

## Birchills Church of England Community Academy

Farrington Street, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 8NF

### Inspection dates

28 February–1 March 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The principal has set high standards for staff and pupils, and planned carefully for the development of the school. As a result, the quality of teaching has continued to rise, and the rate of pupils' progress has increased.
- Senior leaders and governors have addressed successfully the issues raised at the last inspection. In particular, teachers ensure that the many pupils who enter the school with weak language skills catch up quickly.
- Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum and some good extra-curricular activities, especially in sport. Leaders' promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is very effective.
- Staff in the early years provision work well with parents to ensure that children get off to a good start. They plan effectively to ensure that children progress in all areas of learning.
- Some subject leaders are new to their roles, and do not yet contribute fully to improving teaching.
- A little unevenness in the quality of teaching remains, because some teaching does not fully reflect the strong practice established in the school.
- Teaching is consistently good or better. Teachers are highly effective at checking on pupils' progress in lessons, and asking searching questions.
- Inspection evidence showed that pupils are currently making strong progress in English, mathematics and a number of other subjects, including physical education (PE).
- In mathematics, pupils are encouraged to explain their thinking and apply their knowledge to different situations.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are consistently strong. They quickly develop a love of reading, and take pride in their work. Pupils behave consistently well.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the local community, and ensure that all staff are skilled in identifying possible risks.
- The additional work set for the most able pupils or those who finish first is sometimes insufficiently challenging.
- Teaching assistants generally make a good contribution to pupils' learning. However, on occasion their skills or their deployment do not allow them to have the greatest possible impact.

## Full report

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

- Further improve the quality of teaching, by:
  - ensuring that activities set for pupils who understand readily or work quickly always contribute to the deepening of their understanding so they make more rapid progress
  - making sure that leaders and teachers consistently plan so that the skills of teaching assistants have the maximum impact on pupils' learning.
- Deepen the impact of effective leadership and management, by:
  - extending the contribution which subject leaders make to improving the quality of teaching
  - ensuring that teaching assistants, including those working in the early years provision, have all the knowledge and skills they require to be successful at all the tasks they perform
  - developing the arrangements whereby teachers share their most effective practice.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The principal has an expert knowledge of the community. She combines a willingness to welcome to the school pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds with an insistence on high standards of work and behaviour. Leaders have continued to set high expectations for teachers also, so that despite some past instability in staffing, the quality of teaching has continued to rise, and is now consistently good.
- Leaders have addressed directly the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. In particular, they have ensured that pupils gain access to a rich variety of spoken and written language, and have every opportunity to improve their communication skills.
- Leaders make accurate judgements about the effectiveness of the school. They plan improvements carefully, and provide governors and others with clear measures against which to check on progress. Leaders link teachers' targets to the school's priorities, and hold teachers to account for the progress of their pupils.
- The school has established a clear system of regular assessments, and teachers check their judgements about pupils' achievements frequently against those made by teachers in other schools. Leaders use these assessments well to identify those pupils who need additional help, and to evaluate the effectiveness of additional support already provided. Leaders have recently extended the system to include national curriculum foundation subjects in addition to English and mathematics.
- Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities, which place due weight on knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects. Leaders ensure that what pupils learn is well matched to the needs of the community, for example by placing an emphasis on healthy eating and physical fitness. The PE and sports premium is particularly well spent on broadening pupils' engagement in extra-curricular sport and harnessing the mental benefits of physical exercise.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education effectively, so that pupils treat each other with respect, and have an increasingly open-minded view of the world. School values are firmly established. Pupils have a good understanding of British values because they learn about rules and about democracy, and know that their views are valued. Older pupils have the opportunity to take on responsibilities, such as helping with younger children in the playground.
- Part of the school's success stems from setting ambitious targets for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who have slipped behind. Leaders know that although teaching must address areas of difficulty and gaps in their knowledge, these pupils must be given every opportunity to catch up with their peers. This approach underpins the effective expenditure of both the pupil premium and additional special educational needs funding. Well-planned activities and high expectations mean that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well.
- Senior leaders are extending the role that other leaders play in helping their colleagues

to plan and teach lessons which develop expertly the knowledge and understanding of particular subjects. This work is at an early stage, however, and some leaders' skills require further development. Although the quality of teaching is rising, some teaching does not show the close attention to the approaches and techniques – for example in questioning or feedback to pupils – which have proved successful across the school.

