

# University Cathedral Free School

Gateway House, Northgate Street Chester, Cheshire West and Chester, CH1 2HT

**Inspection dates** 3–4 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Pupils make strong progress in reading and mathematics from their different starting points; consequently, a higher- than- average proportion of pupils are working at, or beyond, the levels expected for their age.
- All pupils achieve well and there are no marked differences between groups.
- Pupils gain a firm foundation in basic skills. Their speaking and listening skills are particularly well developed. As a result, the school is successfully meeting its aim to provide a 'voice for all'.
- Pupils are becoming accomplished musicians. A love of music, a desire to sing, to play a variety of instruments and to perform to various audiences is a direct result of the music specialism.
- Pupils' exemplary behaviour is matched by their excellent attitudes to learning and their keen knowledge of how to stay safe. They are the jewel in the crown of this successful school.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, high expectations and shape their teaching well to meet the different needs and abilities of the pupils in their care.
- The inspirational leadership of the Principal has ensured teaching is consistently good and pupils are safe, happy and achieving well, despite the considerable barriers posed by the current accommodation.
- Partnerships with the University and the Cathedral are exploited fully to overcome shortcomings in outdoor facilities.
- Clear lines of accountability, delegation of roles and responsibilities and effective communication between the trust, the local governing body and school leaders are making a positive contribution to the school's success.
- The local governing body has a good insight into the school. Frequent meetings and incisive questioning mean governors are playing their part well in driving the school forward.
- The strong start children make in the early years sets them up very well for future success in Year 1 and as they move through school.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. All of the parents who completed the online questionnaire would recommend the school to others.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' strong gains in reading and mathematics are not yet reflected in all subjects.
- Opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills do not happen often enough. This gets in the way of them soaring as imaginative writers.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to learn about different faiths and cultures.
- The checks on teaching lack rigour so small inconsistencies in teaching across different classes and subjects are not tackled with sufficient haste.
- The role of curriculum leaders in checking on teaching and achievement is underdeveloped.
- The opportunities for pupils in the Reception Year to enhance their physical development are hampered due to limited access to outdoor space.

## Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector made several visits to every classroom to observe teaching and learning, to talk with pupils and to look at their books.
- The inspector observed and spoke to pupils during play and lunchtime. She met formally with three groups of pupils and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with staff, senior and middle leaders and a newly qualified teacher. Discussion took place with members of the local governing body, two representatives from UCAT and a representative from the Department of Education.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding, information about pupils' achievement and pupils' books.
- The inspector spoke informally to a small group of parents at the start of the school day. She also took account of the 64 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to inform the inspection.
- The inspector evaluated the responses from 10 staff questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Joanne Olsson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average. Few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, is lower than the national average. Pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free schools meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or have special educational needs is also below average.
- The school population is stable. Fewer pupils join or leave the school throughout the school year than found nationally.
- The school opened in September 2013 as a one-form entry free school. It is part of the family of schools in the University of Chester Academy Trust (UCAT). There are close links with the University of Chester and Chester Cathedral. The school has a specialism in music. There are currently four year groups in the school, covering Reception Year to Year 3, taught across three classes.
- The school draws from a wide catchment area beyond the Cheshire West and Chester local authority boundaries.
- The school is housed in temporary, refurbished office accommodation. Plans are underway for the school to move into new accommodation from September 2015.
- There is before- and after-school provision which is managed by the governing body.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in all subjects, particularly writing and science, so that it consistently matches the strengths in reading and mathematics by:
  - making sure all subjects are covered in sufficient depth and detail
  - ensuring teachers provide pupils with enough opportunities to write creatively for sustained periods of time
  - enabling pupils to develop their scientific skills through investigative work
  - providing greater opportunities for pupils to find out about different faiths and cultures.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - tightening the checks on teaching so there is a clear focus on learning, so that inconsistencies between classes and subjects are picked up swiftly and teachers are set precise targets to help them improve
  - developing the role of curriculum leaders so that they play a greater part in checking on teaching and pupils' achievement across different subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- Passionate, resilient and ambitious leadership by the Principal, underpinned by strong support from a united staff, governors, parents and the Trust has led to a successful and thriving school community. Despite the considerable limitations of the current accommodation and the numerous setbacks in moving to a new building, no-one has given up. Everyone is seeking to make the best of the situation, finding solutions rather than making excuses. Consequently, the school is a harmonious and welcoming haven of calm in which pupils flourish.
- As the school grows in number, leaders are making the most of opportunities to appoint staff with the right skills to complement the expertise already in place. The systems to manage teachers' performance, which are rooted in the national expectations for all teachers, are used well to reward teachers but also retain high calibre professionals. Staff share a passion for music; this subject pervades all aspects of the school. Consequently, the specialism is serving pupils well in raising aspirations, building confidence and fostering a love of music.
- Staff morale is high and teaching is successful because the Principal gives teachers permission to try new teaching approaches without any fear of blame if new ways of working do not go to plan. Teachers are confident to go beyond published schemes, to share best practice and to learn from each other. Good use is made of the training opportunities provided by the Trust and the local authority to enhance teachers' skills. This is reaping rewards. Recent work to check the accuracy of pupils' assessments means the school's data are secure and reliable.
- Teaching is checked regularly, but the system lacks rigour. Too much centres on whether teachers follow policy, rather than a closer look at what pupils are learning across all subjects. Targets for improvement do not go far enough in pinpointing the exact steps teachers need to take to improve. Consequently, changes for the better do not happen quickly enough.
- Curriculum leaders are a tight-knit team. They are beginning to take the lead in driving improvements to some areas of the curriculum. For example, stronger guidance on teaching computing means pupils are gaining greater opportunities to use technology in their learning. Nonetheless, they are only on the starting blocks when it comes to checking the difference their work is making to teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Pupil premium funding is being used effectively to provide short, well-targeted support to disadvantaged pupils when they encounter difficulties. This work is bearing fruit as disadvantaged pupils across the school do as well as their peers.
- Partnership with the University and the money available through primary sports funding is exploited fully to ensure pupils have access to physical education led by expert coaches.
- The National Curriculum is providing an effective backbone for the learning programmes across the school. Subjects are linked together well and topics are founded on open-ended questions which mean pupils have a say in what they are learning. A range of visits and visitors to the school are used well to enhance pupils' learning.
- The interesting curriculum, a focus on Christian values and pupils' love of music and learning go a long way in ensuring their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong. Pupils' respect and tolerance for differences between people, their good knowledge of the locality and the opportunity to take part in their own general election mean they are being prepared well for life in modern Britain. Events such as the 'Summer Soiree' give pupils a taste of diversity. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to find out about different faiths and cultures.
- The close support of the Trust is making a positive difference to the school's success; effective advice and challenge from its primary adviser has helped the school to move forward at a pace.
- Priorities for future developments are accurate: school improvement planning is a good tool in mapping the way ahead. The considerable distance already travelled and the positive outcomes to date signal strong capacity for further improvement.
- Equality of opportunity is good. Incidents of harassment and discrimination are extremely rare; pupils have the same chance as their peers to benefit from the school's provision and there are no gaps in pupils' achievement.
- Leaders ensure staff are aware of the procedures to keep pupils safe from harm and safeguarding requirements are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Strong systems are in place for the governance of the school. Roles, responsibilities and delegated powers are understood by all. The primary adviser is an effective linchpin between the school, the local

governing body and the Trust, leading to open communication, clear lines of accountability and a shared ambition for the future success of the school. Consequently, everyone has an accurate understanding of current strengths and weaknesses.

