

Rush Common School

Hendred Way, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 2AW

Inspection dates

11–12 January 2017

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

- The acting headteacher, members of the trust and other leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They are adept at tackling any dips in performance quickly and robustly. Consequently, standards remain high.
- Teaching is consistently good so pupils achieve well. Teachers plan engaging activities that capture pupils' interest and meet their learning needs well.
- Pupils, particularly the most able, make good progress in mathematics. However, in 2016, some average-ability pupils did not achieve their full potential by the end of key stage 2. Progress of current pupils is accelerating.
- The teaching of reading is highly effective. Pupils benefit from wide-ranging reading activities and make good progress. Pupils are highly enthused by reading and achieve well.
- All pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, some disadvantaged pupils are not catching up quickly enough in order to achieve the standards expected for their age.
- The curriculum and provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are excellent. Pupils talk animatedly about the opportunities afforded to them.
- Pupils' attendance is excellent. Pupils enjoy school and speak highly of the opportunities and responsibilities afforded to them.
- Children get off to a good start in the Reception classes. The classrooms are a hubbub of activity. Children make good progress and are ready to start key stage 1 with age-appropriate skills and understanding.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils talk competently about a range of current affairs and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of modern-day British values.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent and has improved in recent times. A whole host of responsibilities encourage pupils to use their skills to influence one another positively. They develop a strong moral compass. Relationships are strong with adults and peers alike.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management further so that:
 - the school’s website complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish
 - the role of subject leaders is developed to enable them to have greater influence on raising standards in their areas of expertise.
- Improve further the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement so that:
 - teaching assistants, particularly when working with groups of pupils, develop their skills and expertise
 - disadvantaged pupils catch up more quickly with their peers in reading, writing and mathematics
 - average-ability pupils make expected or better than expected progress in mathematics and achieve well.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- In recent times, the school has withstood unsettled times, experiencing a high turnover of staff and a decline in standards at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. The previous headteacher, following a period of absence, resigned and left in December 2016. The acting headteacher, during her first year as the school's deputy headteacher, took up the temporary headteacher role in June 2016. Her determined and principled leadership, supported by a committed team of leaders and teachers, is restoring high standards, quickly. Leaders have rightly focused their time and resources on improving behaviour, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes, which are now good.
- In 2016, standards at the end of key stage 2 declined and fell below the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' progress and attainment. Taking decisive action, the acting headteacher has reorganised some classes and set about restoring high standards, particularly in key stage 2. Leaders gather assessment information more regularly, analysing their findings in forensic detail and paying close attention to the performance of groups. Consequently, classes are more settled than in the past and leaders and managers have a clear understanding of how well pupils are progressing in their learning.
- Self-evaluation is rigorous. Leaders are tenacious in following up on any dips or blips, promptly instigating thoughtful and detailed actions. Leaders monitor lessons closely and offer support to teachers where weaknesses are identified. Teachers, including those at an early stage of their career or those who are relatively new to the school, are supported well. Staff are positive about the support they receive. For example, changes to the way staff teach mathematics is already paying dividends and more pupils are achieving the standards expected for their age.
- Subject leaders, some relatively new to post, monitor the school's work closely and are developing a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are beginning to use assessment information to evaluate the difference their work is making. For example, the writing leader is clear that recent work is having a positive impact as more average-ability pupils are making good progress across key stage 2 than in the past. However, subject leaders are not yet fully held to account for pupils' performance as their work is at an early stage.
- Aply supported by the reading leader and librarian, the acting headteacher is determinedly raising the profile of reading across the school. Testament to the acting headteacher's commitment is the recent relocation of the school's appealing library, which now lies at the heart of the school. Pupils appreciate the changes, enthused by the range and appeal of reading materials. Partnership work with families, such as the 'books at bedtime' evening during the inspection, further promotes a lifelong love of reading.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Activities such as the morning run and 'wake up and shake up' activities prepare pupils well for the day ahead. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, including orchestra, choir, maths club and a variety of sporting opportunities, further enhance pupils' experiences. Pupils light up when talking

about the school's new approach to homework, valuing the ability to make choices about their activities. Pupils achieve high standards across the curriculum, including in art and music.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. The school places a clear emphasis on pupils' moral development, enabling them to make the right choices. Using the school's prayer space, pupils contemplate values and provide thoughtful and thought-provoking responses when working in groups. The school promotes British values very well and pupils have an excellent knowledge of current affairs. Special 'ambitions days' help pupils aspire to a range of future careers such as solicitors. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives and are truly inspired by the possibilities that lie ahead.
- Leaders have used sports funding effectively to increase pupils' participation in physical education. However, full details of how the school is using funding this academic year are not published on the school's website as required.
- Additional funding is used effectively. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive a variety of support including online mathematics help, in order to learn well. Targeted use of funding ensures that pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit. However, despite most disadvantaged pupils making steady progress from their starting points, too few achieve the standards expected for their age.

