

Birchills Church of England Community Academy

Farrington Street, Walsall, WS2 8NF

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement		3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement		3
Early years provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress over time across the school, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' use of language is not sufficiently developed and this stops them from consistently producing good pieces of writing.
- In mathematics, pupils struggle to explain their thinking, especially when solving problems.
- Attainment is low because some pupils do not achieve their potential and reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Teaching is not consistently good because teachers' questioning does not consistently challenge pupils' thinking.
- Pupils' work shows that classroom written and mathematical activities do not consistently match the pace at which pupils are learning.
- Sometimes, pupils are not given enough practice to ensure they fully understand what they are learning. Also, on occasion, pupils find their work too easy.
- Pupils' responses to teachers' comments in marking vary from class to class. As a result, pupils' learning slows.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, supported by other senior leaders, has set high expectations and brought strong and stable leadership to the school.
- Teaching is improving and some good learning was seen during the inspection.
- School checks to see how well pupils are doing show that they are beginning to make faster progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Governors effectively question senior leaders about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- Pupils behave well and the school's work to keep pupils safe is good.
- Provision for children in the early years is good.
- The school provides very effective support for pupils and families in most need.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 21 lessons and observed 15 teachers.
- Meetings were held with senior staff, members of the governing body and a group of pupils.
- Inspectors examined pupils' work with the headteacher and heard a number of pupils reading.
- A variety of documents were scrutinised including school action plans; information showing pupils' progress; teachers' planning; and the governing body minutes. The school's own judgements about its performance and procedures to help keep pupils safe were also examined.
- There were not enough responses to the Parent View questionnaire on the Ofsted website to judge parents' opinions. Inspectors spoke to a number of parents during the inspection and examined responses to a parent questionnaire undertaken by the school.
- The responses from 13 staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire were examined.

