

Balaam Wood School

New Street, Frankley, Birmingham B45 0EU

Inspection dates

14–15 January 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, leaders have not secured the consistently good teaching required to enable pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils' progress remains uneven. It is weak in science overall, and in most subjects in Year 9.
- In 2015, pupils did not achieve nearly as well as they should have done in several subjects, including English, science and design technology.
- Pupils commonly do not act on the advice provided by teachers in marking their work.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. A few teachers lack a thorough knowledge of the subject they are teaching. Pupils are only rarely challenged to think deeply or apply new ideas in different ways.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is variable. Too often, low-level disruption, such as talking across the teacher, slows pupils' progress.
- The school provides a limited design technology curriculum, and only one science pathway at Key Stage 4. As a result, pupils' opportunities to acquire scientific and technical knowledge and understanding require improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Teachers promote literacy effectively. Pupils are encouraged consistently to write accurately, and articulate ideas orally.
- Governors have a good knowledge of the school, and are providing increasingly effective challenge to senior leaders.
- Staff take rigorous measures to ensure the well-being of pupils, many of whom have complex needs. Safeguarding is effective.
- The school promotes strong spiritual, moral and social values, including respect for those from different cultural backgrounds. Pupils receive good advice on their future careers.
- Senior leaders check carefully on the quality of teaching, and provide relevant training for individual teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently at least good by making sure that:
 - teachers provide sufficient planned opportunities to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - pupils always use feedback effectively to improve their work
 - all teachers have the skills to manage low-level disruption in line with the school's behaviour policy.

- Raise standards of achievement by:
 - increasing pupils' progress in science, so that it is at least in line with that of pupils nationally.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management on pupils' learning by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have the subject knowledge, skills and confidence to enable pupils to make at least good progress
 - providing all pupils with a richer and more varied curriculum, offering them good opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement because senior leaders have not been able to secure consistently good teaching. As a result, although standards are currently rising, there has been no sustained improvement in pupils' achievement since the last inspection.
- The school has experienced marked difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers. This, together with the school's falling roll, has led to teachers teaching outside their specialist subjects. In some instances, they currently lack the knowledge, understanding and confidence to be fully effective.
- Nevertheless, leaders check thoroughly on the quality of teaching, and provide training for individual teachers that is well tailored to their needs. Teachers acknowledge its effectiveness, and inspection evidence confirmed that some teachers' skills are improving significantly as a result. Leaders set performance management targets which are specifically linked to pupils' progress, and contribute well to promoting the quality of teaching.
- Leaders have developed the Key Stage 4 curriculum to place more emphasis on the humanities subjects and on a modern foreign language which contribute to the English Baccalaureate. However, the school offers only one science pathway, leading to core and additional science, and only graphic products as a design technology subject. At Key Stage 3, pupils' experience of design technology is also limited.
- The school's 'Life' curriculum, supplemented by assemblies and work during tutor time, promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils learn about good citizenship and British values, and teachers recently helped pupils to understand more fully the terrorist attacks in Paris. The school provides additional teaching for Year 11 pupils after school, and a small number of extra-curricular opportunities, largely in sports.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's progress is generally accurate, and provides a secure basis for improvement. Senior leaders' evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching observed accorded with those of the inspectors.
- Leaders and governors plan the expenditure of the pupil premium carefully, for example to improve attendance and provide additional teaching and mentoring. Leaders check on its impact. However, in recent years these additional strategies have not been able to make up for the weaknesses in the school's provision.
- Leaders have established clear guidelines for staff in the application of school policies and in their approach to teaching. Inspection evidence indicates that most, but not all, staff meet these expectations, for example in how tutor time is used.
- Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, and work determinedly and resourcefully to overcome the many factors which might make pupils less ready to learn. Safeguarding is effective. The school's arrangements meet statutory requirements, and the school makes sure that parents and other agencies are involved in the support of those pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Senior staff visit alternative provision regularly, and check frequently on these students' achievement and well-being.
- Leaders have decided on a new system of assessment at Key Stage 3, but for the current academic year work in Year 7 and Year 8 is graded using the former National Curriculum levels. Subject leaders make sure that judgements made about students' work by different teachers are consistent, and at Key Stage 4 they check these judgements against those of other schools. Leaders take care that parents are able to understand how well their children are progressing.
- The school is a member of a local group of schools called the Oaks Collegiate. The collegiate provides a great deal of valuable support, particularly in providing training and demonstrating best practice for those teachers who are the only practitioners in their subjects. The local authority has recently established a new organisation, Birmingham Education Partnership, to provide support for teaching and learning, but it is too soon for the new organisation to have made an impact on the school.
- Leaders have created a cohesive school community in which morale is high. Staff report that they are proud to work at the school and are committed to its values. Most pupils and parents are very supportive of the school.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governors provide effective oversight of the school. They have ensured that they themselves are properly trained, and well informed about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. They have

