

Mesty Croft Academy

St Luke's Road, Wednesbury, West Midlands WS10 0QY

Inspection dates

29–30 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since her appointment, the headteacher has brought about considerable improvements and has established a culture of ambition in the school.
- Accurate assessment and good teaching mean pupils make good progress. Academic standards have risen.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 compare very favourably with national figures.
- Standards in key stage 2 are rising because good teaching is building successfully on the higher standards now coming up from key stage 1.
- The most able pupils respond well to the raised expectations of current teaching. They enjoy extra tasks that extend their learning, such as writing for the school newspaper. However, support for the less able pupils could be better.
- While overall attendance has risen, some pupils still miss too much school.
- Effective early years provision means the majority of children are ready for learning in Year 1.
- Older pupils take on a range of responsibilities, such as being play leaders and nurse ambassadors, and show care for younger pupils.
- Pupils are well behaved and feel safe at school, although there are a few bumps in the busy playground.
- Leaders and teachers know the pupils well and have implemented a number of initiatives to support pupils to become more effective learners.
- Governance has strengthened but governors could make a greater contribution to school improvement planning.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance. Middle leaders are still developing in their roles and there is scope to sharpen the rigour of their checks on the school's work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve teaching and learning in order to improve progress across the curriculum, particularly for less able pupils, by ensuring:
 - teachers and other adults respond quickly enough when pupils do not understand
 - pupils have access to appropriate resources when necessary.

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - improving the skills of the governing board so that it makes a greater contribution to school development planning
 - ensuring that newly appointed middle leaders receive the training and support to develop their roles
 - sharpening the rigour of leaders' checks on how well actions to drive improvement are working.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and attendance by:
 - taking action to reduce the number of knocks and bumps in the playground at lunchtime
 - working with parents to improve the attendance of pupils who miss too much school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment, the headteacher has brought greater momentum to address the areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection. She is ambitious for the school to improve further so that pupils receive the best education possible. All staff share this ambition and there is a culture of continuous improvement throughout the school.
- The headteacher manages staff performance effectively to improve teaching and learning. She and other leaders encourage teachers to be the best they can be. Teaching is now consistently good in almost all areas and appropriate support is in place to ensure that staff can improve their practice.
- Teachers feel well supported and receive regular training and development to improve their teaching. Leaders and staff regularly plan and work together in order to improve aspects of teaching, learning or assessment. All teachers have taken on additional responsibility for the leadership of a subject, which demonstrates their commitment to supporting the school to improve. Staff say 'there is a culture of change now'. As a result of this, teaching, learning and assessment have improved.
- Leaders provide staff with high-quality professional training, including from specialist leaders of education (SLEs) working with the Wednesbury Learning Community Trust. They also ensure that support is given to middle leaders to strengthen their evaluative and leadership skills.
- Several subject leaders are new to their posts and are still developing in their roles. However, they all have good knowledge of standards and teaching in the subjects they lead. They keep an eye on teaching and standards and use the information they gather to plan for future improvements. Clear action plans are in place and some subject leaders are ambitious to gain a quality mark award in order to recognise the effectiveness of the school's work.
- The curriculum is suitably broad and there are imaginative links between subjects. The school has a topic-based curriculum, which supports reading, writing and mathematics across the curriculum. Well-thought-out topics such as the First World War or the Great Fire of London help pupils to learn about history, science and geography as well as developing their writing skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported by a number of extra-curricular activities. In the earth explorers' club, pupils tend a school allotment, which helps them to acquire useful life skills. In enterprise week, pupils work in teams, learning to be persistent, cope with challenge and think creatively in order to complete a task. The school works closely with the Rotary Club to support their fundraising campaigns. Some pupils recently sang on stage at the German market in Birmingham city centre, which helped to build their confidence and cultural awareness.