Inspection team

James Henry, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Linda Rowley	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Chilcott	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The school converted to an academy in June 2013 and is managed by St Chad's Academies Trust.
- The school has had a number of temporary headteachers until the appointment of a new permanent headteacher in May 2014.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, and those who speak English as an additional language, is well above the national average. The large majority of pupils are of Pakistani heritage.
- About one in three pupils is disadvantaged and eligible for the pupil premium. This is extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- School records show that the number of pupils entering and leaving the school at times other than normally expected is above the national average.
- There is part-time education in either the morning or afternoon for children in the Nursery. Children in the Reception classes attend full time.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is above the national average.
- There is a breakfast and after-school club that is managed by the governing body.
- The school did not meet the government's current floor standards in 2014. These set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good by ensuring:
 - teachers adapt classroom activities to match the rate at which pupils are learning
 - teachers' questioning consistently challenges and extends pupils' thinking
 - pupils regularly respond to teachers' comments in marking in all classes.
- Raise attainment by the end of Year 6 by increasing the rate at which pupils learn, especially in writing and mathematics, by:
 - extending pupils' vocabulary to allow them to write more varied and interesting pieces of work
 - producing more extended pieces of writing across all subjects
 - developing pupils' mathematical language so that they can more easily explain their thinking
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving skills.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has brought stable and effective leadership to the school. In a short space of time, supported by other senior leaders, she has identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. There are robust action plans being carried out that are beginning to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement.
- Through rigorous checking on learning in lessons, the headteacher has ensured pockets of past inadequate teaching have been addressed. Consequently, pupils behave well and teaching is improving quickly.
- Senior and middle leaders are also now checking on the quality of teaching and giving effective advice to staff about how to improve their lessons.
- The school has a rigorous system for tracking pupils' progress and managing the performance of teachers. Senior leaders set challenging targets for staff, based on improving the progress of pupils they teach, that are linked to any pay increases.
- The additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils, known as pupil premium, is used carefully to provide extra support to help them with their learning. School checks show that these pupils are now making faster progress and is now in line with that of their peers. This has yet to have a full impact on closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils when compared with other groups in school and all pupils nationally.
- Through being taught a good range of subjects and experiencing a variety of different activities, pupils' personal qualities are developed well. For example, the school has established close links with the local vicar and leaders of the local mosque, and this helps to promote pupils' spiritual and moral development.
- Pupils learn about different faiths and celebrate various religious festivals such as Christmas and Eid. This helps the school to promote good relations and helps prevent discrimination within cultural and religious groups in school. Pupils' social development is promoted through a variety of visits, for example to the seaside, and sporting activities. Visits to places of interest, such as Lichfield Cathedral, foster pupils' cultural development.
- The curriculum helps pupils prepare effectively for life in modern Britain. They gain an understanding of the importance of democracy through holding elections to choose candidates for the school's 'Pupil Voice' committee. The police visit the school to talk about the importance of obeying the law. Assemblies, often led by the local vicar, are linked to the values of the school. These promote the need for respect and understanding of different opinions, beliefs and lifestyles.
- The school is working to introduce new ways of checking pupils' progress in subjects. However, arrangements are not fully developed.
- The school works very well to support all pupils and their families. This is especially the case for those who are in most need or who are having social or emotional difficulties. Parents say they appreciate the way staff care for their children.
- The additional funding from the sports premium is used well. Specialist staff work with teachers and lead coaching in various sports for pupils. For example, pupils are taught to swim. This includes girls from different ethnic groups, whose requirements, such as specific dress for swimming, are catered for. This is an example of how the school promotes equality of opportunity and ensures all have access to the activities offered. The school is measuring the difference this is making through attendance records and assessing the improvement in pupils' physical abilities and skills.
- Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. All adults are checked before working in school. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection procedures. The school is very good at monitoring the safety and well-being of pupils in most need and taking appropriate actions when and if necessary.
- St Chad's Academy Trust provides good support to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement. For example, specialist consultants have been working with newly qualified teachers to help them improve their lessons.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body effectively questions the headteacher about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Through checking statistics about pupils' attainment and progress, governors have a good independent view of pupils' achievement. Governors manage the budget well. They regularly check on the difference the additional government pupil premium funding is making to the progress of disadvantaged pupils. There are effective procedures for setting appropriate targets for the headteacher and staff that reward good teaching. This system is used to address shortcomings in teachers' performance. The governing body carries out its statutory duties well. Safeguarding policies and

procedures are up to date and reviewed regularly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils say that behaviour is typically good around the school, in the dinner hall and in the playground.
- Relationships are good with different groups of pupils playing well together in the playground and cooperating in lessons.
- Pupils are keen to learn and say they enjoy school even when activities do not fully engage them. There was no disruption to learning due to poor behaviour seen in lessons during the inspection.
- Staff manage the behaviour of pupils well, especially those with emotional or behavioural difficulties. The school does accept pupils from other schools who need a fresh start. They settle quickly and become part of the school community.
- Pupils are generally polite and respectful to each other and adults. For example, they open doors in corridors to allow others through.
- Pupils appreciate the school's consistent approach to rewarding good behaviour and dealing with any instances of poor behaviour.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. This includes pupils who are in the breakfast club and after-school activities.
- Pupils said there used to be a few instances of bullying, but since the arrival of the new headteacher, this has stopped.
- Pupils, including the disabled and those who have special educational needs, feel safe in school. They say that they can approach any member of staff to talk about any problems and know they will be listened to.
- Pupils appreciate the number of staff on duty to help them come into school safely in the morning. They say this helps them feel safe when leaving their parents.
- The school arranges for visitors, such as the police, to talk about 'Stranger Danger' and how pupils can keep themselves safe. Pupils are helped through activities in school to understand how to be safe when using the internet.
- The need for regular attendance is a constant message given to parents. The school has a positive reward system for pupils for good attendance. As a result, attendance is broadly in line with the national average.
- Responses to the school's parent questionnaire show that most parents feel behaviour and safety in the school are good. This was confirmed by those parents who were spoken to during the inspection.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Pupils' work and overall checks on their progress over time show that teaching requires improvement. This is because different groups of pupils are not making consistently good progress.
- Work in pupils' books show that teachers do not consistently adapt activities to match the rate at which pupils are learning.
- The school has introduced a new system for marking pupils' work. Teachers are working hard to follow this guidance and mark pupils' work regularly. However, there are differences between classes in teachers ensuring pupils take note of their comments and improve their work. As a result, the rate at which pupils learn slows.
- Teachers' questioning in lessons varies in the extent to which it stretches pupils' thinking. Relationships are good and teachers know their pupils well. They regularly check pupils' progress and identify and help those who may be struggling, especially disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- The school has a good system to teach pupils early reading skills. As a result, pupils generally make better progress in reading than in writing and mathematics, especially across Key Stage 1.
- Lessons in reading, writing and mathematics are now planned more effectively to meet the abilities of different pupils. Consequently, different groups of pupils are starting to make faster progress.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and generally plan lessons well. They respond positively to any advice given by senior leaders on how to improve their lessons. Consequently, teaching is improving with pupils beginning to make faster progress. Some good learning in lessons was seen during the inspection.

