
Wensum Junior Academy

Date of Review: 13 July 2017

Review conducted by Paul Andrew & Peter Whear on behalf of EAT

Type of School	Junior
School Category	Academy
Age range of pupils	7-11
No. on roll	197
Chair of Governors	Joe Harvey
Headteacher	Victoria McConnell

Purpose of visit

This one-day review was undertaken on behalf of the Evolution Academies Trust (EAT) to evaluate and report on the progress made by the academy since the previous audit in June 2016.

Monitoring activities

- Evaluation of attainment and progress data
- Scrutiny of school's self-evaluation and SIDP
- Learning Walks with the headteacher and deputy head
- Review of work in pupils' books with subject leaders
- Listening to pupils read
- Discussions with pupils in lessons and at break/lunch
- Interviews with pupils
- Interviews with the headteacher
- Interviews with members of the senior leadership team
- Interview with the Chair of SAIG
- Discussions with parents and carers at the beginning of the day

School context

- Wensum Junior is a smaller-than-average sized junior school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average and equates to 60% of those on roll.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs support is above average.
- The proportion supported with a statement of special educational needs or Education and Health Care Plan is below average.
- The school joined EAT in February 2015 and the Headteacher took up post in June 2015. A new Chair of the Local Governing Body was appointed in May 2016.
- Last year, the school met the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Ofsted context

The school was judged to require *special measures* at the last S5 inspection and subsequent monitoring inspections in May and November 2014. In the school's self-evaluation document, senior leaders have identified the action taken to address the key areas for improvement.

The keys areas for improvement were as follows:

Improve the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' progress by making sure that:

- all teachers make accurate assessments of how well pupils are learning
- teachers make full use of assessment information to teach lessons that challenge pupils at the right level so that they are fully engaged in their learning
- all teachers mark pupils' work in the manner specified by the school so that pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve
- teaching assistants are provided with high quality training, especially to support the teaching of mathematics
- pupils are given opportunities to write at length
- the school's mathematics curriculum is reviewed to give consistency to the teaching of efficient methods for carrying out basic calculations.

Increase the rate of progress made by pupils eligible for pupil premium funding by ensuring that:

- senior leaders develop a precise understanding of what is needed to help these pupils make good progress, and prioritise funding accordingly
- teachers and senior leaders together set ambitious targets for pupils' progress
- governors hold the headteacher and teachers to account for meeting these targets.

Ensure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress by:

- setting clear and easily measurable targets for pupils' progress, which senior leaders hold teachers to account for making sure pupils reach
- ensuring that pupils in all classes are getting the precise help they need
- ensuring that pupils who find reading difficult have frequent opportunities to practise with suitable books.

Strengthen the impact of leadership and management by making sure that:

- the headteacher and senior leaders undertake effective training to monitor the quality of teaching and then do so rigorously
- teachers are given precise targets and professional development opportunities for improving their teaching
- teachers are given timescales for improvement and senior leaders make sure that these are met
- teachers are held to account for the progress their pupils make
- subject leaders undertake training to develop and fulfil their roles effectively
- the governing body holds the school to account for progress towards the targets in the recently produced school improvement plan.

Evidence from visit

Leadership and management

- The Headteacher's compelling and ambitious vision of an outstanding education for all is shared and articulated by other senior leaders. Staff enthusiastically "buy in" to this vision.
- Senior leaders operate well as a team and have grown considerably in confidence over the past 12 months, articulating more clearly and coherently the plans they have to improve outcomes for young people at Wensum Junior and the community it serves. Their ability to monitor and evaluate the impact of these plans is also more effective.
- Immensely positive relationships exist at all levels and high expectations are voiced by staff and pupils alike. This is an area of notable strength.
- The promotion of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is at the heart of what the school does to prepare young people for the next stage in their education.
- Its innovative and well-planned curriculum goes well beyond "broad and balanced", providing all pupils including those who are disadvantaged with a rich range of cultural visits and experiences. It has been highly successful in engaging parents, carers and the wider community.
- Governors have a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and have taken innovative steps to identify the impact of the school's actions, including a "speed-dating" exercise in which they questioned every single teacher and sought their views and experiences about the school's development.
- School leaders are at pains to find out what pupils have to say and the pupil voice has been used positively in the appointment of new staff, discussions with the school's caterers. Members of the School Council took it upon themselves to develop and promote a set of strategies that pupils could use if they got stuck in class and before asking the teacher.
- The leadership and management of teaching and learning is effective and senior leaders accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and its impact on learning.
- The highly effective SENCO can point to a number of strategies that have successfully promoted pupils' social and emotional development and the progress of different groups of pupils.
- The school's website is broadly compliant and the published curriculum content (including the highly informative and regular blogs) is a strength.
- The 2017 KS2 maths results were disappointing but senior leaders have been quick to diagnose the problems and are taking decisive action to address them.