- Pupils' understanding of fundamental British values is good. In community group sessions, where pupils from different year groups meet together, they learn about democracy and cultural traditions, such as celebrating St Andrew's Day and learning about patrons.
- The use of pupil premium funding is effective. As a result of a recent analysis of pupils' needs, leaders decided to spend pupil premium funding on initiatives that will improve the self-esteem and resilience of disadvantaged pupils.
- The use of funding to support pupils with special educational needs is effective. Teachers adapt and amend their teaching to address the full range of pupils' needs and leaders have improved procedures for identifying needs and appropriate forms of support.
- Additional funding for physical education (PE) and school sports enables pupils to attend a number of external competitions, such as for football, netball, cricket and dance. Pupils who win trophies and awards are celebrated in assembly. This motivates pupils to get involved in school sports and extra-curricular events. In addition, the school's sports ambassador runs a number of after-school clubs, organises activities at lunchtime and provides staff training to improve the quality of PE provision across the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance has been strengthened since the last inspection. Governance is carried out by a board of directors which is aware of its statutory responsibilities. The directors also recognise a need to broaden further the range of skills on the board. Following a recent skills audit, a comprehensive action plan has been put in place. This correctly identifies that directors need to monitor more effectively the progress the school is making against actions in the school improvement plan.
- Directors are developing their role by carrying out visits to the school and taking on areas of responsibility. They are proud of the fact that the school is now engaging with the community more effectively. For example, they are very supportive of the recently established parents' council and the impact that this is already having in terms of relationships with parents.
- Although directors are aware of how additional funding such as pupil premium is spent, they are not fully involved in the evaluation of the impact of interventions.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Children are safe in school. The school has developed good partnerships with parents and works closely with families that need support to get their children to school on time and ready to learn. As a result, children are happy and feel well protected.
- Teachers and other adults are aware of the signs of neglect and abuse and are vigilant in raising concerns. Accurate, timely referrals are made and followed up with external agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching across the school has improved so that pupils are engaged and excited by learning. Consistent routines and high expectations are now well established. Pupils talk confidently and articulately when discussing problems and questions together and when giving answers to their teachers. Teachers model the use of specialist vocabulary effectively. As a result, pupils of all ages use key terms with ease and are able to explain their meaning.
- Teachers design activities with increasingly difficult levels of challenge, which stretches the more able pupils well. In Year 2 mathematics, for example, pupils regularly work their way through increasingly difficult problems until they get to 'the stinker', which is a really challenging problem that makes them think hard and apply what they know. In their conversations with inspectors, pupils in Years 5 and 6 reported that teachers made them do a lot of work but also said 'we love a challenge'.
- In mathematics at key stage 2, teachers focus on improving pupils' reasoning skills. They frequently ask pupils to explain 'why' when giving their answers. If pupils' responses demonstrate that they have not quite understood the teaching, most teachers adapt what they do to ensure that pupils get the support they need. However, this is not always the case and sometimes the less able pupils who are struggling are not supported quickly enough through teaching or the use of appropriate resources.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and their judgements about writing are secure. All teachers attend meetings and moderation sessions with other local schools and carry out their own internal checks to ensure that progress and standards in different year groups are as they should be.
- To promote reading beyond the classroom, pupils visit the local library and take part in reading challenges. Some pupils have visited Birmingham's central library. As a result, many pupils are enthusiastic readers. They read frequently at home and at school. Pupils who read to inspectors did so confidently, using their phonics skills to decode when necessary. They described how they read most days at school, that there is an expectation for them to read at home and for them to select challenging books. The school has also invested in a new reading scheme.
- The curriculum is organised around topics which aim to enhance pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills while they study content for other subjects such as history, geography or science. In a topic lesson on the Great Fire of London, Year 2

