

Cedar Children's Academy

Cedar Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 2JP

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2019

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	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Good, strong leadership has secured improvements since the school opened as an academy in June 2016. Senior leaders have a clear vision for the school that is shared by all staff.
- The focus on leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics is at an early stage. While subject leaders are developing the clarity of curriculum planning and assessment, standards are not equally high in all subjects.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Teachers plan engaging lessons that help pupils develop their reading skills. As a result, pupils read with interest and enjoyment.
- In the early years, children receive strong phonics teaching and make good progress from their starting points, preparing them well for the transition to key stage 1.
- Outcomes for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics are strengthening. Lessons engage pupils and build relevant skills, knowledge and understanding. However, too few of the most able pupils achieve highly enough due to the work they are given lacking sufficient challenge.
- Governors and trustees are knowledgeable about the school. They make regular visits to the school. While governors are effective in holding senior leaders to account, challenge for middle leaders has not been as strong.
- Disadvantaged pupils are supported well. School leaders ensure that the funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent wisely and targets the needs of pupils. As a result, the difference between disadvantaged and other pupils nationally is diminishing.
- Pupils behave well. School leaders have dramatically reduced the number of exclusions over the past three years because of high behaviour expectations across the school.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective. Pupils make good progress from their starting points because of the support they receive.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen outcomes across all subjects, by:
 - ensuring that subject leaders are clear about the sequence of learning within their subjects
 - ensuring that governors hold middle leaders to account so that pupils make strong progress across all subjects
- Raise the expectations for most able pupils, ensuring that they are challenged sufficiently to work at higher standards.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- In the short time since the academy was opened in June 2016, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have embedded a culture of improvement across the school. The vision that 'a Cedar learner is courageous' has been modelled for the school community by the headteacher and deputy. They have used educational research to introduce effective systems to improve the quality of teaching across the school and stabilise staffing.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of what the school needs to do to improve. They have a clear plan for improvement that is focused on well-considered priorities. Through regular monitoring, they make sure that plans are followed through and improvements are embedded over time.
- Staff feel well supported by leaders. Teachers recognise that leaders have worked hard to make sure their workloads are managed fairly. Newly qualified teachers are supported in developing their craft as teachers, and established teachers value the training they receive from the school and trust.
- Middle leaders, including year-group leaders and subject leaders, are supported well. They value the mentoring they receive from senior staff, enabling them to become increasingly accountable for the strengthening outcomes of pupils across the school.
- Parents are complimentary about the leadership of the school. Many parents comment on the positive changes since the headteacher has been in post. Parents feel well supported by the school and have confidence in the teachers. The comment from one parent typified a number of responses: 'Great headteacher and staff. My child is happy and doing very well at the school.'
- Leaders use the sport premium funding well. Funds have been allocated to provide a wide range of sporting activities for pupils and training for teachers. The school is also rightly proud of the increased uptake in sports competitions, winning the local 'mini youth games' for netball and being awarded the 'fair play' award for rugby. As a result, teachers are confident in teaching physical education and there is a greater uptake of physical activities by pupils.
- Staff value the training and support they receive. Leaders recognise talent in staff and deploy them across the school to coach and support colleagues. Teachers have used the training they have undertaken in mathematics to develop their practice. Year-group leaders and subject leaders comment positively on the impact of training they have received to develop their middle leadership roles and responsibilities.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Children in the early years welcome residents from a local care home each week to their class to learn alongside them. The school's values of being 'considerate, enthusiastic, determined, assured and resilient' are upheld by pupils and staff. As a result, pupils are reflective about their own beliefs and ideas.
- Subject leaders are developing the curriculum. They have established a clear understanding of the chronology of learning in reading, writing and mathematics. While they are beginning to develop the progression of skills, knowledge and understanding

within the wider curriculum subjects, subject leaders are not yet challenging staff to ensure that progress is strong across all subjects, in particular for most-able pupils.