- The Trust ensures all statutory requirements, including safeguarding, are met in full through the adoption of common policies and procedures.
- The local governing body, which includes parent representatives, has unshakeable confidence in the school. Governors are proud of all that has been achieved; but share a steely resolve to improve further. Governors use the support of the primary adviser wisely to ensure they are not relying solely on the information provided by the Principal.
- Although a relatively new group, governors have got to grips with the role quickly, seeking advice and attending training to make up for any shortcomings in their skills and knowledge. This is serving them well; they have a good understanding of pupil performance data, an accurate picture of teaching across the school and they know the positive difference pupil premium funding is having on pupils' achievement. They are confident their decisions to reward teachers are accurate because they consult a broad range of evidence prior to passing judgements.
- The Community Development Group ensures parents have a voice in the future direction of the school.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The warm welcome pupils receive when they enter school sets the tone for the day and promotes a strong sense of family, where everyone is accepted. Pupils' eagerness on crossing the school threshold does not falter throughout the extended day. Pupils wear their uniforms as a badge of honour; they are fiercely proud of their school and talk about it with glowing praise. Classrooms and corridors are spotless because they take care of their surroundings.
- Pupils' behaviour during lessons, around school and beyond the building is exemplary because pupils have excellent attitudes to learning: they are willing to work hard and keen to succeed. Respect and tolerance form a deep seam throughout the school. Consequently, pupils treat everyone with courtesy and no-one is afraid to share their work or air their views. This is particularly evident at lunchtime. Despite being keen to go outdoors, all pupils patiently wait for everyone to finish their meal without any complaint or fuss; harmonious relationships and excellent conduct do not wobble for an instant during this time.
- Ample opportunities to work together and teachers' open-ended questions help pupils to take charge of their own learning and behaviour. They become engrossed in their tasks; teachers rarely need to intervene to check behaviour. Pupils happily support each other. In a lesson on directions, one pupil responded very well when a partner pointed out mistakes; they worked together on the problem until both achieved success.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the standard of behaviour in the school. Pupils confirm behaviour is consistently strong and their learning is never disrupted. Attendance is broadly average. It is improving over time for all groups, although there is a very small number of girls who miss too much of their time at school.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Children have a strong sense of how to keep themselves safe. Even the youngest children know the risks associated with the building and follow the rules without fault. Pupils move around the school and during the short walk to the play area exceptionally well, needing little intervention from adults to avoid accidents.
- A recent visit from a local police officer has helped all pupils know how to overcome the risks associated with technology. Younger pupils have a good grasp of 'stranger danger' and older pupils know who to talk to if they feel uncomfortable with unwanted attention from adults. Pupils know how to minimise the immediate risks of their locality, for example, road safety and the dangers of playing on building sites.
- Across the school, pupils of different ages and abilities are adamant that they are safe from bullying and harmful name-calling. School records and the views of parents confirm this view. Pupils feel safe because they value differences and they understand why racist and homophobic language is unacceptable. They have absolute confidence that adults will take any concerns pupils raise seriously. Pupils who sometimes need extra help with their learning are not subject to any teasing by their classmates and the most able can fly because their success is celebrated by others.

**The quality of teaching****is good**

- Teachers' success in creating vibrant and purposeful classrooms in old office accommodation is irrefutable. Due to their determination and resilience, the learning areas are an unexpected oasis, not apparent from the entrance to the building. All teachers foster caring and respectful relationships so pupils feel safe and enjoy their time at school.
- Teachers are skilled in harnessing pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Lessons are imaginative, relate to pupils' interests and carefully build on what pupils already know and can do. Resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), are used very well to enhance pupils' experiences. Teachers use questions effectively to check pupils' understanding. Misconceptions are not allowed to take root as teachers take swift action to iron out any muddled thinking.
- The strongest teaching demands a lot from pupils in terms of behaviour and workload; pupils rise to this challenge without fault. However, not all teachers are as relentless in pursuing such high standards. This means pupils sometimes get away with not completing their tasks and allowing their presentation to slip.
- Pupils' work is marked carefully and teachers keep a close eye on pupils' learning so they can re-shape their plans to meet any emerging weaknesses or to deepen pupils' knowledge. Teachers are alert to any pupil who may be slipping behind. Focused and effective support is put into place so pupils catch up quickly. Teaching assistants play a key role in this successful strategy.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge and a whole-school systematic approach to teaching reading and mathematics are paying dividends. Teachers consistently enable pupils to extend their strong literacy skills in other subjects. This is less well developed for numeracy. Teaching in other subjects, including science, is not always underpinned by the same consistent approach across the board. This means coverage in some subjects is patchy and lacks sufficient depth to help pupils make the best possible progress in all areas of learning.

