

# Northern House School (Solihull)

Lanchester Way, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, West Midlands, B36 9LF

## Inspection dates

17–18 May 2017

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	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Teachers do not consistently have high expectations of the work pupils can do and as a result, pupils do not make the progress they should. The progress that pupils make by the end of key stages 2 and 4 is below average.
- The quality of teachers' assessment and their feedback to pupils is variable, and so pupils do not always know how to improve their work.
- Leaders have not developed good systems to track pupils' achievement and set challenging targets for progress, attendance and behaviour.
- Attendance of pupils overall is below national averages and significantly below in key stage 4. Poor attendance adversely affects many pupils' progress.
- Subject leadership is underdeveloped and as a result, monitoring of progress and moderation of standards within subjects are variable.
- Some teachers do not make effective use of the time available in lessons. As a result, pupils do not complete sufficient work in some lessons. At times, low-level disruption slows learning.
- Pupils are not appropriately challenged in the work that is set and this slows down their progress.
- Primary staff do not have sufficient skill in calming pupils down when they misbehave. Physical interventions are used more frequently than they should be.
- Some pupils do not take pride in the work they do and this is not challenged by all teachers.
- Governors, although insightful, do not always challenge leaders enough to take prompt action on areas that need to improve.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has created an ethos of care and support where all pupils, parents and staff are valued. Staff know their pupils well and have developed strong professional relationships. As a result, pupils trust them.
- The large majority of pupils feel safe at school and know how to get support when they need to.
- School days start calmly and purposefully, and the time is well used to develop pupils' literacy skills.
- Pupils enjoy the wide variety of trips and extra-curricular activities that motivate and inspire them.

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

- Improve leadership and management by:
  - supporting teachers to form an accurate view of the current attainment and progress of their pupils, and use this information consistently well to provide work that meets pupils' needs and enables them to make rapid progress
  - using assessment information systematically to form an accurate view of how well pupils are doing and what actions are needed to improve pupils' progress across the curriculum
  - analysing information about behaviour and attendance and using this alongside information about progress to set challenging targets for improvement and to plan and implement appropriate actions to enable these targets to be met
  - reducing the use of physical intervention in the primary phase
  - making sure that pupils throughout the school are consistently taught and supported to improve their own behaviour
  - ensuring that governors make good use of the information they receive about the school's performance to challenge leaders where the pace of change is not quick enough.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and as a result, improve the progress that pupils make by:
  - ensuring that lessons meet the needs of all groups of pupils
  - consistently engaging all groups of pupils and motivating them to do well
  - instilling a desire in pupils to make progress
  - making sure that lessons get off to a prompt start and that time is used productively
  - providing clear guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work and supporting them to do so as needed
  - consistently challenging all low-level disruption.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- The headteacher and the senior team have created a caring culture, a level of social expectation and a calm learning environment where pupils feel safe.
- The headteacher and governors have a clear vision that develops the resilience of all pupils to enable them, in many cases, to re-engage successfully in education. This is evident in the success of the restorative approach they use to support pupils to resolve conflict and to help pupils to develop the skills and attributes they need to become good citizens.
- The headteacher and leadership team are clear about what needs to be done to improve the school further. They welcome the insightful external scrutiny provided by the academy trust and have used this to inform their whole-school development planning.
- When pupils join the school, many of them have experienced difficulties in their previous school which has led to exclusions or time out of education. Many are not working at the standard expected for their age. Pupils are often afraid of failure and this can often show in their challenging behaviour. Some may have regressed from their last end-of-key-stage assessment. Leaders do not make sure that pupils' attainment on entry is checked in order to set a baseline and put in place challenging targets and interventions to help them fulfil their potential.
- Leaders have put in place systems to record progress in the many different areas of pupils' experience. However, the systems are not yet developed sufficiently to ensure that teachers and leaders accurately know pupils' starting points on entry to the school and how much progress they need to make in order to catch up on what is expected for their age. Leaders have not made sure that assessment is robust enough to set challenging targets that stretch all pupils to achieve their potential.
- Leaders are developing a system that will provide them with a more accurate measure of progress in order to provide teachers with targets that challenge all pupils as this is currently not consistent.
- Middle leadership is underdeveloped. Middle leaders do not have clear areas of responsibility or accountability. As a result, there is inconsistent monitoring of progress in their subject areas and they do not have a clear view about the actions they need to take in order to raise standards.
- Leaders can account for additional funding received to support disadvantaged pupils and those for whom literacy and numeracy catch-up funding provides support. The impact of this funding in 2016 was that disadvantaged pupils made more progress in English and mathematics than other pupils in the school at key stage 4, and pupils made similar or slightly better progress than other pupils in the school at key stage 2. However, these pupils make less progress than other pupils do nationally.

