning over the last two years has had a positive effect on children's outcomes. In 2018, a far greater proportion of children reached a good level of development than the previous year and compared favourably with national figures. Current assessments show there will be a dip this year. This is in part due to the increased number of children who have more complex needs.

School details

Unique reference number	140711
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10088170

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	567
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees of The Castle Trust
Chair of the board of trustees	Chris Purchase
Executive headteacher	Kate Taylor
Telephone number	01634 845 242
Website	www.delceacademy.co.uk
Email address	office@delceacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 to 22 March 2017

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Castle Trust. This multi-academy trust incorporates Delce Academy and Greenway Academy in West Sussex. The trust is responsible for school performance. A local advisory committee oversees the work of each school.
- The school is much larger than primary schools nationally. Previously a junior school, the transition to a primary school began in September 2016 with the admission of the first Reception cohort. Currently, there is one full-time Reception class and one class in each of Years 1 and 2. In key stage 2, there are four classes in each year group. The Bridge is a separate unit that offers specialist provision for up to 15 pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school is led by an executive headteacher and two heads of school. One head of school is responsible for the specialist provision and the second is responsible for key stages 1 and 2.
- Over one quarter of pupils are disadvantaged. This is greater than the proportion found

in primary schools nationally.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average for primary schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning throughout the school. Most of their observations were carried out with the executive headteacher and/or other school leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the two heads of school, other school leaders and teachers who are new to the profession. The lead inspector held meetings with members of the local governing body and with the chief executive officer of The Castle Trust.
- A wide range of current pupils' work was scrutinised. Inspectors worked with school leaders to do this.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons, around the school and on the playground. They also met more formally with a group of pupils that inspectors selected. Inspectors heard some pupils read.
- A range of documentation relating to safeguarding, school improvement, governance, behaviour and attendance was scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the first day of the inspection. They considered 118 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 86 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered two letters that were submitted from parents.
- Inspectors also considered 58 responses to the pupils' survey and 11 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Yasmin Maskatiya, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alison Bradley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Katherine Powell	Ofsted Inspector

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