

Stephenson Way Academy and Nursery School

Stephenson Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 7DD

Inspection dates

12–13 December 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching over time has not been precise enough to enable all pupils to get off to a strong start.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress through early years and key stage 1.
- The teaching of phonics is inconsistent. Lower ability pupils, in particular, struggle to adapt to teachers' different strategies. This slows the development of their ability to decode words and read with fluency and accuracy.
- Gaps in lower ability pupils' knowledge and skills in reading continue as they enter key stage 2. A lower than average proportion of pupils reach expected and higher standards in reading by the end of Year 6.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of the most able pupils.
- Teachers have not ensured that pupils have sufficient opportunities to write independently, to develop writing stamina and apply the grammar they have learned.
- Leaders' analysis of pupils' knowledge, skills and progression across the wider curriculum is not sharp enough.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of different religions are underdeveloped.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment within early years is inconsistent.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum has a strong enough impact on pupils' cultural development.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have taken effective action to improve rates of attendance overall, and to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Governors have invested in additional staffing to support pupils and families, strengthening pupils' personal development and welfare.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good.
- Teaching in some subjects is effective, for example in mathematics.
- Parents and carers are positive about the school.
- Staff effectively support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress in English from early years to Year 6, by:
 - developing further the strategies used to engage and enthuse pupils to read widely and often
 - ensuring that phonics teaching is delivered using a consistent, systematic phonics programme
 - making sure that lower ability pupils in key stage 2 are taught how to read with fluency and accuracy and have the opportunity to read aloud frequently
 - widening pupils' knowledge and use of vocabulary, including across the curriculum
 - promoting opportunities to write independently and at length, across a range of subjects
 - ensuring that all teachers have suitably high expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve
 - providing more opportunity for pupils to consolidate and apply their developing grammar skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that all teachers have high expectations of the most able pupils.
- Strengthen the influence of leaders across the curriculum to widen and improve pupils' learning in a range of subjects, by:
 - broadening pupils' knowledge of different religions, faiths and cultures
 - providing regular opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of British values
 - checking the quality of learning and progress that pupils are making, throughout the school, in subjects such as geography and religious education.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, the school has undergone considerable changes in staffing and leadership. Pupils' outcomes have fluctuated. The head of school and acting deputy headteacher, new to their posts in September 2018, recognise the strengths of the school and have begun to address some of the identified areas for improvement. However, weaknesses remain, particularly in the teaching of reading.
- Leaders have implemented a range of strategies to increase pupils' engagement in reading. The school environment promotes and celebrates different authors and reading materials. However, leaders' evaluation of pupils' progress in reading is over-generous. While some headway has been made in engaging parents to support reading at home, leaders have not noticed the lack of opportunities some lower key stage 2 pupils are given to read to an adult in school. Leaders rely too heavily on pupils opting to attend early morning reading sessions before the start of the school day.
- Pupils' cultural awareness needs further development. This was also an area for improvement highlighted at the last full inspection. In contrast to this weaker aspect of provision, leaders welcome everyone and are ambitious to lead a fully inclusive school where everyone can thrive. For example, leaders' assessment information shows that current Year 6 pupils who speak English as an additional language are making good progress.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics have good subject knowledge and are committed to securing improvements in pupils' progress. The impact of leaders' actions on pupils' outcomes is most notable in mathematics, where new initiatives are delivered consistently across year groups. Close attention has been given to checking the progress pupils are making in English and mathematics, and more recently in science, but middle leaders have recognised that there is more work to be done in establishing how well pupils are doing in other subjects.
- There is currently considerable variation in the quality of teaching across the foundation subjects in different year groups. Consequently, the progress that pupils are making across the curriculum is variable. Subjects such as geography and religious education are not well enough developed or studied in sufficient depth.
- Additional funding for pupils with SEND is used effectively. The new special educational needs coordinator is highly effective, and very well supported by the assistant leader. Leaders have refined their record keeping and analysis since the last inspection, so that they now have a much better understanding of the progress each pupil is making. They effectively coordinate and monitor the impact of support for pupils in classes and in additional intervention groups. The weak progress that these pupils were making previously has been remedied. Pupils with SEND are making stronger progress.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the different barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. They have used additional funding wisely to strengthen safeguarding arrangements and improve attendance. The appointment of a home-school liaison officer has improved the effectiveness of systems to reduce persistent absence. As such, there has been a reduction in the number of pupils who miss too