- Teaching assistants are guided well by teachers in lessons, especially in supporting disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs. As a result, this group of pupils is fully included in lessons and make good progress overall.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment is well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2.
- School checks and pupils' work show that different groups of pupils do not make consistently good progress over time, especially in writing and mathematics. This includes pupils from Pakistani backgrounds, those who speak English as an additional language and the most able. As a result, many do not reach the standards of which they are capable, especially by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils' vocabulary skills are not developed enough to ensure they can regularly produce interesting and varied pieces of writing. They also do not consistently produce good pieces of writing in other subjects.
- Pupils struggle to explain their thinking using mathematical language, especially when solving problems. Work in pupils' books shows that their problem-solving skills are too variable.
- The school tracks carefully those pupils who enter and leave the school at times other than normally expected. Checks show their progress tends to fluctuate and often depends on the length of time they spend in school.
- In line with most other groups, disadvantaged pupils do not make consistently good progress. Due to having only one set of national test results, it is not possible to judge if the school is closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils in national tests. In 2014, disadvantaged pupils left in Year 6 about one and a half terms behind other pupils in school in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the same group left over five terms behind all pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- School checks over the past two terms indicate disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make faster progress. The gap is beginning to close for this group in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- Learning seen in lessons and accurate school assessments over the past two terms show different groups are starting to make better progress. For example, pupils in Year 6 are on track to raise attainment to above the current government's floor standards in reading, writing and mathematics in 2015.
- The most-able pupils are also starting to make faster progress. School checks show that the number of pupils on track to achieve the higher levels in the national tests at the end of Year 6 is rising.
- Pupils are now making quicker progress in their learning due to teaching improving strongly.
- Due to clearly focused support that meets their needs, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, overall, make good progress.

The early years provision

is good

- Children enter the early years provision with skills and abilities that are well below those that are typical for their age.
- Different groups of children, including disabled children and those who have special educational needs, make good progress in the different areas of learning, especially in their personal development. Children's work in their 'Learning Journals' shows that they make good progress in developing early writing and mathematical skills.
- Children enter Year 1 with attainment that is close to that typical for their age, especially in developing their personal, social and emotional skills.
- Teaching is good. Staff check children's progress well to ensure activities are set at the right level for all children, including the most able.
- Staff quickly identify the areas of learning where individual children are having difficulty. Extra support given is effective in helping them to make good progress in their learning.
- Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders work with teaching assistants to check on the quality of teaching and improve their ability to support children's learning.
- Staff work well with parents and are readily available to talk to them about any worries they may have about their children. Each morning, children's work is put out for parents to look at so they can see the progress their children are making.
- Children feel safe and behave well. They cooperate with each other, share resources such as scissors,

and take turns in using large play equipment. This helps foster children's social skills.

- The classrooms and outdoor learning space are attractive. This stimulates children's imagination to help them learn in different activities.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139435
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	449915

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	433
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend H. Bishop
Principal (Headteacher)	Mrs B Williams
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01922 721063
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