

Holmer Church of England Academy

Holmer Road, Hereford, Herefordshire HR4 9RX

Inspection dates

26–27 March 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and senior leaders provide clear, principled leadership that is appreciated by pupils, parents and carers, and staff. They are uncompromising in their commitment to provide the highest quality education for all pupils. Expectations and standards are high.
- The curriculum is thoughtfully planned and carefully implemented. It is supplemented by a wide range of high-quality activities and experiences. Together, these make an exceptionally strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- The school is an inclusive and welcoming community. Staff provide exceptional support for pupils with additional needs. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) thrive.
- Governors provide strong strategic leadership. They support and challenge leaders very effectively. However, the school's governance structure does not conform with current government guidance.
- Pupils make very strong progress in all years and across all subjects. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 is consistently well above the national average.
- Teaching is highly effective throughout the school. Teachers expect the best from pupils, who rise to these high expectations. Pupils debate and discuss ideas with great maturity. They produce high-quality written work.
- Teachers use questions very well to deepen pupils' understanding of their work. Staff are quick to spot when pupils are struggling. They provide timely feedback and extra support to ensure that pupils do not fall behind.
- Relationships are strong throughout the school. Pupils like and trust their teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and are keen to do their best. They thoroughly enjoy school and attendance is consistently well above average.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, both in lessons and at other times of the day. They are confident, articulate, polite and courteous. Older pupils readily take on leadership responsibilities and support younger pupils.
- The early years provides children with an excellent start to school. Clear leadership and highly effective teaching mean that children make consistently strong progress in all areas of learning. They are very well prepared to start Year 1.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the school's governance structure provides sufficient separation between the academy trust's members and its trustees.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, provides strong and uncompromising leadership. She is clear that the school's purpose is to provide the best education for every pupil, regardless of their ability, needs or background. Her leadership is valued and appreciated by all members of the school community. Staff rightly believe the school is well led and they are very proud to work at Holmer.
- Senior leaders and governors know the school well. They know its many strengths and are equally clear about those areas where they want to see further improvement. The school's leadership is characterised by integrity and humility. Despite exceedingly strong published outcomes, leaders are in no way complacent. Instead, they continually seek new ideas from other schools that they can apply to their school. They carefully evaluate the strategies they use and are not afraid to alter or discard any that are not proving sufficiently effective.
- Parents are full of praise for the school, especially its leadership, the quality of teaching, and the care and support that staff provide for pupils and parents. Almost all parents who completed Parent View said they would recommend the school to another parent. One parent represented the views of many when they wrote:

'Holmer Academy is a wonderful school. I feel very pleased that my children attend this school. They love school and cannot wait to get there every day. I feel very lucky to have my children attend such a wonderfully safe environment with excellent teachers. I would recommend it to everyone.'
- Leaders have a strong track record of developing members of staff so they become successful teachers and leaders. For example, leaders and teachers provide excellent support for newly qualified teachers as they begin their careers. Senior leaders develop middle leaders by working alongside them and modelling effective leadership to them. Leaders carry out regular checks on teaching and provide timely training when their checks highlight any issues that need to be addressed. All staff who completed the inspection survey agreed that leaders use professional development well to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement.
- Leaders have put in place a curriculum that interests and engages pupils while developing the knowledge they need across a broad range of subjects. They use the national curriculum as their starting point. Learning is carefully sequenced, so pupils' knowledge builds logically as they move through the school from Reception to Year 6.
- The formal taught curriculum is supplemented by a very wide variety of carefully planned, additional experiences and opportunities. These contribute extremely well to pupils' personal development. For example, leaders organise two 'multi-faith days' each year where pupils spend time learning about Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism and Judaism. One of these days is hosted by a local secondary school and attended by pupils from schools throughout the diocese. Similarly, pupils are taken on regular visits that link to curriculum topics. For example, pupils in Year 1 recently visited the Morgan car factory, as part of their topic on transport.

- Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. All pupils learn a musical instrument and many sing in the school choir. All pupils take part in inter-house competitive sport and many represent the school competitively. Pupils in Years 4 and 6 take part in residential visits and those in Year 2 have a 'sleepover' in the school hall as a preparation for those later visits.
- The school building provides a vibrant and stimulating place to learn. There are many displays that exemplify the school's values and the breadth of experience that pupils enjoy. Together, the school's ethos, its curriculum and the wealth of additional opportunities contribute exceptionally well to pupils' SMSC development.
- Leaders check on pupils' progress carefully and sensitively. They collect assessment information sufficiently regularly to give them an informed view of how pupils are getting on. However, they do not collect unnecessary information and, therefore, demands on teachers' time are reasonable. Leaders use assessment information well to decide where extra support or revised improvement strategies might be necessary.
- Holmer is a very inclusive school. Leaders and all staff are committed to ensuring that all pupils can succeed. They work hard to identify anything that might get in the way of a pupil's learning. They then put in place carefully planned, personalised, additional support to ensure that each pupil can do as well as possible. For example, pupils with SEND receive high-quality support that enables them to feel secure and make strong academic progress. Similarly, pupils who speak EAL receive bespoke support to ensure that this does not inhibit their learning.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school is strong. Governors have appropriate expertise and they know the school well. Consequently, they provide good support and strong challenge to leaders. They provide a strong strategic lead, but understand where their role ends and that of senior leaders begins.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently. They closely monitor the school's finances, and plan, as far as is possible, to ensure the school is well placed financially. Consequently, the school is fully staffed, well resourced and maintained. They check that additional funding is spent appropriately and that it is having the desired impact. For example, governors check that the pupil premium is being used well to support disadvantaged pupils and that the physical education (PE) and sport premium is successful in promoting participation in sport.
- The school became an academy in 2011. Since that time, government guidance about how academies should structure their governance arrangements has changed. Consequently, the school's arrangements do not comply with the government's current guidance for effective governance. In particular, all of the academy trust's members are also trustees and therefore governors. Current guidance says there should be a significant degree of distinction between the individuals who are members and those who are trustees. However, there is no detriment to the effectiveness of governance in ensuring an excellent quality of education.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose.
- This area is well led. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained to spot the signs that pupils might need additional support. Members of staff know pupils very well indeed. They readily pass on any concerns they have about pupils to leaders. Leaders deal with concerns speedily, involving outside agencies appropriately, to ensure that pupils get the help they need.
- All staff understand that keeping pupils safe is their top priority. An extremely strong culture of care and support for pupils is evident throughout the school. All staff who completed Ofsted's survey said that pupils are safe in school, as did all parents who responded to Parent View.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- In all years, teaching is highly effective and this results in pupils making strong progress in all subjects. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, and pupils thrive in response. For example, pupils routinely write at length, using correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. They use technical, subject-specific vocabulary with confidence from a young age. Pupils throughout the school are confident writers.
- Teachers use their expert subject knowledge well to explain new ideas and concepts. They use questioning very well to deepen pupils' understanding. They expect pupils to think hard before answering questions. When pupils provide brief answers, teachers draw out from them more detailed and complete responses. Consequently, pupils develop a secure understanding of the ideas they are studying.
- Teachers carefully check that pupils understand their work. They are quick to spot misconceptions and pupils who are struggling to understand what they are doing. They step in to provide extra help, quickly organising additional teaching in small groups to support these pupils. Consequently, pupils do not fall behind their classmates when they find work difficult.
- Strong relationships and well-established routines mean that pupils become confident and enthusiastic learners. For example, pupils of all ages are used to discussing new ideas with their classmates. When the teacher asks them to discuss, they do so quickly and confidently. When the teacher wishes to draw the class back together, pupils settle quickly and are quiet and attentive. Consequently, time is very well used in lessons.
- Mathematics is taught well throughout the school. Pupils develop secure basic skills in arithmetic. Teachers routinely expect them to solve problems and to explain their reasoning. Pupils have a secure understanding of mathematical concepts and techniques as a result.
- Expert phonics teaching helps children make a good start with reading in early years and key stage 1. Pupils quickly become confident and proficient readers.
- Inspectors found no discrepancy between the quality of teaching in English and mathematics and in other subjects. Pupils enjoy other subjects, such as science,

history, geography, art and PE. They also develop a sound understanding of the key knowledge in each of these subjects.

- Pupils with SEND are very well taught. Teachers take these pupils' needs into account when planning lessons. Teaching assistants provide just the right amount of support in class. They ensure that pupils can do the work set, but they also encourage pupils to work independently. If pupils with SEND begin to fall behind with their work, teachers and teaching assistants provide timely additional support that helps them catch up.
- Pupils who speak EAL are also very well taught. Staff regularly assess each pupil's stage of English acquisition. Teachers use this information to plan appropriate work, using bespoke resources. Expert teaching assistants provide one-to-one support when it is needed. Consequently, these pupils learn English quickly and make strong progress in all subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- In their time at the school, pupils become confident and enthusiastic learners. They discuss and reflect on their learning with maturity. Their excellent attitudes to learning mean they are very well prepared for secondary school when they leave Year 6.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed this to be the case. They told inspectors that bullying is very rare indeed and most pupils have had no experience of it in school. Additionally, pupils were unanimous in telling inspectors that they have great confidence in staff to support them with any problems they might face.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils understand the risks that using the internet can pose. Similarly, pupils understand how to live a healthy life. They take part in regular physical exercise and they know how to eat healthily.
- Pupils readily take on responsibility and their voice plays an important part in the life of the school. Older pupils perform duties at lunchtime and others act as 'peer mentors', helping pupils when they fall out with each other, or have worries. The school council is regularly involved in decision making. For example, pupils designed a spiritual garden that pupils now use as a quiet and reflective space during breaktime and lunchtime.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils behave very well at all times of the day, including in lessons and at other times. Inappropriate behaviour is rare and, consequently, so is the need for staff to sanction pupils. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day. Classrooms provide an excellent learning environment.
- At lunchtimes, pupils play sensibly with a wide array of play equipment, including old chairs, large cardboard rolls, netting and boxes. This fires their imagination as boxes