many school days. However, as with other pupils in school, disadvantaged pupils make variable rates of progress, across year groups and subjects.

- Leaders understand the difference that additional physical education (PE) and sport funding is having on pupils' engagement with, and progress in PE. The school encourages pupils' participation in competitive games and has funded additional opportunities for all key stage 2 pupils to swim. School PE and sport funding has included investment in a wellness programme with a focus on improving pupils' mental health and well-being. The impact of this can be seen in pupils' improved behaviour and a reduction in the number of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions.
- Parents are generally positive about the work of the school. One parent said, 'Both my children enjoy attending and I believe this is down to the amazing teachers.' However, some parents think pupils should be given more homework and others raised concerns that bullying was not addressed quickly enough by leaders when it was raised with them as an issue. Importantly, during the inspection, leaders were able to demonstrate how they respond to such concerns when they are made aware of them.
- Most teachers who responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire agreed that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement. Newly and recently qualified teachers are positive about the support they receive, and particularly value the team-teaching opportunities that they share with more experienced teachers. One newly qualified teacher said that working alongside the mathematics subject leader had led directly to improvements in her subject knowledge, and to her use of questioning to extend pupils' reasoning.

Governance of the school

- Governors understand the community they serve and they are proud of the school's inclusivity. Governors know how additional funds for disadvantaged pupils are used and they understand the impact of this expenditure on reducing exclusions and improving attendance.
- Governors have a less secure understanding of the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on the progress current pupils are making across all areas of the curriculum.
- Two governors on the local board are also trustees, as is the chief executive. A lack of clear demarcation and delineation between these different roles and responsibilities has inhibited governors' ability to report and challenge objectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The multi-academy trust conducts an annual safeguarding audit and findings are reported to governors. The trust oversees all recruitment arrangements and safeguarding questions are asked at interview.
- Gaps in statutory training for some staff were identified by inspectors. Leaders made sure that these staff completed this training over the course of the inspection. All staff

are now properly trained to recognise the signs that may indicate potential safeguarding concerns.

- Effective arrangements are made for checking that pupils who are missing from school are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is varied between classes and across subjects. All teachers and support staff work hard, promote good attitudes to learning and have developed positive relationships with pupils. However, a lack of clear direction for improvement, and inconsistency in the strategies used, particularly in reading, have resulted in pupils making variable progress across the curriculum.
- A third of pupils leave key stage 1 unable to read well. This is because the programmes and strategies used to deliver phonics teaching are different in each year group. This means that, although adults consistently model sounds well, lower ability pupils' progress stalls as they try to adapt to new strategies.
- The teaching of phonics is inconsistent. Although reading books are at appropriate levels, there is insufficient emphasis on blending sounds to enable pupils to read fluently and accurately. Effective and lively teaching across Year 2 supports better progress, but this dips again as pupils enter lower key stage 2.
- Recent work to instil an enjoyment of reading is starting to pay off. During the inspection, Year 2 pupils talked with confidence about their class books, their favourite characters and what had just happened in the story. They were very keen to show off their special advent calendar and describe how they could unwrap and read a new book each day.
- Focused teaching is helping pupils with SEND to learn to read. Frequent opportunities to read aloud to an adult in school mean that pupils with SEND are gaining confidence and fluency and making good progress. However, lower ability pupils are not given the same clear direction, and so continue to struggle to read well. Pupils in lower key stage 2 have insufficient opportunities to read aloud in school. The lower ability pupils who did not meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check in key stage 1 are struggling to catch up with their peers.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils in key stage 2 to write independently or at length in a range of subjects. There has been an undue emphasis on structured grammar exercises and this has restricted pupils' development of writing stamina and the way they apply grammatical knowledge. Consequently, not enough pupils, including the most able, are able to write at greater depth.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. The subject leader can explain the principles underpinning the mathematics curriculum, which has been implemented well. The good balance between arithmetic and reasoning means that pupils have developed mathematical fluency, and they are given frequent opportunities to use and apply their skills to solve problems.
- Teachers use assessment information well to inform pupils' next steps for learning in mathematics. Pupils' knowledge and skills are built sequentially through this consistent