- Pupils receive careers guidance and support to prepare them for the next steps of their education. The majority are offered college places; however, the high number of placements that are not sustained indicates that preparation for their next steps is not effective.
- Leaders accurately identify the skills staff need and, with a strong emphasis on professional development, have provided timely training for staff. An example of this is recent training delivered to develop primary staff's confidence and skills in dealing with challenging behaviours through emotional coaching for staff. This is helping teachers and other staff to better understand and support the pupils. Nevertheless, the use of physical intervention with primary pupils remains too frequent.
- The school has utilised the additional funding received to support the development of primary physical education and sport and to enrich curriculum opportunities for pupils.
- Pupils shared with inspectors how they enjoy the wide range of trips and activities that the school provides. The impact of the residential activities was so powerful that some pupils were extremely enthusiastic when they told inspectors about their experience from nearly two years ago.
- Through assemblies, tutor time and the restorative justice approach towards behaviour, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. In particular, there is a strong emphasis on mutual respect and tolerance of others.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils are treated equally and any concerns around inequality are accurately recorded, followed up and resolved.
- Through the headteacher's philosophy of creating a nurturing, caring environment where pupils can achieve success, he has gained the support and respect of staff and parents.
- Pupils have access to an appropriately broad range of subjects in all key stages that provides them with a variety of opportunities to experience hands-on and academic learning. Pupils' experiences are further enhanced with a wide variety of educational visits, holiday activities and residential visits.
- To meet the needs of a growing pupil population, the school has supported some teaching assistants to train as teachers, who are then supported by leadership mentors to develop their classroom practice and knowledge of special educational needs and/or disabilities. This investment has enabled the school to be less reliant on supply staff. As a result, pupils' learning experience is becoming more consistent and positive.

### **Governance of the school**

- The trust board effectively manages the school's finances and complies with all the statutory requirements. The board appointed a local governing board to work more closely with the school to provide an oversight of the school's operations, including safeguarding, and to hold the headteacher to account.
- The chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust board provides the local governing body with a level of external scrutiny from regular audit reports of the school, undertaken using experts from within the trust. However, governors do not use these reports well enough to challenge the headteacher to take prompt action. Inspectors found that areas identified for improvement in these reports still needed to improve.

- The local governing body and the trust board have worked together with the headteacher to create a stable, calm school, and since the school opened three years ago, the number of pupils on roll has grown, attendance has improved and exclusions have reduced. Examples of where they have worked well together is in the significant reduction in damage to school property and stronger relationships with local neighbours.
- Through regular meetings, visits to the school, the headteacher's report and external monitoring reports, governors are well informed about all aspects of the school and are pleased about how the school's positive ethos has developed over the last three years, citing the now positive relationships with the local community. Governors rightly believe that the strength of the school is the dedication and care it shows to all pupils by building strong, positive relationships and knowing each pupil well.
- Governors and the trust board know the school very well. They recognise the need to improve their monitoring of the impact of the additional funding received for current pupils and have in place better plans for spending this funding.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all statutory training is up to date for all staff. Leaders have a strong system in place for reporting any safeguarding or well-being concerns. Staff know how to raise a concern and have confidence that all concerns are diligently followed up because they are made aware of the outcomes.
- There is good communication between the designated safeguarding lead and outside agencies, and concerns are actively followed up, ensuring that pupils' safety and well-being are not compromised.
- Inspectors noted that safeguarding procedures were in place, and that staff, visitors and volunteers were vetted and appropriate checks were made. In a few instances, there was insufficient evidence readily available of the checks undertaken.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Teaching does not consistently engage, challenge and motivate pupils to do well. For example, in a secondary mathematics lesson, the language used by the teacher meant that pupils could not understand what was expected of them. This resulted in low-level disruption which was not appropriately addressed and meant that pupils lost interest and did not make progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to all aspects of their learning are not consistently positive. As a result, sometimes they take too long to get started on their work in class and do not understand the importance of making the most of the time they have in class to make as much progress as possible.
- Feedback to pupils often does not support them to understand the next steps in their learning. The school does not have a policy on how teachers should provide feedback to pupils and as a consequence, pupils do not always know how to improve their work.