become ships in the shark-infested waters of the school playground! Younger pupils talk incessantly, and this helps to develop their vocabulary. Older pupils chat and behave maturely, often supporting younger pupils. With pupils of all ages present, the playground is a vibrant and exciting place to be at lunchtime.

- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They make good friends and enjoy their learning. Pupils who join the school during the year settle quickly and are welcomed by their classmates. Attendance is consistently higher than the national average for primary schools and almost all pupils attend regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make very strong progress in all years and subjects. This is because of outstanding teaching, including highly effective assessment and well-targeted extra support when it is needed.
- Published outcomes at the end of Year 6 have been consistently strong in reading, writing and mathematics for several years. Pupils' progress is significantly better than that seen nationally from pupils with similar starting points. Consequently, attainment at the end of key stage 2 is consistently well above the national average. Pupils achieve well in all subjects.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 1 is also consistently above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics check is consistently above average.
- In common with other pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make very strong progress. Leaders and teachers are relentless in providing appropriate extra support for these pupils whenever they need it.
- Pupils who speak EAL improve their spoken English quickly because of detailed assessment and carefully planned support. They make strong progress in all subjects and the proportion achieving the standards expected for their age, in all subjects, is improving as a result.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leadership of early years is strong. In common with the rest of the school, leaders are clear about what they want the provision to provide and they constantly reflect on its success, making changes whenever necessary. For example, leaders identified issues with language and communication among some children. As a result, leaders made changes to the learning environment so that there is a constant emphasis on language, with labels and talking 'speech buttons' around the classrooms. Consequently, children are making strong progress in language and communication.
- Teaching is highly effective. For example, expert phonics teaching means that children make an excellent start with reading. The classrooms and outdoor space are vibrant and stimulating, providing engaging resources for all areas of learning. There is an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Adults skilfully prompt and question children to further enhance their learning.

- Teachers and teaching assistants accurately assess what children understand, know and can do. Many parents and carers contribute to this picture via the school's online recording system. Staff use this information expertly to plan each child's next learning steps. This means that children take part in activities that are very well matched to their ability and they learn quickly as a result.
- Children make strong progress from their starting points. The proportion of children attaining a good level of development is consistently well above the national average. Children are very well prepared to start Year 1.
- Behaviour is excellent. Children move from one activity to another safely, sensibly and with a minimum of fuss. Adults have successfully established clear routines that children follow impeccably. Children are polite, articulate and considerate of others. They listen attentively when adults, or other children, are talking. Inspectors observed several examples of children holding articulate, thoughtful conversations with each other, without adult prompting.
- Adults take great care to make sure that children are safe. All adults have been well trained and are vigilant to the signs that children might be vulnerable to harm. Positive and warm relationships between children and adults are evident throughout. Children trust adults and feel safe.
- Leaders' efforts to involve parents and carers in their children's learning are proving very successful. For example, during the inspection, groups of parents took part in craft workshops alongside their children. Adults were as engrossed in the activity as their children.
- The ethos of overcoming any barriers to learning that is evident throughout the school is also evident in early years. For example, children with SEND are very well supported. Similarly, children who speak EAL are helped to build their confidence quickly in speaking English.

School details

Unique reference number	137731
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10058519

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	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	402
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Andrew Wibmer
Headteacher	Jayne Maund
Telephone number	01432 273301
Website	www.holmerceacademy.co.uk
Email address	admin@holmer.hereford.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 January 2018

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized Church of England school that became an academy in December 2011.
- The most recent section 48 inspection of the school's religious character took place in February 2017.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The school has more than 30 pupils who speak EAL.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons; some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to many pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. Inspectors observed pupils at breaktimes, lunchtimes and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors visited an assembly.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including information relating to governance, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers.
- A meeting was held with three members of the governing body, including its chair and vice-chair.
- The lead inspector spoke over the telephone with a representative of the diocese.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the school day. They took account of parents' views by considering the 70 responses to Parent View, including the 43 free-text comments. The lead inspector spoke with a parent over the telephone.
- Inspectors considered the 14 responses from staff to Ofsted's survey.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gareth Morgan	Ofsted Inspector
Bianka Zemke	Her Majesty's Inspector

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