- Staff, including those at an early stage of their careers, report that the training and support that they receive are proving helpful in developing their skills. Inspection evidence confirmed this. Several teaching assistants have trained to support expertly pupils with particular educational needs. Nevertheless, some do not have all the knowledge required to fulfil well all the roles they are currently asked to perform.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governance is effective.
- Leaders are held to account effectively by both the local governing body and the St Chad's Academy Trust, operating on behalf of the academy's sponsors. Local governors visit the school often, and hold detailed discussions with those staff who lead the areas of the school in which they take a particular interest. For example, the chair has looked at the impact on individual pupils of how the school spends the pupil premium.
- The local governing body is very well informed about the specific risks faced by pupils in the school, and ensures that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and followed meticulously. Governors ensure that the right steps are taken when staff are appointed, and that leaders make the necessary checks on all who come into contact with children. They give due consideration to the principal's recommendations, but have the final decision on teachers' pay.
- The trust directors monitor the school's expenditure frequently, including how the school spends additional money to support particular groups of pupils, and manage the principal's performance. They ensure that the school site is safe. Officers representing the trust also monitor the quality of education in the school directly, and provide effective support and advice to leaders and staff.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's arrangements meet all statutory requirements, and all policies and procedures are up to date. Leaders ensure that they act on their thorough knowledge of the local community to protect both pupils as a whole and as specific individuals. The principal has ensured that all staff are fully trained, and are alert to a wide range of potential risks. She issues regular updates to address any changes in pupils' circumstances.
- Inspectors found that staff keep detailed records, and work very well with parents and others to help pupils whose situations make them potentially vulnerable. When leaders do not receive an adequate response from other agencies that protect children, they persist until they know that appropriate action has been taken and pupils are safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Since the last inspection, leaders have established a stable team of teachers and set clear expectations for teaching and assessment. Pupils have responded well to this consistency of approach, and classroom routines provide a strong platform for learning.
- Classroom observation, scrutinies of pupils' workbooks and the school's records of both pupils' progress and lesson monitoring all show that teaching is consistently good across the school. Learning is characterised by very strong relationships between pupils and adults. Pupils settle to work very quickly, and teachers use time productively in lessons. Homework makes a well-considered contribution to pupils' learning across the school.
- Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge, use the correct terminology and insist that pupils do likewise. They explain new ideas clearly, relating difficult concepts well to pupils' own experience. Questioning checks on pupils' understanding, and frequently encourages pupils to think more deeply. For example, in Year 3 reading lesson the teacher asked how pupils knew which texts were fiction and which were non-fiction, and how they would tell the difference.
- Starting in the early years, all teachers recognise the limited vocabulary and ability to manipulate English with which many pupils enter the school, and provide an environment rich in different kinds of text. Pupils continually explain their ideas orally, and learn to use full sentences when appropriate.
- Younger pupils develop phonic knowledge well, because staff introduce letters and sounds in a structured sequence. They use a variety of different approaches to enable pupils to read and to record sounds in writing. Older pupils are taught various strategies for reading texts, and develop an understanding of how to retrieve factual information and recognise implication.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspectors really enjoy reading, and read at home. Weaker readers know how to use their phonic knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words, generally with confidence. The most able readers can read fluently and with impressive expression.
- Teaching in mathematics builds up pupils' knowledge and calculation skills, and provides pupils with good opportunities to reason mathematically and to solve practical problems. Staff reinforce pupils' learning by using physical resources such as number lines or counters when required.
- Teachers plan carefully to make sure that the work set is pitched at the right level. They then check pupils' progress systematically, and encourage those who have grasped an idea or demonstrated a skill to move on to more challenging work. Sometimes, however, teachers do not provide additional tasks which are designed sufficiently carefully to extend and deepen pupils' understanding.
- Teaching assistants generally support pupils effectively, breaking down the work into smaller steps and asking questions which help pupils to develop their understanding of the topic. During the inspection some teaching assistants demonstrated an excellent

understanding of both how pupils learn and the subjects they are studying. This was not consistently the case, however. On some occasions, their effectiveness was a little reduced either by the way in which the teacher deployed the assistants in the classroom, or the assistant's own knowledge and skills.