Governance of the school

- The trust has been a supportive sounding board for the acting headteacher as she has set about making changes. Members are beginning to review school performance information more closely than in the past. They now receive information on pupils' performance more frequently so they, like senior leaders, can be alert to any dips in performance more promptly.
- Trustees and members are extremely supportive of the school's leadership team. School leaders are keen to reverse the high staff turnover in recent times, and the introduction of entry and exit interviews has enabled trustees and members to gain a better understanding of the issues around retaining staff. The acting headteacher is also contributing well by ensuring that more staff are trained in key aspects, such as the leadership of special educational needs, in order to assist the school's succession planning. Consequently, trustees, alongside school leaders, are beginning to address successfully recruitment and retention issues.
- The trust has adopted a forward-looking approach and in recent times has worked more closely with other local schools, considering the role it can play beyond Rush Common School. As a result, the trust is undergoing some restructuring, re-evaluating members' roles and responsibilities. Members are excited about future opportunities, including plans to work even more closely with Rush Common School leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Safeguarding procedures are robust. The school's designated safeguarding lead is highly skilled, and leads competently the training of school staff and those from other Abingdon schools. As a result, staff at all levels are aware of their duty to keep children safe. They know pupils well and they implement safeguarding procedures confidently.
- The school's safeguarding policy and procedures meet requirements. Leaders have ensured that they keep a watchful eye on all aspects of the school's work, ensuring that all staff are familiar with the latest government guidance. All required employment checks are made. In addition, many staff have recently refreshed their first-aid training qualification. The school's record keeping is of a particularly high standard.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan very effectively, ensuring that tasks offer appeal and are well matched to pupils' starting points. Pupils say that they enjoy learning because teachers make their lessons fun. For example, pupils in Year 5 worked collaboratively to plan horror stories, describing the spooky characteristics of their settings enthusiastically. Pupils of differing abilities, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress, as teachers set tasks that meet the needs of individuals and groups.
- Teaching is characterised by encouragement and good levels of consistency from class to class. Teachers manage their classes well, having high expectations of pupils' productivity and behaviour. Pupils respond well, working with engagement. Teaching and learning activities are purposeful and positive relationships mean that learning is uninterrupted.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Pupils read fluently and well, developing a secure love of books. For example, during the inspection, pupils developed a mature grasp of literary conventions, pointing out and explaining subordinate clauses and their purpose confidently to an inspector.
- Displays around the school are of high quality. 'Wonder walls' celebrate pupils' best efforts in a variety of subjects. Staff and pupils have contributed to eye-catching displays in the school hall that promote the school's values strongly. Pupils say that since the acting headteacher has reorganised the library and music room, their learning environment is much nicer.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding and are adept at identifying and addressing misconceptions at the earliest opportunity. When pupils find work tricky, teachers intervene promptly and offer helpful support and guidance. For example, in a Year 6 writing lesson, pupils were unsure how to use and punctuate the word 'its' correctly. Because of timely intervention, they were able to improve the accuracy of their grammar and punctuation in their non-chronological reports about gorillas.
- Teachers skilfully foster an enjoyment of mathematics among pupils, expertly encouraging pupils to explain their thinking. For example, in a Year 3 mathematics lesson, pupils were encouraged to formulate explanations using mathematical vocabulary of 'greater than' or 'less than' when solving fraction problems. Teachers are making greater use of assessment information, particularly to ensure that current

pupils of average ability progress and achieve well.