worked hard to ensure that all governors understand the pupil progress information provided by school leaders. They are ambitious for the school and its pupils, and are anxious to see weaknesses in provision tackled and standards rise. Meeting records show that they are beginning to ask challenging questions of senior leaders, for example about the achievement of girls.

- Governors fulfil all their statutory responsibilities. They check that the school meets all its responsibilities through the rigorous scrutiny of staff during the appointment process, and the school's compliance with other safeguarding requirements. They check the arrangements for school trips and monitor the safety of the site.
- Governors are working with the local authority to meet the many demands on the school's budget while reducing the small current deficit. They manage the pay and performance of the headteacher and other staff effectively, making sure that pay increases are awarded on the basis of teachers' performance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching remains too variable to support good achievement. Teaching has not ensured that pupils make consistently good progress across a range of subjects for a sustained period of time. Teaching in science remains weak overall.
- Several teachers are in the early stages of their career, and a few are teaching a subject other than their specialism. Although the school provides well-considered and sometimes intensive training for teachers, there are several classrooms where the teacher lacks full confidence and command of their subject matter. Partly as a result, pupils rarely have the opportunity to deepen and extend their understanding, for example in response to a question which arouses their curiosity or tasks which require them to apply knowledge or skills in new ways.
- Teachers mark books regularly, and most provide a good level of specific guidance about how pupils can improve their work. The school's policy indicates that pupils should reflect on their work and add to their understanding by responding to questions or prompts. However, scrutiny of pupils' books indicated that they often fail to act on this advice both immediately and in their subsequent work.
- The school has established clear rules for the management of classroom behaviour, which pupils understand well. However, in too many lessons these rules were not applied with sufficient rigour, with the result that pupils' low-level disruption slowed the pace of the lesson somewhat.
- Teachers generally plan lessons that take account of the varying prior knowledge and understanding of pupils in the class. Leaders have sought to improve the effectiveness of teachers' questioning, and in most lessons questions were targeted at specific pupils, which helped to sustain their concentration and enabled the teacher to assess the progress of different groups within the class. In other lessons, mini-whiteboards were well used to record answers and display them to the teacher and others in the class.
- Teachers promote literacy well. Leaders have established clear procedures for helping pupils to improve the accuracy of their written work, and teachers regularly expect pupils to explain an idea orally. Pupils regularly read fiction in tutor time. Those who enter the school with poor reading skills benefit from a structured course based on phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) taught by well-trained staff. As a result, they are beginning to catch up quickly with their peers.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs generally learn well. Many benefit from the intensive reading support, and leaders are skilled at identifying their particular needs, and advising class teachers how best to provide tasks that will help them to progress.
- Where learning is at its best, typically in art and physical education, teachers combine practical work with more theoretical work skilfully and use their detailed subject knowledge to extend individual pupils' understanding. Homework makes a good contribution to pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good. The school has a clear and effective focus on developing pupils' attitudes so that they become well-rounded, outward-looking young people with positive attitudes towards others and the skills to gain employment.