approach to teaching and learning, resulting in an improving trend in mathematics results in key stages 1 and 2.

- In science, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to plan enquiries and carry out practical work. The science leader has identified this as an area to develop, especially in order to challenge the learning and progress of the most able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have good attitudes to their learning and they take pride in their work.
- Work in PE is good and pupils say they enjoy these lessons. Inspectors saw Year 3 pupils dancing in the hall before playtime, and pupils said that all year groups enjoy a few minutes of extra fitness activities every day, in addition to their weekly PE lessons. A wide range of clubs provide further opportunities to promote pupils' fitness and their participation in competitive sports.
- Learning experiences that contribute to pupils' cultural development are less well developed. Inspectors saw very little evidence in pupils' books of religious education being studied. Key stage 2 pupils were unsure when asked by inspectors to explain their understanding of different religions or cultures.
- Leaders have invested in a family support worker to help promote pupils' social, emotional and mental health. Parents value this extra support offered by the school.
- Pupils know how to stay safe, including staying safe online.
- A small proportion of pupils attend the breakfast club each morning. Pupils enjoy a healthy breakfast. Pupils of different ages develop their social skills by talking and playing together. All pupils enjoy a calm start to the day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is generally good. This is particularly the case in lessons and when pupils are moving around the school. In the small proportion of occasions where a minority of pupils show challenging behaviour, teachers skilfully help pupils calm down, so the disruption to other learners is minimised.
- Behaviour on the playground is generally good. A few pupils told inspectors that there is sometimes bullying between older pupils. This bullying was said to include racist and homophobic name-calling. While leaders deal effectively with any concerns that arise, teaching is not reinforcing these messages well enough to ensure that pupils fully understand the language they hear and/or use so that similar incidents do not occur again.
- Leaders have recently worked diligently to improve attendance rates, which have remained below average for the last four years. The school's most recent figures for this term show improvements, including a reduction in the numbers of pupils who too

often miss school. Leaders rightly acknowledge that there is more work to be done for attendance figures to reach at least national benchmarks.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes for pupils have fluctuated over recent years. Current pupils' work shows that in most classes, and in most subjects, pupils are now making stronger progress.
- Pupils with SEND are very well supported in all classes and their individual learning needs are effectively met. Improved leadership, teaching and careful monitoring have resulted in current pupils with SEND making good progress.
- After an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the phonics standard at the end of Year 1 in 2017, phonics results dipped to below the national average in 2018. Inconsistency in the teaching of phonics means that the progress current pupils make is variable, rather than consistently good.
- Over half of the pupils in the school are disadvantaged. In 2018, by the end of key stage 2, a similar proportion of disadvantaged pupils reached expected standards compared with other pupils in the school.
- Key stage 1 results at the expected standard in writing have been below average for the last three years, but as a result of more rapid progress during key stage 2, by the end of Year 6, pupils achieve writing results that are broadly in line with those found nationally.
- In mathematics, there is an upward trend in outcomes at key stage 2 with attainment being above average for the last two years. Pupils' current work shows that progress is speeding up.
- Pupils' outcomes in science have improved, as a result of better direction from leaders and effective teaching. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in science at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 was broadly average.
- There is insufficient evidence of coverage across the wider curriculum to be able to fully evaluate the progress pupils are making in subjects beyond English, mathematics and science. From the work scrutiny undertaken with school leaders during the inspection, coupled with pupil interviews, it is clear that current pupils' progress in subjects such as geography or religious education requires improvement.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The early years provision requires improvement because there is variation in the quality of teaching and learning in Nursery and Reception. Children get off to a slow start in Nursery, but make more rapid progress during Reception. Leaders know that frequent changes in staffing and organisation have had an inhibiting effect on the progress children make when they first enter school. There is some more recent evidence of better teaching in Nursery, but leaders acknowledge that it is early days and there is more work to be done to improve children's progress overall during their time in the setting.