- Teaching assistants provide highly skilled support, particularly when working one to one with pupils who have complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils display high levels of confidence in the adults who support them. In recent times, some teaching assistants have changed role. As a result, some are developing their skills, particularly when managing and working with groups of pupils, rather than individuals.
- Pupils competently use their strong knowledge of language conventions and grammatical devices to write accurately and for a range of purposes. For example, pupils in Year 4 used their growing grammatical awareness of commas, inverted commas and fronted adverbials to improve their own writing.
- Parents are positive about the quality of teaching and the progress their child is making. Parents who spoke to an inspector were complimentary about all aspects of their child's experience at Rush Common School. The majority would recommend the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils relish new experiences and hold high aspirations, wanting to learn and achieve well. Those who took part in a project with Oxford University, to learn more about fractions in mathematics, talk enthusiastically about their experience. Such opportunities cement pupils' enjoyment of mathematics and inspire them to learn even more.
- Pupils have very good social skills and are articulate and confident in lessons and when speaking with visitors. Pupils who spoke to an inspector confidently discussed current affairs, including the recent American presidential election and the pros and cons of Brexit. Pupils say they love opportunities to debate and their knowledge of modern society shines through.
- At playtimes, pupils mix well, confidently interacting with pupils of all ages, enjoying each other's company. Pupils speak positively about the reorganisation of some classes. They say they have retained friendships with previous classmates but have relished the opportunity to get to know other members of their year group better.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including online. Curriculum opportunities such as road safety workshops and the junior citizen project run by the police, all contribute well to pupils' awareness. Pupils say that they feel safe at school and the majority of parents agree.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- Pupils attend school regularly and attendance is above that seen nationally. School leaders monitor pupils' absence carefully. Staff follow up first-day absence as a matter of course. A small number of pupils with historically low attendance are well supported and their attendance is beginning to improve. Pupils say that they enjoy school and learning is fun. They appreciate the breadth of the curriculum and the additional activities on offer.
- Pupils are attentive in lessons and show a high degree of independence and self-motivation. They told an inspector, 'We particularly like tasks that push us.' They confidently choose activities and respond quickly to adults' instructions. Pupils talk proudly about how much their teachers help them learn well.
- Pupils relish opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities, such as elected representatives of the school's pupil parliament, anti-bullying ambassadors or play leaders. They talk eloquently about their duties, proud of the important role they play. For example, the school's 'minister of music' spoke confidently to an inspector about the high-quality approach of the school to this subject. Pupils are terrific advocates for their school, enthusing about a whole host of different aspects.
- Much of the school's work integrates seamlessly into the life of the community. The school's values, such as tolerance, understanding, respect and honesty, underpin much of the school's work. For example, pupils are proud of the research they conducted into the life of a local soldier who served during the first world war. At a recent Remembrance Day service, pupils read their own poems to his ancestors, understanding the significance of the occasion.
- Pupils behave well. From time to time, they say that there are disagreements and adults sort things out effectively. During the inspection, inspectors noted the warmth of relationships between older and younger pupils.
- A small proportion of pupils have highly complex behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. These pupils are well supported and the number of serious incidents has decreased markedly in recent times. Pupils say that behaviour in and around school has improved significantly since classes were reorganised.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2016, pupils in key stage 1 achieved well. An above-average proportion of pupils attained or exceeded the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Many pupils made expected progress, with some making more than expected progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support linked to their specific needs. Activities are adapted appropriately, and pupils, particularly those who receive one-to-one support, are encouraged to develop independence and make gains in their learning. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. However, leaders have not ensured that their evaluation of this aspect is available on the school's website.
- Pupils talk animatedly about their love of books and enthuse about storytelling activities. In reading, in 2016, the proportion of pupils who achieved the standard

expected for their age exceeded that seen nationally at key stage 1 and key stage 2. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils working beyond age-related expectations in 2016 exceeded that seen nationally. Pupils achieve high standards in reading.

- Over the last three years, standards at the end of early years have risen steadily. Most make good progress to achieve well. In 2016, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was in line with that seen nationally. Children get off to a good start.
- Pupils make good progress in writing and achieve well. Pupils write confidently for a range of purposes. Pupils present their work with care, paying close attention to the accuracy of their spelling and the fluency of their handwriting. Work in pupils' books is of high quality.
- Standards at the end of key stage 2 in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test were in line with those seen nationally in 2016. Across the school, pupils write with a high degree of accuracy, confidently applying grammatical devices to their own creative writing.
- The most able pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers ensure that activities are planned carefully and provide sufficient challenge.
- Pupils make good progress in other subjects, including science, music and art. For example, pupils in Year 6 produced striking pastel interpretations of the artist Paul Gauguin's work.
- In all year groups, pupils read fluently and accurately. However, standards in the Year 1 phonics check dipped in 2016 and were lower than expected. Leaders have responded, sharpening their focus on developing early reading skills in early years and key stage 1. Pupils' performance is now monitored more closely. Consequently, standards are already beginning to improve. The school's information shows that more pupils are on track to meet the standard this year. In addition, pupils in Year 2 who did not meet the standard are catching up quickly.
- In 2016, too few Year 6 pupils, particularly those of average ability, made adequate progress in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. The acting headteacher has instigated appropriate measures to remedy quickly the weaknesses identified. Current pupils, including those of average ability, are making better progress and more are achieving the standards expected for their age.
- There is a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school. Many are making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics because teaching is adapted appropriately to meet their needs. However, too few make accelerated progress in order to achieve the standards expected for their age, particularly in key stage 2.