**The achievement of pupils****is good**

- Children leave the Reception class with a firm foundation for future success. This is built on successfully as they move from class to class so that all pupils are making good progress over time. Consequently, standards are rising. In 2014, Year 2 pupils, who entered school with lower than average starting points, left Key Stage 1 one term ahead of pupils in other schools in reading, writing and mathematics. Current data show an improving picture. Almost all pupils are working at the levels expected for their age; many are exceeding this benchmark.
- There are no marked gaps in achievement between different groups. Boys do as well as girls. Disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and pupils who have special educational needs are keeping pace with their peers in school and nationally due to close and targeted support in class and in small group sessions. Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those from different minority ethnic groups make similar progress to their classmates.
- The achievement of the most able pupils mirrors that of others in the school. They do not tread water because of their own desire to succeed and their positive response to challenging tasks. In 2014, the proportion of Year 2 pupils gaining the highest levels matched the national average in reading and exceeded in writing and mathematics. Current data show the most able pupils are soaring in reading and mathematics; the proportion working beyond the expected levels in writing is broadly average.
- Pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is exceptional. Pupils read fluently and with expression because they enjoy reading and have a good grasp of the sounds that letters make. Consequently, the success rate in the Year 1 phonics check is above average. Ample opportunities for pupils to do their own research means they are not just skilled at decoding words but understand what is written on a page. A strong grasp of number and opportunities to explore mathematics through investigative work means pupils are increasingly fluent in using their mathematical skills to solve problems.
- In writing, pupils' basic skills are strong; often surpassing what is expected for their age. Pupils spell accurately, use a wide range of grammar and punctuation and pepper their writing with rich and varied vocabulary. Nonetheless, pupils' success in writing lags behind reading because they do not have enough opportunities to write imaginatively and creatively for sustained periods of time. Sometimes, the progress of the most able pupils is hindered by writing frameworks which prevent them from writing at length.
- Pupils' achievement across other subjects is more variable. Their skills in using ICT are improving and they are becoming accomplished singers and musicians. However, in some areas they do not cover enough ground to deepen their understanding and skills. In science, they are gaining a body of knowledge, but their investigative skills are not keeping pace because they do not have enough opportunities to investigate and work scientifically.



- Pupils embody the school's success in promoting 'a voice for every child' through their well-developed speaking and listening skills and flourishing musical talents. Pupils are keen, articulate youngsters who enjoy their learning, approach all activities with enthusiasm and strive to get the best out of each and every day.

### Early years provision

is good

- Children get off to a flying start in the early years; their time in the Reception class stands them in good stead for future success and they are well prepared to face the demands of the Year 1 curriculum. Children enter Reception with a broad range of starting points. Some are ready to hit the ground running; others have skills and knowledge that are slightly below those typically associated with their age. All achieve well so that a higher than average proportion meet the expected goals in all areas of learning by the end of the year. Over one-third of children goes further and surpasses national expectations.
- Good teaching, good provision and warm relationships foster a love of learning and ensure children are happy and safe. Interesting activities capture children's enthusiasm and harness their natural curiosity. Children are confident and willing to explore, to ask questions and to share their ideas. They are resilient learners who do not give up easily, even when they encounter difficulties.
- Teachers' high expectations lead to all children having the necessary skills to become able readers, mathematicians and writers. They have a good understanding of number and they can calculate simple problems with ease. Children enjoy putting pen to paper; many willingly write extended sentences, which are punctuated and spelt correctly, without any prompting from adults. Children are soaring in these areas because activities and questions are skilfully shaped to build on what they already know and can do.
- The constraints of the building make easy access to outdoor learning difficult. The leader of the early years is tenacious in her drive to overcome this barrier. There are frequent opportunities for children to learn outside the classroom and the proximity of the city is exploited so children have a rich knowledge of their immediate locality. Nevertheless, the opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills further are limited.
- Children thrive emotionally due to the care they receive and the systems in place to keep them secure. Children typically behave well, treat each other with respect and follow instructions. They are particularly good at following the rules for moving around and outside the building so they do not come to any harm. Occasionally, activities do not always spark their interest well enough. When this happens, their attention wanders and their usually excellent behaviour falters.
- Leadership of the early years is good. The leader has a good understanding of what needs to happen next to improve teaching and learning. Careful analysis of data last year led to prompt action to improve children's writing skills and this is already paying dividends. Children's progress is captured frequently in beautifully presented 'learning journeys' which tell a good story of the rich and varied diet children experience every day. Partnerships with parents are fostered through regular meetings, newsletters, 'wow cards' and learning challenges for children to complete at home. Many parents attend the workshops delivered by the school. This gives them a useful insight into how children learn to read.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139832
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	450166

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Free school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	86
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ted Behan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gareth Davies
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01244 512507
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