- Most children enter early years with skills below those typical for their age, with language and communication skills being particularly low. Adults in Nursery and Reception offer a warm and welcoming start to school life. They make sure that children are safe and happy. All welfare requirements are met and managed effectively. The early years leader ensures that everyone is aware of each child's starting point and rightly prioritises developing children's reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Children's learning records, school assessment information and observations show that lower ability children in particular make slow progress through Nursery. Adults are confident in describing the progress children are making in reading, writing and mathematics, but are less sure about children's progress in other areas of the curriculum. Children's physical development and their skills in understanding the world are lower, but activities to promote these areas of learning are limited.
- High-quality teaching and high expectations of children in Reception ensure that they make good progress. In Reception, a vibrant environment promotes opportunities for learning in reading, writing and mathematics. Attractive, well-organised activities encourage children to work together well to practise their phonics skills. They enjoy learning to form letters accurately and choose to write independently using a range of readily available materials. Adults can demonstrate how current children's progress in early reading and writing is stronger than in recent years.
- Children's behaviour is good. Careful direction and adult modelling support children in managing their feelings and behaviour. Children happily go about their work, taking turns, cooperating with each other and showing interest in their learning.
- Parents have a positive view of the care and guidance their children receive when they start school. They say that they feel well informed about their child's progress and many are keen to attend the 'stay and play' sessions.

School details

Unique reference number	138556
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10053307

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	364
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mike Simpson
Headteacher	Lee Jones
Telephone number	01325 300324
Website	www.swcps.co.uk
Email address	office@swans.education
Date of previous inspection	20 February 2018

Information about this school

- The school became an academy in December 2012. It is part of the Tudhoe Learning Trust.
- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has a larger proportion of disadvantaged pupils than is found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils identified with SEND is significantly higher than the national average.
- Since the last short inspection in February 2018, a new headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have been appointed from within the school. The trust has designated the new headteacher as head of school.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club.

- Early years consists of a Nursery and two Reception classes.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all year groups from Nursery to Year 6. Several of these observations were undertaken alongside the head of school.
- Inspectors reviewed children’s learning journeys and pupils’ written work across the curriculum alongside subject leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils throughout the inspection: at breakfast club, in lessons, during playtime and in more formal meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed the nine responses to Parent View, along with the school’s own recent parent survey outcomes. Inspectors also talked to parents before school. The 26 responses to the anonymous staff survey were considered.
- Meetings were held with the head of school, the acting deputy headteacher, the foundation stage leader, several subject leaders (including the science and PE and sport premium leaders), the inclusion leader and home–school liaison officer. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive for the multi-academy trust, four governors of the local governing board (of which two are also trustees), and the local authority educational development partner who is commissioned by the trust to work with the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a number of school documents, including the school’s monitoring records, the school’s own assessment information about the progress of current pupils, curriculum planning documents, the school’s records of attendance (including individual case studies), behaviour and exclusion records, records of pupils with SEND, and examples of personal education plans for children looked after.

Inspection team

Tracey Ralph, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Kate Rowley	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Karen Heath	Ofsted Inspector

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