- Support for pupils with SEND is effective. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has supported the training for teaching assistants through a local inclusion project run by the local authority. Provision for pupils with SEND is tracked termly to ensure that pupils make progress. Early intervention is put in place in the early years to ensure that children's needs are supported swiftly. However, some parents of pupils with SEND feel that the school is not doing enough for their children. This was not confirmed by inspectors. The school is aware that more needs to be done to ensure that all parents feel confident in the provision in place for their children.
- Leaders use the pupil premium grant well. They are clear about the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils and work hard to make sure these barriers are overcome. Disadvantaged pupils receive free places at the school's breakfast club, giving them a positive start to the school day. The plan for pupil premium is published on the school website and is reviewed by leaders and governors each term. As a result, the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are strengthening across the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors in the academy advisory board and the regional governing body support and challenge senior leaders well. They have clear understanding of the school plan for improvement and share the school leaders' passion to secure the best education possible for the pupils in the school. Governors make regular visits to the school and provide challenge to senior leaders on the improvements needed. However, not all monitoring visits record clear evaluation and, as such, actions are not always followed up. As a result, year-group leaders and subject leaders are not always held to account for the progress of pupils across a wide range of subjects.
- Trustees are knowledgeable about the standards within the school. They work closely with the regional governing body to make sure that plans for improvement are effective. Trustees ask searching questions that help hold governors and school leaders to account. They deploy trust staff to the school to train and mentor staff, helping to strengthen the school's drive for improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A strong culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Staff and parents agree that that pupils are cared for and safe. Pupils understand how to remain safe online and are confident that they can talk to a trusted adult about any worries they may have.
- Staff and governors receive training in how to keep children safe. Effective systems are in place to make sure that any concerns about the safety of a pupil are diligently followed through. School leaders make sure that all the required recruitment checks are carried out on adults before they can work in the school. Swift support is in place to keep children safe from risk of harm.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use questioning effectively. Questioning is detailed and based on secure subject knowledge. In mathematics, teachers' questions challenge pupils' understanding, providing well-crafted problem-solving opportunities. As a result, pupils are encouraged to think more deeply about their learning, giving them time to reflect and clarify their understanding.
- Teachers use assessment well in reading, writing and mathematics. Feedback given to pupils, in line with the school's feedback and marking policy, helps them refine their written work and clarify their understanding. Assessment is used well to identify pupils requiring additional support or to identify next steps in teaching. While assessments are established in reading, writing and mathematics, assessment is not yet embedded across the wider curriculum.
- Pupils learn about the key features of writing. They are challenged through clear instruction to produce writing that is well structured and where words are spelled correctly. While pupils are developing their writing skills, the most able pupils do not fully apply their skills at greater depth to bring their writing to life with adventurous language and a deepening awareness of their audience.
- The curriculum is broad and engaging. Topic books show that a wide range of subjects are taught. Some subjects show a clear chronology of learning. In geography, pupils develop a deepening understanding of map work. In science, pupils apply the knowledge they learn to their investigations. However, teachers do not always ensure that there is a clear sequence of learning in all subjects, leading to missed opportunities for pupils to embed their learning in some subjects.
- Pupils with SEND are supported well. Intervention groups are planned and resourced to address the particular needs of pupils. Teaching assistants support pupils well in class and during intervention groups. They help pupils talk about their learning. However, at times too much support is given for pupils with SEND, making some of them more passive in their learning, limiting the progress made.
- Teaching of phonics is effective in key stage 1. Teachers and teaching assistants use their strong phonic knowledge to make sure that pupils build a clear understanding of reading. Phonic lessons are planned and resourced well. Assessment is used effectively to inform the next steps in learning. As a result, pupils are keen to read, and develop strong phonic skills across key stage 1.
- Disadvantaged pupils are supported well. The pupil premium champion works with teachers to mentor them in making positive changes to the provision for disadvantaged pupils in their class. Although this is in its early stages, one teacher stated that she had gained valuable information through these mentor discussions that had helped support disadvantaged pupils in class. Disadvantaged pupils engage well in lessons and make good progress.
- Some lessons lack challenge, especially for the most able. In mathematics, some activities were too easy for the most able pupils and did not extend their thinking. In a geography lesson, children became distracted because the learning lacked urgency and difficulty. As a result, the progress for the most able pupils was limited in some lessons seen.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils play positively at breaktimes. They take pride in supporting younger pupils. They respect one another. Incidents of misbehaviour are rare. Pupils are mostly courteous when moving around the school and have positive relationships with peers and adults.
- Attendance is strong. School leaders have worked hard to ensure that attendance improves. They have developed effective systems to reward attendance and challenge absence. As a result, attendance of pupils, including those who are persistently absent, is above that of pupils nationally.
- Pupils are prepared well for the next phase of their education. Children in Nursery transition confidently to Reception Year because of the consistent approach to learning. Children in Reception Year enter Year 1 with the skills needed to access the key stage 1 curriculum. Parents also state that pupils who transfer to secondary school are well prepared for the structure of key stage 3.
- Pupils understand about being a good global citizen. In geography, pupils learn about their responsibility to recycle, in light of the global warming agenda. Across the curriculum, and in assemblies, pupils learn about the importance of respecting diversity and show a genuine compassion for those who are different to themselves. They use the internet to research global issues and are aware of how to keep safe online.
- Pupils have mixed views about their learning. While many pupils thrive in lessons, some pupils stated that they found learning quite hard and did not really enjoy it. School leaders are aware of this and are working hard to ensure that the curriculum and lessons motivate, challenge and support all pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- School leaders have worked hard to improve behaviour. Pupils and parents state that behaviour has improved since the school became an academy. As a result, there has been an impressive reduction in fixed-term and permanent exclusions, with no exclusions since September 2018.
- Behaviour in lessons is mostly positive. Pupils have strong relationships with one another and respect the views of one another. Expectations for behaviour are clear, and teachers uphold these in class. However, when lessons lack challenge, some pupils lack focus and become distracted.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils across key stage 2 have strengthened in reading, writing and mathematics over the past three years. Attainment is now in line with that of pupils nationally in reading and writing by end of key stage 2. The school has worked hard to

address the low attainment of pupils across key stage 2 and has now secured strong progress for pupils in writing. However, opportunities to deepen the understanding of the most able pupils in mathematics are not yet consistent; as such, not enough of this group of pupils attain at the higher level in mathematics by end of key stage 2.