- Pupils feel very safe in school, and the parents who responded to questionnaires agree. Pupils say that that staff supervision of the site is effective, and that there are no areas in which pupils are vulnerable. They agree that bullying is rare, and that all pupils know who to turn to for support. Staff deal effectively with any incidents when they arise. Pupils understand the importance of tolerance, and older pupils pointed out to one of the inspectors that the small size of the school meant that 'we're all close'.
- The school teaches pupils how to be safe in many respects, including about online safety, the dangers of substance abuse and the importance of sexual and mental health. The school has taken the initiative in tackling racism, homophobia and religious prejudice. There are effective procedures for staff recruitment and staff are thoroughly trained to identify those at risk from others.
- Pupils receive enterprise education in Years 7 and 8, and thorough careers guidance throughout the school. All pupils benefit from impartial interviews, and the school offers support to those who have recently left. Former pupils visit to talk about their careers. As a result, almost all the pupils who left the school in 2015 found an appropriate placement in further education or training.
- Pupils understand the value of their education, and the importance of making the best of their opportunities, even if they are not always quite able to live up to it.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils told inspectors that there is some low-level disruption in lessons, particularly those for lower sets. This was confirmed by inspection evidence, typically occurring in lessons taught by both less-experienced and less-confident teachers. In these lessons, some pupils become disengaged and reluctant to volunteer answers to questions. Books are generally presented with a good level of care, although some contain a number of scrappy or incomplete pieces of work.
- Over recent years, the school has invested heavily in strategies to improve attendance, and as a consequence it has improved to be broadly in line with the national average. However, attendance fell in the autumn term of 2015, adversely affected by a widespread outbreak of sickness. Currently, the attendance of girls lags behind that of boys.
- Pupils' conduct at social times is orderly and responsible. Pupils are polite, and respect the school's facilities, so that very little litter was seen on site. They bring the right equipment to lessons, and in the majority of classes display constructive and enthusiastic attitudes. The very few pupils benefiting from alternative provision behave well, because they understand how the provision contributes to their long-term aspirations.
- The school has recently amended procedures to manage incidences of poor behaviour, and staff report that this has improved pupils' recognition of what they have done wrong. This was confirmed by a discussion with the pupils in the 'Inspire' learning support area.
- The school's skilful management of pupils presenting more acute behavioural difficulties has meant that the rate of fixed-term exclusion has continued to fall, although it remains above the national average. Two pupils were permanently excluded last academic year.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Typically, pupils start at the school with attainment that is below average. However, those who left in 2015 joined Year 7 with broadly average attainment, and left with attainment which was below average overall, and on several courses, including those in design technology, English literature, history and core science.
- In 2015, the overall proportions of pupils who made expected progress and exceeded expected progress in English and mathematics were all below average.
- Disadvantaged pupils, who make up the majority of every year group, left Year 11 in 2015 on average three quarters of a grade behind other pupils in English and in mathematics. Compared with pupils nationally, they were a grade behind in mathematics and more than a grade behind in English. These gaps were larger than they had been in 2014. However, information supplied by the school indicates that disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress, and so are starting to close the gap on other pupils.
- Historically, few pupils have made more progress than that expected of pupils nationally, especially in the key subjects of English, mathematics and science. The school has recently adjusted the way it sets progress targets for individual pupils so that they provide a greater challenge, but it is too soon to see the impact of this change on pupils' progress.

- Information supplied by the school and broadly confirmed by inspection evidence indicates that pupils are currently making better progress but that this remains uneven, mirroring both the variation in the quality of teaching and pupils' attitudes to their work. Good progress has been sustained in art and physical education, and has generally increased in English and geography. Progress is weak in Year 9. In science, where the school's records show that improvement has been slow, inspectors saw pupils responding well to some better teaching, and making rapid gains in knowledge and understanding in these lessons.
- Many pupils with special educational needs are improving their reading rapidly in response to the school's 'Fresh Start' reading programme. These reading skills put them on course to make good progress across the board. The promotion of reading during tutor time, and the development of a reading room open for pupils at lunchtime are beginning to increase the rate at which all pupils improve their reading skills.
- The very few pupils on alternative provision make at least expected progress, and are on track to attain work-related qualifications in the relevant subject.

School details

Unique reference number	103529
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10002518

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	275
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Valerie Allen
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Harris
Telephone number	0121 4649901
Website	www.balaamwoodacademy.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@bwacedmy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 November 2013

Information about this school

- Balaam Wood School is a much smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium, which is the additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care, is high.
- At Key Stage 4, a very small number of pupils currently receive alternative educational provision for one half day each week at Gordon Franks Training.
- In 2015, the school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 25 lessons, three of which were conducted jointly with senior leaders. They also carried out some shorter visits to lessons. Inspectors visited tutor time and an extra-curricular sports session, and observed pupils' conduct at breaktimes and lunchtime.
- The inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, other leaders, class teachers and governors. They spoke to representatives of both the local authority and the organisation established to provide support for school improvement.
- Inspectors met with three groups of pupils, including some chosen at random, and spoke with many more informally.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons. They scrutinised several exercise books in more depth. They also looked at information on pupils' current attainment and progress.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of documents, both electronically and on paper. These included: development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; minutes of governing body meetings; policies; information provided for parents; and records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils.
- The inspection team took account of the 14 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, records of surveys of parental opinion conducted by the school and submissions from individual parents. Inspectors also considered the 30 responses to the questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Feldman	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Naylor	Ofsted Inspector

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