Next Steps

- School leaders are aware that the key priority is to improve outcomes for pupils in maths in all years and particularly at the end of KS2 and are preparing a highly-focused short-term action plan to address this.
- The school's self-evaluation document should provide a clearer analysis of the impact planned actions have had on school improvement.
- The school improvement and development plan should in turn establish a sharper focus on how planned actions will be monitored and evaluated for impact.
- The published safeguarding policy should refer to the latest version of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- Pupils demonstrate good behaviours and attitudes to learning. They are curious learners who are keen to show and share their work and are becoming increasingly articulate when talking about their learning.
- They take great pride in their work and exercise books are neat and well-presented.
- The well-planned REAL curriculum that was introduced at the start of the year has very successfully engaged their enthusiasm. It has also led to a consistency in lesson content across year groups with resources planned and shared effectively.
- The new curriculum incorporates English, science, the arts and humanities while maths is taught discretely.
- Pupils feel suitably challenged by their learning. A Year 6 pupil for example stated that, "Work is challenging, which is good."
- Feedback follows the school's policy and pupils respond routinely to their teachers' comments in their books.
- Teachers employ an assessment break midway through the teaching of maths in the mornings and this has had a positive impact in helping them to adapt their teaching and provide support at the point of need.
- Pupils make slower progress in maths than in other subjects and their calculation skills lack fluency. Maths lessons focus disproportionately on teaching data-handling and shape and space and more time needs to be given to developing fluency and consolidating skills.
- The pace in some maths lessons is slow because teachers do not move swiftly enough from whole-class teaching to pupils answering questions on their own.
- Calculation methods rightly develop conceptual understanding but the progression to more formal methods needs to be accelerated.
- Members of the senior team including the Headteacher teach regularly themselves and so are able to monitor at close hand the progress that pupils are making in all years. However, senior leaders are aware that this detracts from their ability to maintain an overview of whole-school progress and their need to plan strategically for the future.
- Teachers seek to ensure that pupils read guided texts that meet their needs and pupils are able to use their phonics skills to decode and read a variety of texts. However, their reading aloud sometimes lacks fluency and expression and does not always convey a sense of enjoyment although standards in reading are improving overall.
- Classrooms are warm, welcoming learning environments in which displays are a strong feature.

Next Steps

- Adapt the teaching of maths to incorporate data-handling and shape and space into the REAL curriculum, within the science and arts schemes of learning for example.

- Focus on developing fluency in calculation in maths lessons and consolidate the link between mental and written methods.
- Develop strategies to instil a love of reading.
- Consider using “Secure Judgement” rather than “Broadly age-related” as the basis for target-setting to generate more reliable forecasts of pupil outcomes and further raise expectations.

Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare

- This is an area of strength. Pupils are confident and self-assured. They enjoy being in school and feel safe.
- Pupils move around the school in a polite, calm and purposeful manner. They are respectful of each other and of the adults in school.
- They conduct themselves well throughout the day and the break times and lunch times observed were orderly and well supervised – no child was left out. Pupils of all ages socialised well together.
- They have a good understanding of what bullying is and say that it is dealt with well by adults when it happens although it occurs only rarely. It is safe to be different. For example, the mother of a Year 5 pupil who is in the process of gender transition said that her daughter had been accepted without question by her peers. Pupils also say that there has been a marked improvement in how bullying has been addressed since the current Headteacher took up post.
- Meeting the social and emotional needs of all pupils, including those with SEND, is central to the philosophy of the school.
- The level of fixed-term and permanent exclusions is high but the school points to the fact that it has admitted a number of pupils from the Locksley School who had been permanently excluded from other schools. There are persuasive case studies to show that the school has been successful in enabling these pupils to reintegrate into mainstream education.

Next steps

- Develop the use of play leaders so that lunchtime behaviour is at the same very high level as it is during lessons and other supervised times of the day.

Outcomes

- The cohort size at the end of KS2 in 2017 was 55. Outcomes in reading and writing at the end of KS2 were broadly in line with national averages. The GPS score doubled to 70%. Attainment and achievement in maths were weak and this remains a cause for concern.
- 50% of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017 compared to 45% in 2016 although nationally, this figure increased from 53% to 61%.
- 67% of pupils attained the expected standard in reading against a teacher assessment figure of 76%.
- There are two figures for teachers’ assessment of writing – 75% (recorded Easter 2017) and 80%. The latter is the figure submitted to the DfE and takes into account a further 3 pupils who joined the school after Easter.
- In maths, 56% of pupils attained the expected standard against the national average of 75%. Teacher assessment was at 78%, a difference of 22 percentage points.
- The improvement of 9 percentage points in maths on the 2016 figure is greater than the increase of 5 percentage points seen nationally and of those pupils that failed to meet the standard, 12 achieved a scaled score of 99. If they had achieved at a slightly higher level, it would have made a significant difference to the overall results.

- The school acknowledges that there is some discrepancy between the forecast and actual figures, particularly in maths, but works hard to moderate and standardise judgements across the school, other schools in the Trust and other schools locally that use Herts for Learning.
- In 2017, 20% (14%) of pupils attained a higher than expected standard in reading and 7% (3%) in maths. (2016 figures)
- Up-to-date DfE pupil progress data were not available at the time of our visit.
- Writing is a strength because the new curriculum has given pupils a purpose and a context for their writing and they are encouraged to develop a range of writing styles on a regular basis.
- Current school data suggest that the difference in progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is diminishing but this is not yet evident in outcomes at the end of KS2.
- Pupils show a growing confidence in their ability to talk about their learning and to understand what they need to do to improve.

Key recommendations

- **Focus on developing fluency in calculation in maths lessons.**
- **Adapt the teaching of maths so that data-handling and shape and space are incorporated into the REAL curriculum.**
- **Ensure that the school's self-evaluation document and school improvement and development plan establish a sharper focus on the monitoring and evaluation of planned actions.**

Paul Andrew & Peter Whear

Date: 17 July 2017