

City of Birmingham School

The Link Centre, Jenkins Street, Small Heath, Birmingham, B10 0QH

Inspection dates

7–8 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good academic progress. They make rapid progress over a comparatively short space of time, enabling them to return to mainstream schools where appropriate.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are outstanding. Their personal and social development is outstanding, due to the excellent positive environment that the school provides to help get them back on track.
- The pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has a positive impact on their behaviour and attitudes. There is an embedded sense of respect.
- The partnerships the school forges with parents and other agencies are excellent and this benefits pupils' progress.
- Leaders, managers and the management committee have managed the merger of the different pupil referral units exceptionally well. They have established high expectations and aspirations for pupils, who respond well.
- Teaching is good. It is lively and motivates pupils well, so that they are keen and enthusiastic learners. Outstanding relationships with pupils are often the key to getting the best out of them.
- The outreach service that the school provides is highly valued by Birmingham schools and is very effective in reducing exclusions from other schools.
- The range of subjects and experiences given to pupils are excellent and encourages them to establish better attendance, punctuality and good learning habits

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are some inconsistencies in mathematics teaching across the centres, the use of marking and the level of challenge for some pupils.
- The progress of pupils who attend alternative providers is not as good as it could be.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 32 lessons, most of which were joint observations with different leaders of the centres. All 11 sites that the school occupies were visited by inspectors.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, pupils, members of the management committee, the school's improvement partner and a representative of the local authority.
- There were not enough responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for the results to be analysed, but the school's recent survey of parents' views was considered.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school's information on pupils' progress, its own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses and resulting development plans, and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jennifer Taylor	Additional Inspector
Christine Bray	Additional Inspector
Lynn Stanbridge	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Buckingham	Additional Inspector
Debra McCarthy	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The City of Birmingham School (COBS) is a large pupil referral unit (PRU) that was formed in April 2013 through the merger of three PRUs (Behaviour Support Service PRU, Virtual College and LACES PRU) and the local authority Behaviour Support Service.
- The school provides for pupils who have been excluded from other schools, or who are at risk of exclusion and those with a range of other emotional and behaviour difficulties.
- The school has specialised teaching centres across the city offering personalised educational programmes.
- The school makes extensive use of alternative providers for older students. Some provide academic courses: Blue River; City United; Flexible Learning; Future First; Silver Birch; St George's; Bridging Skills; TLG and South and City. Others provide work-related experiences and courses: Archway; Blue Whale; Bournville; Envirohort; Learnfit; Merlin; NOVA and Southside.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional government funding, because they are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority, is above average.
- Most pupils have some form of special educational needs, although not all have a statement of special educational needs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and further raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring work is consistently challenging through matching tasks closely to pupils' abilities and through marking which tells pupils how to improve their work
 - spreading effective practice in mathematics across all centres
 - developing the use of information technology, enabling access to work from home and encouraging greater use of homework.
- Further improve the progress of students who study with other providers by ensuring programmes fully meet their needs.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils make good and rapid progress, usually from low starting points, due to the nature of their fragmented previous education or difficult personal circumstances.
- More able pupils achieve GCSE passes in English, mathematics and science. Other pupils achieve nationally recognised qualifications in numeracy and literacy. Many older pupils also achieve awards in a wide range of work-related courses, which helps to boost their self-esteem.
- The school enters some pupils early for examinations. This is so that they can achieve an accredited qualification while at school and increases their chances of achieving further or higher qualification in the following year, if they remain at school.
- Pupils make exceptional progress in some aspects of their personal and social development, and learn how to cooperate and better manage their feelings. This is a key factor in enabling pupils to return to school or move on to other training or employment. The recording of pupils' improvements in their social and emotional development is excellent.
- Pupils reintegrate into their original or different schools. The rate of reintegration is at its peak in Years 6 to 9. It is more limited in the early primary years, due to lack of available places. However, the school does all it can to smooth and support pupils back into school. The Year 10 pupils usually remain at school so that they can experience stability in preparation for examinations.
- The school runs a highly effective outreach service to other schools. Some pupils from other schools attend an 'improving behaviour' course and this has proved very successful in reducing the number of exclusions from schools in the city.
- Pupils' progress and achievement are closely tracked and a traffic light system is used to identify pupil who are not making the expected progress. This allows the school to react quickly to any concerns and take additional measures to accelerate progress.
- Three quarters of the pupils are supported by the pupil premium, and they make good progress. The funding has been used to close the attainment gap compared to other pupils in English and mathematics. For example, regular reading practice has resulted in improved reading ages, confidence and enjoyment of books. It has also been used to improve pupils' attendance. All pupils are encouraged to read widely and often.
- Some pupils' progress has been hampered by the lack of specialist mathematics teaching. However, some teachers have recently started to share their practice more widely across centres where there have been weaknesses and this is starting to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. In one mathematics lesson, pupils were encouraged to solve problems in order to work out ratios. With persistence they found the answers and derived great satisfaction from having achieved a task that they initially thought was too hard for them.
- Primary school sport funding has been used to provide pupils with memorable and rich experiences, such as participating in high quality sporting events in a sports stadium, and providing access to a wider range of sporting and leisure activities. This is beneficial in improving pupils' self-confidence and physical well-being.
- The progress of some students who attend alternative providers is not as rapid as it could be.