- Although teaching is increasingly consistent, some practice lags behind the imaginative and enterprising teaching that has the strongest impact on pupils' learning.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel entirely safe in school. They say that bullying is extremely rare, and that everyone would know whom to turn to if a problem arose. The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe from a wide range of different risks, including abuses of the internet and road safety. The school makes every effort to ensure that pupils can swim before they leave. Each week, pupils have a short safety briefing which allows staff to provide guidance on any aspects of safeguarding which are a particular concern.
- Pupils are fully aware of the school's values and expectations, and the school's motto, 'Manners matter most' was much in evidence during the inspection. Through religious education, during special events and from the displays and murals which adorn the school, pupils learn to respect different cultures and traditions, and to celebrate diversity. Leaders also promote effectively the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, including eating a balanced diet and growing one's own vegetables.
- Pupils are proud of their school, and appreciate both the support of their teachers and the education they receive. They value the opportunity to help the school, for example as playground assistants, and feel involved in the development of the school.
- Year 6 pupils believe they are well prepared for secondary school, both by the range of subjects they study and the encouragement of their teachers to achieve high academic standards.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils really enjoy their learning, and are willing to work hard. In the classroom, pupils follow staff instructions, and settle to work with a conspicuous lack of fuss. They take a pride in their work, and present it neatly even when this requires considerable effort. Pupils persevere, and sustain their concentration well. They collaborate effectively in pairs and groups when asked to do so.
- Pupils' conduct in the corridors and in the dining room is orderly and responsible. They explained to inspectors that the purchase of a range of more interesting play equipment has increased their enjoyment of lunchtimes, and improved playground behaviour.

- Leaders keep detailed records of behavioural incidents, and these demonstrate that serious incidents are very rare. The school has not excluded a pupil in recent years. Pupils who join the older year groups with challenging behaviour rapidly come to respect the school's rules and values.
- School leaders know that some pupils' circumstances make it particularly important to promote school attendance and pursue absence relentlessly. A wide range of rewards are on offer for those who come to school regularly. Leaders work intensively with the parents of those pupils whose attendance begins to slip, visiting homes and working with other agencies when necessary. Pupils' attendance during the last academic year was below average, but showed an improvement in the autumn term of 2016 to be in line with attendance nationally. The proportion of pupils who are absent persistently has fallen this academic year.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Since the last inspection, outcomes have improved. This academic year, an orderly climate for learning, consistently good teaching and high expectations have led to a rapid increase in the rate of pupils' progress in English, mathematics and a range of other subjects. Information supplied by the school, observation in lessons and evidence from pupils' workbooks all show that in the younger year groups, most pupils are attaining the standards expected for their age. Some older pupils have more catching up to do, but they too are making strong progress from their different starting points.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, and some individuals make exceptional progress. This is because leaders identify their needs early, and secure any specialist support the pupils require. Teachers understand well how to meet these pupils' needs, and are held accountable for their progress. Leaders check regularly on achievement, and modify the provision if necessary.
- In recent years, disadvantaged pupils have made progress similar to that of other pupils. Consequently, they have not diminished the difference between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally, particularly at key stage 2. However, stronger teaching for all pupils and close attention to these pupils' particular circumstances mean that disadvantaged pupils across the school are now making the strong progress which enables them to catch up.
- Because attainment in the school has historically been low, there are relatively few most-able pupils in the older year groups. Like their peers, the most able, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are now achieving well. This is because teachers in general set work which builds on and extends what they can already do. They also benefit from their teachers' encouragement to reflect on how they learn best.
- Standards of writing are also rising across the school. Teachers ensure that pupils pay due attention to their spelling and punctuation, and enhance their writing to develop their vocabulary and the arrangement of words. Pupils have good opportunities to apply their writing skills in a variety of subjects and contexts. Year 4 pupils, for example, have written descriptively about life in Stone Age Britain compared with that in Ancient Egypt.