Early years provision

Good

- Teaching is effective in the early years and leads to children making good progress. Teachers plan activities carefully, ensuring that activities hold appeal. For example, children made excellent progress with their understanding of number, calculating confidently how many buttons the gingerbread man had left, when some had fallen off

his coat. Children could confidently count back and use their early subtraction skills to good effect.

- The setting provides plentiful opportunities for children to progress well with their physical development skills. During the inspection, children were able to use toy tools to fix a fence, use balance beams to move from tyre to tyre and use one-handed tools such as scissors to cut out gingerbread-men paper chains. Children make rapid gains in this aspect of their learning.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. During the inspection, a group of children were able to identify the sound 'sh'. Using singing and rhyme, they were able to begin to identify the letter pattern in new words such as sheep, cash and shoe. A different group developed their understanding of rhyming patterns, making silly soup that included a bat, cat and rat. Children make good progress in securing their early reading skills.
- Teachers keep detailed assessment records. Learning journeys cover all aspects of learning and are presented well. Records are accurate and reflect children's achievements well. Boys and girls achieve equally well in all aspects of learning.
- The temporary early years leader is determined to secure the best possible outcomes for all children. Although relatively new to the role, the leader has a clear view of the department's strengths and weaknesses. Action planning is appropriate and there is a high level of commitment to building on children's higher starting points this year. Leadership of the early years is of good quality. All safeguarding requirements are met.
- Children keep to routines, take part in activities and concentrate well. They move from activity to activity sensibly because expectations of behaviour are high.
- Parents are fully involved in their child's learning and many make valued contributions to their child's learning-journey record. Workbooks completed in partnership at the beginning of the year encapsulate 'my unique child' and provide helpful information to school staff.
- Children's starting points vary from year to year. Some start school with below typical starting points. The majority of children make at least typical progress and many make rapid gains in their learning. Last year, the proportion of children who were ready for Year 1 at the end of Reception was similar to that found nationally. Over the last three years, standards have risen steadily. However, disadvantaged children do not catch up quickly enough in order to achieve well.

School details

Unique reference number	137920
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10025513

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	404
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Robert Parsonson
Acting headteacher	Mrs Jacquie Stevenson
Telephone number	01235 533 583
Website	www.rushcommonschool.org/
Email address	headteacher@rushcommonschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of information on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish, including providing a link to the school performance table website, publishing the current special educational needs information report or the school's sport premium funding for this academic year.
- Rush Common School is larger than an average-sized primary school. The academy has two classes in each year group.
- In March 2012, Rush Common School became an academy. In September 2015, the trust changed its name from Rush Common Academy Trust to Abingdon Learning Trust. The trust is working closely with other schools in the partnership.

- The school runs a before- and after-school club. In 2014, the number of places available increased.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is lower than in other schools nationally, as is the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- A very large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below that seen nationally.
- Children in the early years foundation stage are provided for in two Reception classes. A temporary leader of this phase took up the post in September 2016. A substantive leader has been appointed and will join the school in April 2017.
- In 2016, the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector also met with four members of The Abingdon Learning Trust.
- Inspectors observed 30 lessons including 10 jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at work in books and discussed pupils' progress and attainment with leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and also met with groups of pupils in Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6.
- Parents' views were taken into account through face-to-face informal discussions before school and the 130 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors also took account of 32 survey responses submitted by staff.
- Inspectors checked records and documentation relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, staff performance and school improvement.
- Inspectors reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Farr, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Penny Orme	Ofsted Inspector
Spencer Allen	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah O'Donnell	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Walshe	Ofsted Inspector

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