- Outcomes in key stage 1 have improved. There has been consistent improvement in attainment over the past three years in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment over the past year has been especially strong for mid- and high-prior attaining pupils in writing. The provision for phonics is effective and outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have improved and are now above those of pupils nationally. However, too few pupils attain at the higher level in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Work in books is strong. In writing books, pupils make good progress over time; their writing is constructed well and uses adventurous language, although this is not consistent across all abilities. Pupils' mathematics books show a balance between acquiring new knowledge and skilfully applying this through mathematical problems in order to deepen their understanding. Pupils develop knowledge, skills and understanding in history, science and geography across the year groups. However, there is less consistency in the progression of learning across other subjects seen.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make good progress across a wide range of subjects. Work in books shows that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make similar progress to their peers, particularly in writing and mathematics. School leaders recognise that too few disadvantaged pupils attain in line with other pupils nationally by the end of key stage 1. Improvements are being made to strengthen outcomes for this group.
- Pupils speak articulately about their learning. They are encouraged to answer a range of thought-provoking questions in topic work. In a history lesson, pupils thought carefully about primary and secondary sources of information, helping them to broaden their historical understanding through well-crafted questioning by the teacher. As a result, pupils use the information gained in discussions to inform their writing.
- Pupils read enthusiastically. They acquire strong phonic skills in key stage 1 and use these skills to develop a love of reading and the capacity to understand what they read. By the end of key stage 2, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, read widely and with fluency and expression.

Early years provision

Good

- There is a consistent approach to teaching, learning and assessment across the early years. Children receive the same good standard of education across the three Reception classes and Nursery. The environment is organised well, with established routines that are reassuring for children. As a result, children form strong relationships with their peers and adults.
- Children are highly engaged in learning. Positive attitudes to learning have been established that are well supported by strong routines and expectations. They have stamina to remain on task, to follow adult direction and also to work on teacher-directed tasks. While at play, children work with interest and are happy in one

another's company. Children are prepared well for formal education as they move to Year 1.

- Evidence in children's books shows that all groups of children make good progress in number and writing. They apply the knowledge and skills they learn through play in their work. While outcomes in reading and writing at the end of last academic year were lower than children achieved nationally, leaders are optimistic that this will improve for this academic year, and evidence seen supports this. Leaders recognise that not enough of the most able children attained beyond the expected level in writing; this was due to children not being sufficiently challenged in writing early in the year.
- Provision for phonics is effective. The early years leader has prioritised and appropriately adapted the phonics scheme this year in order to meet the needs of the children and, already, progress and attainment have improved. Staff have the expertise to support children well as a result of effective training, enabling staff to use precise pronunciation that supports the development of phonic skills in all children.
- The quality of teaching in the early years is good. The early years leader monitors the quality of provision across the early years. This leads to a clear understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across both Nursery and Reception classes.
- Children learn how to keep themselves safe. Activities are carefully constructed to ensure that children develop an awareness of risk and how to keep themselves safe. Leaders undertake risk assessments for all activities, and as a result learning is engaging and safe.
- Children in the Nursery class transition well to Reception Year. Children have well-established routines and know the Reception Year staff, easing the transition and strengthening their dispositions for learning. Transition is less well established for children transferring from other settings, and limited communication between the school and settings has led to some children's needs not being known until they start school.

School details

Unique reference number	142817
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10088106

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	607
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr Derek Morrison
Headteacher	Mrs Kirstie Jones
Telephone number	03333 602105
Website	www.cedarchildrensacademy.org.uk
Email address	office@cedarchildrensacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Cedar Children's Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2016. When its predecessor school, Cedar Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to require improvement.
- Cedar Children's Academy is larger than the average-sized school, above the national average for primary schools.
- The headteacher was in post at the time of conversion. The academy is supported by a trust board whose members act as trustees of the academy, executive trust staff who have delegated powers to support the work of the trust board, a regional governing body who have delegated powers to support the work of the trust board and an academy advisory board as a body to provide stakeholder views and act as a critical friend for the academy.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is in line with the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 41 lessons to observe pupils learning, 29 jointly with senior leaders, and attended one assembly.
- Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and at breaktimes, and had a formal meeting with a group of pupils.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, trustees and representatives from the trust executive, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work with school leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including: the school's own assessment information; the school's self-evaluation and plan for improvement; policies; minutes of the governing body and members' meetings; governor monitoring records; teaching and learning monitoring records; and records relating to pupils' attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school website and single central record.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- The views of 77 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 44 free-text responses, were considered, as was one parental letter. The views of 47 pupils who responded to the Ofsted's pupil questionnaire were considered. The views of 56 staff submitted through Ofsted's staff survey were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Graham Chisnell, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Wibroe	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Martin-O'Donoghue	Ofsted Inspector
Mrs Fisher-Pink	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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