This is because some students who attend have the most complex and challenging needs and on occasions programmes do not meet the needs of some students well enough.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is lively and engaging, motivates pupils well, and is often imaginative. In an English lesson, the 'discovery' of a 'spy's evidence' in the school grounds enthralled the pupils, who were keen to work out how to crack the combination code and read clues. This encouraged their use of adjectives to describe characters and situations.
- The relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. This quickly establishes mutual respect and is the basis for the excellent management of behaviour. A hallmark of all staff is the positive attitude and enthusiasm they exhibit towards pupils, and this is powerful in winning pupils' trust.
- Teaching takes place in a variety of settings. Some pupils who are not able to cope with coming to school are taught in local community facilities such as the BBC, which they find less threatening. Teachers are flexible in their methods and approaches and this helps to get the best out of pupils. For example, some pupils are initially unwilling to leave the house, but through persistent persuasion, they become more confident and start to engage in learning more readily in different environments.
- Teachers ask questions skilfully to test and extend pupils' thinking. The targets set for pupils are precise. Pupils have these at hand on their tables or in their books, and this gives them a very clear idea of what they are achieving and improves their progress.
- In some lessons, work is not difficult enough for more able pupils. Not enough use is always made of homework and the use of information technology to encourage pupils to access study programmes virtually and submit work from home is not yet in place.
- The marking of pupils' work is not always helpful in showing them what they need to do to further improve it.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding and the school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The school is a secure place and risk assessments are used to ensure pupils are safe in all activities, including those undertaken off-site. When accidents do occur these are responded to quickly and remedial actions are put in place quickly. Procedures are firmly established to ensure internet safety. Pupils are relaxed and confident throughout the school day and show respect to their environment and staff.
- In most cases pupils are referred to the school for behavioural reasons. They make excellent improvements in managing their behaviour. They learn to reflect upon their actions and the impact on others. This is a considerable benefit in lessons and around the school. Pupils are keen to learn, which is remarkable given their previous experiences. They are welcoming to visitors and show increasing tolerance and maturity. This stands them in good stead for the next phase of their education.
- There are effective school councils in each centre. These encourage pupils to make suggestions for improvement and develop their rights and responsibilities.

- At the beginning of each day pupils' behaviour is improved through 'swop' (social, well-being opportunities) sessions, whereby pupils mix socially with each other in a relaxed atmosphere and take part in a range of activities such as discussing the latest news events, the daily papers or playing constructive table top games such as draughts and chess to encourage positive social interaction.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well. It is planned for and promoted consistently across all lessons. Activities beyond lessons also contribute strongly to this and provide memorable and enjoyable experiences for pupils.
- Some pupils have an ingrained habit of poor attendance and punctuality. For nearly all pupils attendance improves vastly, although the school is always looking to improve attendance rates.
- There have been no permanent exclusions and few fixed-term exclusions for some time. The centres are harmonious and positive places and this does much to encourage pupils' improved behaviour and positive attitudes. In lessons pupils are motivated and keen to engage in learning through the setting of high expectations and aspirations.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The City of Birmingham School is a complex organisation. It is led and managed outstandingly well and the consistency of provision across the different sites is impressive. Levels of communication across the sites are excellent.
- The passion and dedication of staff support their uncompromising attitudes toward further improvement. Skilful management has ensured that the merger of the existing pupil referral units has not detracted from developments.
- Approximately 300 schools use the outreach service, which provides support to schools to help them manage pupils more effectively. This is led and managed outstandingly well and pupils make significant gains and improve their prospects. This service results in fewer exclusions.
- Middle leaders understand their roles clearly and carry them out effectively. Heads of centres provide smooth running of their centres and drive forward improvements. They make sure that staff can be exchanged between centres to provide expertise for particular subjects as required. This has helped to strengthen mathematics teaching where there has been a gap in expertise.
- Pupils enjoy wide-ranging and memorable subjects and experiences, such as skiing, arts festivals and outdoor activities, which give them with new experiences. The involvement in the local and wider community is excellent and boosts pupils' self-esteem.
- The work of teachers is checked closely and there is a suitable link between the quality of teaching and salary progression. Weaker teaching has been addressed effectively. Training for staff is excellent. They are knowledgeable and share their skills with other schools.
- Alternative providers are checked effectively to ensure pupils are kept safe. Better checking of providers is improving students' attendance and progress, although some programmes do not meet the needs of some more challenging students well enough.
- The school is well regarded by the local authority, which has confidence in the high quality support and advice it provides for other schools.

- The school makes good use of other people who check on teaching and bring challenge and rigour to teaching, such as additional support in mathematics.
- Parents and staff are very positive in their views of the school and this is supported by inspection findings.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The management committee has been involved well in the merger of the service. Its members have a good awareness of pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, through visits to all of the sites and focused reviews of aspects such as attendance. It is working to reduce the deficit budget and has a suitable recovery plan to achieve this. It receives good quality information, so that its members can ask questions and hold the school to account well. They know how additional funding has been spent and the improvement it has made to pupils' reading and in promoting pupils' emotional and social development. They also know about how the performance of staff is managed, and how pay is linked to performance. They are actively involved in improvement planning for the future, and have undergone training to make themselves an effective body that both supports and challenges the work of the school.

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	103146
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	427110

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	468
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Philip Haynes
Headteacher	Fiona Wallace
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2010
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