- Teachers do not always plan an activity and prepare resources that take account of pupils' needs. For example, inspectors found that pupils with different reading ages and prior knowledge of a topic were provided with the same learning task. This meant that for some pupils, the task was too difficult and that other pupils were not stretched and challenged. This lack of attention to pupils' individual needs results in too many of them not making the progress they should.
- Too many teachers do not have high expectations for pupils. Expectations of what pupils can achieve academically are often too low. Work is sometimes completed superficially, which means that pupils' knowledge is not deepened. This has an adverse impact on their progress. Inspectors found graffiti in books that was not challenged by staff. In contrast, some teachers have high expectations to which pupils respond very well, and they make good progress as a result.
- When teachers choose interesting tasks, pitch the work to meet pupils' needs, share their expectations with pupils and direct staff appropriately, pupils are engaged and enthusiastic and make progress over time.
- Many pupils arrive at the school with low reading ages. As a result of a strong focus on reading every day, some pupils in key stage 4 have made significant progress in one year. The recently appointed primary leader is developing staff's knowledge of phonics since pupils in the primary phase do not consistently use their knowledge of phonics to help them work out unfamiliar words. This means that pupils do not read as well as they should.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff offer opportunities to enable pupils to improve their social and communication skills. For example, during social times, staff talk to pupils about their day. Members of staff lead lunchtime activities such as table tennis, pool and other clubs. As a result of this, pupils develop their social skills and become better prepared for life after school.
- The school promotes healthy eating. Water is available during the school day and pupils were keen to share how much they enjoyed the quality of the food provided.
- Pupils told inspectors that they felt safe in school and there were no places they would not go. Pupils of all ages were able to share whom they would go to if they needed help and were confident that staff would sort out any concerns.
- One pupil said that the difference between this school and his last one is that 'staff take time to listen to me'. The pupil survey supported this. The large majority who responded agreed that staff listened to them.
- The majority of pupils feel supported at school and a number of them spoke positively about how staff helped them to make the right choices and, as a result, they were more able to engage in lessons.
- The staff team has created a culture where pupils feel safe and are confident to seek support. Pupils understand what bullying is and have confidence to report it, knowing it

will be dealt with.