- Since the last inspection, the proportion of Year 1 pupils meeting the expected phonics standard has been above that seen nationally, reflecting the school's effective approach to phonics teaching. In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, in writing and in mathematics was in line with the national average, but the proportion attaining greater depth was below average.
- Year 6 pupils in 2016 left the school having made progress that was below average, especially in reading. However, the overall published results were affected by the school's decision not to enter several less-able pupils for the tests, believing this to be in the pupils' best interests. The progress of most pupils in writing and in mathematics was at least average.
- Inspection evidence shows that achievement is rising in science, in the humanities subjects and in physical education. Rising standards, the broad curriculum and thoughtful attitudes towards their own learning mean that pupils are increasingly well prepared for secondary school.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- The majority of children enter the Nursery Year with skills and abilities which are well below those typical for their age, particularly in the area of communication and language. Many of these children are at an early stage in the acquisition of English. Leaders rapidly identify those children who require particular support, drawing on the assistance of other agencies when necessary. Additional money provided to support particular groups of children is spent most effectively to address any social or emotional difficulties, and boost children's academic progress.
- Inspection evidence showed that children make good progress, and many who enter the school with limited skills make exceptional progress. As a result, the proportion of children who left Reception in 2015 and 2016 having attained a good level of development was broadly average.
- Children's behaviour in the setting is good. During their early weeks in the Nursery class, staff prioritise children's social skills and emotional development. Consequently, children learn to treat each other and staff with respect, and demonstrate conspicuously good manners. Staff introduce children effectively to different cultures and festivals.
- Teachers plan a wide range of activities which effectively promote children's progress in acquiring skills and understanding in all areas of learning. Staff check carefully on children's learning in class, and are alert to their possible misconceptions, for example in how particular letters should be pronounced. Activities led by the staff proceed at a good pace, and retain children's interest.
- Staff record children's achievements thoroughly, and assess their progress every half term. Their judgements are checked regularly against those made by staff in other settings.
- The school works particularly well with parents, visiting all children's homes before the children start at school. Leaders regularly hold workshops to explain to parents how they can support their children's learning. Children's learning journeys showed



inspectors that many parents contribute effectively to helping children with their skills.

- Leaders ensure that all staff in the early years provision work together as a team, and know each child's abilities in detail. Teaching assistants contribute greatly to children's progress, but on occasion lack some of the skills to fulfil their roles to the highest standard.
- The school has rigorous procedures to keep children safe, and promote their welfare. Both the indoor and the outdoor learning environments are well organised, stimulating, and rich in language. The outdoor area provides additional opportunities for children from the different classes to work and play together.
- Children are well prepared for learning in key stage 1, because they have developed good attitudes to learning. Most children have already taken large steps towards catching up in their language skills. Importantly, the setting also establishes a culture of respect for others and the celebration of diversity.

## School details

Unique reference number	139435
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10025187

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	437
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mrs H Hastings, MBE
Principal	Mrs B Williams
Telephone number	01922 721063
Website	<a href="http://www.birchills.walsall.sch.uk">www.birchills.walsall.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@birchills.walsall.sch.uk">admin@birchills.walsall.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	15 January 2015

## Information about this school

- Birchills Church of England Community Academy is a much larger than average primary school. Children attend full time in the Reception class, but for morning or afternoon sessions only in the Nursery classes. The school runs a breakfast club.
- Birchills Church of England Community Academy is sponsored by The Church of England Central Education Trust (CECET).
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also well above average.
- The majority of pupils are of Pakistani heritage. One in six pupils is White British.

- The majority of pupils speak English as an additional language, and a high proportion of these in the younger year groups are at an early stage of learning English.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school holds the Inclusion Quality Mark, and a number of awards recognising its successful promotion of health and fitness.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 6.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 23 lessons, and on one further learning walk. Two observations were jointly conducted with the principal. The inspectors also observed an assembly presented by an Olympic swimmer, and pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, other leaders, class teachers, governors and representatives of the academy trust.
- Three groups of pupils, two selected at random, met with inspectors. Inspectors also spoke to many other children informally. One inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 4 read.
- The inspectors scrutinised in depth all the work produced this year by some pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6. They considered a wide range of information about pupils' current and recent performance.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, both electronically and on paper. These included: development plans and their evaluations; records of how leaders check on teaching; minutes of meetings held by the governing body and the trust; policies; and records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils.
- There were not enough responses to the online Parent View questionnaire for inspectors to take account of these views. Inspectors looked at 87 responses to a school parental questionnaire. They also spoke to a substantial number of parents delivering their children to school. There were no responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Helps	Ofsted Inspector
Bev Petch	Ofsted Inspector

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