pupils demonstrated a good understanding of the causes and circumstances of the fire. They recalled historical facts about the dates, times and sequence of events. They also showed empathy for the people by describing how they thought it would have felt to be there at the time, using impressive vocabulary. One pupil commented that, 'The fire was so aggressive, I would have been petrified.' The quality of pupils' writing as a result of their learning was of a high standard.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and, when any occur, pupils say they are dealt with swiftly by staff.
- Pupils say they feel safe and parents say they feel their children are safe in school. Inspectors spoke to pupils at lunchtime who said 'Mesty is like a big family'.
- Pupils attend a wide range of after-school clubs including art and crafts, school choir, earth explorers' club and newspaper club, where some pupils run the 'Mesty Chronicle'. This gives pupils a wide range of opportunities to write for real audiences. They also 'sell' advertising space, which develops their understanding of the world of work.
- Leaders have invested in a new programme of support for personal, social and health education (PSHE), which will focus on mental health and well-being. A new log cabin in the school grounds is being set up to act as a nurture hub and will also provide a meeting space for parent support activities. The school has a strong commitment to improving the social and emotional mental health of the pupils, which they see as a barrier to learning for some pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are aiming to apply for a quality mark to recognise this aspect of their work.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They move calmly and purposefully around the school, with only occasional reminders to 'walk nicely'. Well-established routines at lunchtime and breaktimes ensure that pupils eat and play in clean, orderly environments.
- Year 6 pupils take care of younger pupils by acting as play leaders, showing younger pupils how to play playground games. They also act as nurse ambassadors, showing younger pupils how to wash their hands.
- In lessons, pupils follow routines and expectations consistently. Disruption to learning through distracted behaviour is very rare and, if it occurs, is picked up quickly by staff. Pupils show good self-discipline in their lessons. They talk confidently about the choices they make to challenge themselves with more difficult tasks.
- Pupils like the rewards they can earn from teachers and are motivated to receive them.
- Pupils show pride in their work through their presentation and commitment to learning. They like to be challenged.
- Attendance for all pupils is broadly in line with national figures. Leaders monitor

attendance rigorously to ensure that any dips are picked up quickly and patterns are identified. Persistent absence is still above average, but the school is working closely with parents to remove barriers to regular attendance.

- The school works closely with families to improve attendance and punctuality and has had considerable success, with some pupils now achieving 100% attendance. The breakfast club runs every day on a drop-in basis so that parents can ensure their children are at school on time.
- There are quite a lot of bumps and tumbles at lunchtime play but first aid is available when needed. Leaders are looking into ways to reduce these minor accidents on the busy playground.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes across the school have improved since the last inspection. Pupils made strong progress by the end of key stage 2 in 2017. At key stage 1, pupils achieved in line with or above national figures at both the expected standard and at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching have led to faster progress in all year groups. In 2017, for instance, key stage 2 pupils made much better progress than others nationally in writing.
- As a result of the rising standards coming up from key stage 1, the proportion of key stage 2 pupils on track to reach the expected standard for their age has also risen. Leaders rigorously track pupils' progress and check that teachers are closing any gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills.
- The standard of writing in pupils' books currently is very strong at key stage 1. Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to write for a range of different purposes, including newspaper reports, non-chronological accounts and stories. They confidently use grammatical terms appropriate to their age to describe the features of their texts.
- Any pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now identified early and a range of interventions are in place to ensure that they do not fall behind. The evaluation of the impact is in its early stages, but leaders track their progress rigorously. As a result, pupils who have additional needs make similar progress to their peers.
- The most able pupils achieve well at this school. At key stage 1 in 2017, a higher proportion of pupils achieved at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics than nationally. At key stage 2, a higher proportion of pupils achieved above the expected standard in reading and mathematics. The school's current tracking data indicates that this standard is being maintained in 2018. Evidence in pupils' books and the level of challenge provided in lessons supports this picture.
- Disadvantaged pupils in early years and key stage 1 reach similar standards to their peers. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally has closed at both a good level of development and phonics. Current disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 are making increasingly better progress in response to the improved provision. Leaders are providing additional support for pupils' social and emotional health in order to build their resilience and self-esteem. Leaders see this as a longer-term solution to lifting

aspirations and promoting well-being. The school is ambitious to become a centre of excellence in this regard.