- Staff know their pupils well and build positive relationships. This leads to trust and pupils knowing that staff will give them time and understanding when they are in crisis.
- Movement around the school, including into and out of assembly, is orderly and managed well by the staff team, ensuring that pupils maintain their positive relationships with their peers.
- Assembly themes are well coordinated and promote the personal development and well-being of pupils. During assembly, pupils listen well and are confident to share their ideas when asked.
- Staff are quick to challenge swearing, and no examples of derogatory language or stereotyping were evident during the inspection.
- The restorative justice approach to resolving conflict enables pupils to be reflective and to take responsibility for their actions, and helps them to understand how to be good citizens.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Physical interventions are too frequent in the primary phase. Some staff do not have the confidence and strategies to de-escalate challenging behaviours in order to reduce the need to physically intervene.
- Low-level disruption is not always challenged by staff and this has a negative impact on the learning of other pupils. When staff have high expectations and challenge low-level disruptive behaviour, pupils settle quickly and learning continues.
- Sometimes pupils struggle to cope with the demands of school life. When staff respond quickly and calmly, this helps pupils to keep their behaviour under control and to get back on track for the school day. Pupils are supported to reintegrate back into their lessons promptly.
- Leaders encourage staff to record all instances of unacceptable behaviour, but do not yet analyse the information to identify trends to set targets for improvements.
- When not in lessons, pupils generally conduct themselves in a calm and sociable manner. Pupils who disrupt the calm environment are challenged quickly on the majority of occasions and generally they respond well.
- Exclusion rates are higher than the national average. Current programmes of support focus too much on controlling behaviours, not changing behaviours.
- The school follows up rigorously on absences with first-day phone calls and home visits that encourage better attendance. This is more successful with pupils in the primary phase, where attendance is closer to the national average. Key stage 4 attendance is significantly below the national average. As a result, pupils do not make as much progress as they could and do not sustain their college placements.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The school's assessment information shows that pupils' progress is improving over time. However, some of this information is not based on robust assessment and moderation. Therefore, pupils do not make good progress in all subjects.
- Published information shows that pupils taking their GCSEs in 2016 made progress well below that of other pupils with similar starting points nationally. Pupils with low prior attainment made more progress than those with middle prior attainment in English, mathematics and overall.
- Many key stage 4 pupils are making rapid progress in reading. These improving skills are seeing pupils beginning to make better progress in their other subjects.
- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils made better progress than other pupils in the school, particularly in English. However, their progress was below that of other pupils nationally.
- At key stage 2, all pupils are working below where they should be, given their prior attainment. The recent appointment of a new primary coordinator is further developing the school's focus on literacy and numeracy to support pupils in making progress to the expected level.
- School information shows that disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 2 make less progress than other pupils in the school and nationally. The difference between disadvantaged and other pupils is less in English than in mathematics.
- The poor attendance of some pupils in key stage 4 has a clear negative impact on their outcomes and slows the progress they make.
- Outcomes for all pupils are below the expected level in the Year 1 and Year 2 phonics checks. There are no differences in attainment between the different groups of pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics made more progress than other pupils at key stage 4, as a result of targeted literacy and numeracy interventions using pupil premium funding.



## School details

Unique reference number	141171
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10032552

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

Type of school	Academy Special Sponsor Led
School category	All-through special
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	86
Appropriate authority	Northern House School Academy Trust
Chair	Mr P Leivers
Headteacher in charge	Mr T Scott
Telephone number	0121 748 9760
Website	<a href="http://www.northernhousesolihull.org">www.northernhousesolihull.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office-solihull@northernhouse.org.uk">office-solihull@northernhouse.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## **Information about this school**

- Northern House School (Solihull) is a small special school, where the number of pupils on roll is growing. It currently does not have any four-year-old pupils and does not use any alternative provision. The school is sponsored by the Northern House Academy Trust.
- The majority of pupils are White British. The largest other ethnic minority group is any other White background, and Black Caribbean. Other pupils are drawn from several different ethnic groups.
- All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The largest group has social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Many pupils have additional needs and almost half of pupils currently have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is over twice the national average.
- 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.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 11 lessons and visited 16 lessons during learning walks. Some lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed tutor time, and pupils' conduct at break- and lunchtimes.
- The inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, other leaders and class teachers. The lead inspector met with governors and a representative of the academy trust.
- Two groups of pupils met with inspectors. Inspectors spoke with a large number of pupils informally.
- The inspectors looked at many workbooks in their visits to classrooms and scrutinised in depth pupils' work in a wide range of subjects. They considered a range of information about pupils' current and recent performance.
- The inspectors looked at a wide variety of documents, both electronically and on paper. These included: development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; policies; the minutes of governors' meetings; and anonymised information showing how the headteacher manages the performance of teachers. Inspectors scrutinised in detail the single central record and safeguarding procedures.
- The inspection team took account of the 10 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, a small number of letters from parents and comments made by free text. They also considered 27 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 31 responses to the questionnaire for staff.

## Inspection team

Chris Field, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Russell Hinton

Ofsted Inspector

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