- At key stage 1, a high proportion of children reached the expected standard for their age in the Year 1 phonics screening check. This has been an improving picture over the last three years.
- In order to improve reading, leaders have instigated a determined drive to promote a reading culture in the school. Colourful displays featuring high-quality texts entice pupils to choose more challenging texts. As a result of a review of the texts used in the curriculum, many of the books used have been moved into lower year groups to ensure that challenge is built into the curriculum. In the school's 'Sherlock Holmes Room', which is furnished with period furniture, pupils who need additional support work with a teaching assistant to develop their inference and deduction skills by taking on the role of 'reading detectives'. As a result of this inspired initiative, pupils are excited by reading and frequently make rapid progress in reading accuracy and comprehension skills. There are some examples of exceptional progress.

Early years provision

Good

- Many children start in the early years with a level of knowledge and skills below that typical for their age. Close liaison with parents helps children to settle in quickly and also enables the school to gather plenty of information about children's needs, aptitudes and interests. Consequently, all adults involved with children's early education are well informed.
- Children achieve well in the early years at this school. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development increased in 2017. The school's tracking data for the autumn term so far shows that the proportion of children on track to achieve a good level of development will increase again this year. In addition, two thirds of children currently in the Reception classes are on track to achieve age-related expectations, with some children operating above this level. From a low starting point, this represents good progress and shows that children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Good teaching, steered by effective leadership, leads to good progress across both the Nursery and Reception classes. Consistent routines help children to feel secure. Adults provide plenty of positive encouragement that promotes good behaviour and an interest in learning. There is a strong focus on developing effective learning habits. Children have plenty of opportunity to investigate, explore, cooperate, take decisions and be creative.
- Classrooms are well organised and provide a safe, purposeful space for children to learn. The outdoor learning environment, however, is less well developed and is an area for improvement already identified by staff.
- Staff set up a wide range of activities focusing on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills, based on the children's own interests and experience. Inspectors observed children making sandwiches, an activity based on the children's interest in Paddington and his love of marmalade sandwiches. Children were engaged in the activity while learning about hygiene habits.

- From when they first start in the Nursery class, children are taught to respect themselves and each other and to understand that everyone is unique and should be treated fairly. Children are encouraged to look after each other. For example, during break time, a 'VIP' child helps to prepare the snacks.
- To support transition, children move across to the Year 1 classrooms two weeks before the end of the summer term. This helps children to familiarise themselves with their new environment and helps staff to get to know the children.
- Parents are fully engaged in their children's learning through home learning logs in which children are set weekly home learning challenges. Parents are invited to comment on how their children have got on with the task. Inspectors observed a session for new parents invited to 'stay and play' with their children before they join the Nursery. This helps parents support their children's education from the start of their time at Mesty Croft.

School details

Unique reference number	137972
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10042874

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	439
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr Mike Babb
Headteacher	Mrs Lucy Bray
Telephone number	01215560854
Website	www.mestycroftacademy.co.uk
Email address	parents.parents@mestycroft.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 December 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- 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 converted to become an academy before the last inspection and is currently exploring joining a local multi-academy trust.
- The school is in an area of high deprivation.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased since the last inspection.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school runs a daily breakfast club.
- The headteacher took up her post since the last inspection and many teachers are new to the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning, spoke to pupils and looked at pupils' books in all classes. Several lesson observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour on the playground, in the breakfast club and in the dining hall during lunchtime. Inspectors met with a group of pupils to ask about their views of the school and listened to pupils read.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and leaders responsible for English, mathematics, science, geography, computing, early years and special educational needs.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the board of directors and with a school improvement adviser.
- Inspectors spoke to 16 parents at the beginning of the day and took into account 43 responses to Parent View and 17 comments. Twenty-six responses to the staff questionnaire were also considered.
- Documents scrutinised included: the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school improvement plan, information on pupils' progress and attainment, records of behaviour and attendance, minutes of board of directors' meetings, external reports, information relating to the performance management of staff and safeguarding information.

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