

City of Birmingham School

The Minerva Centre, Thornthwaite Close, Frankley, Birmingham, West Midlands B45 0DS

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies within and across centres. This leads to inconsistent outcomes.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 4 is too low. Pupils do not complete enough accredited qualifications and many do not make fast enough progress at some alternative providers.
- The key stage 4 curriculum does not fully meet the needs of many of the pupils. Currently, many pupils do not benefit from a coherent provision that allows them to build on prior learning and attain a wide range of qualifications.
- Senior leaders do not yet have a clear strategic overview of the quality of education provided by the different centres.
- Leaders do not closely analyse the wide range of information that they collect in order to inform subsequent developments. This slows down the speed of improvement.
- During the inspection, leaders were not aware which alternative providers were registered with the Department for Education (DfE). However, plans are in place to improve the quality assurance process in relation to alternative providers.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently established senior leadership team have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are beginning to take effective action to improve the quality of education provided.
- Pupils in key stages 1, 2 and 3 benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, which is carefully tailored to meet their needs. It develops fundamental British values and spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness effectively.
- Personal development and welfare are promoted very well. Pupils enjoy positive and productive relationships with staff and benefit from opportunities to succeed.
- Staff are extremely skilled in managing pupils' behaviour. As a result, many pupils improve their conduct and return to mainstream settings or move onto further education, training or employment.
- Safeguarding procedures at each centre are robust. Pupils feel safe and they are taught to stay safe in a range of situations.
- There is some good-quality teaching, learning and assessment in every centre. Most pupils, who attend regularly, make good progress from their different starting points, particularly in key stages 1, 2 and 3.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress and attainment by taking effective action to:
 - ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently strong across all centres
 - implement the planned changes to the key stage 4 curriculum so that it builds upon prior learning in a coherent way
 - introduce a wider range of accredited qualifications at key stage 4
 - ensure that all the alternative providers used offer high-quality educational opportunities that help pupils to gain further qualifications
 - help all pupils to attend regularly.
- Build upon the improvements made in leadership and management by ensuring that senior leaders:
 - have a clear strategic overview of the quality of education provided by each centre
 - closely analyse the range of information that is available to them to inform subsequent action to improve the school further
 - introduce the revised quality assurance process for alternative providers to closely monitor the quality of their provision.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership over time has not secured consistently good-quality teaching or outcomes across the different centres. The current leadership team are making improvements but new systems and structures are not fully embedded. Inconsistencies remain between centres.
- Senior leaders do not yet have a clear strategic overview of the quality of education provided by the different centres. Roles and responsibilities are not fully established. For example, at the time of the inspection, no senior leader had overall responsibility for behaviour.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' behaviour is carefully monitored and recorded. However, analysis of interventions, such as the use of the reflection rooms and the use of restraint, are underdeveloped. This means that the information collected is not used well to inform further action.
- Current leaders collect a wide range of information about all aspects of the school's provision. However, they do not analyse this in enough depth to inform subsequent developments. This slows down the speed of improvement.
- As leaders are aware that the key stage 4 curriculum does not fully meet the needs of many of the pupils, they are in the process of changing it. Currently, many pupils do not benefit from a coherent provision that allows them to build on prior learning and attain a wide range of qualifications in Year 11. Leaders inherited a system where Year 11 pupils received most of their education from alternative providers but, as more pupils spend the whole of key stage 4 at City of Birmingham School (COBS), this provision is no longer fit for purpose.
- Leaders ensure that pupils at all alternative providers are regularly visited by members of staff and that any concerns are followed up. However, during the inspection, senior leaders were unclear which providers were registered with the DfE. They are currently in the process of improving their quality assurance arrangements.
- Primary-aged pupils and secondary-aged pupils in Years 7 to 10 benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, which is carefully tailored to meet their needs. It promotes personal development very well. Leaders have embedded fundamental British values and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development deeply within the curriculum. It also contributes well to improving pupils' behaviour and enhancing their physical, mental and personal well-being. The curriculum helps to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- The school supports learning in the classroom through a wide range of enrichment activities. Pupils enjoy trips and visits to places of interest, including staying away from home in Cornwall. They also participate in a range of sporting activities. Pupils develop an understanding of cultures that are different to their own and they learn about all the major religions. Staff openly promote diversity and equality of opportunity and help pupils to be tolerant and respectful of the beliefs of other people.
- The relatively new headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, other leaders and staff, has a clear vision to improve the school. Leaders are ambitious for all

pupils and have created a positive ethos where pupils are given opportunities to succeed.

- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and they are taking effective action to improve the quality of education provided. Middle leadership is developing and there are some good-quality leaders at all levels. Heads of centres are taking on more responsibilities and subject leadership in the secondary settings is beginning to be established.
- Staff value the opportunities they are given to improve their practice. Training and performance management are based around the needs of the individual, their role and the school's priorities. Professional development is now used effectively to improve the school.
- Additional funding is used effectively. Pupil premium and special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities funding is used to provide a range of targeted activities that have helped individual pupils improve their progress and attendance. The school rarely receives Year 7 catch-up premium but leaders use primary sports funding well. As a result of this additional funding, pupils take part in a wider range of sporting activities and staff are developing their expertise as a result of further training from professional coaches.
- Staff work very well with parents and carers. Through regular meetings, newsletters and events at the different centres, parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education. Parents are welcomed at the centres and staff lead sessions for them on issues such as internet safety. Almost all parents who made their views known during the inspection were very positive about the impact of the school on their child's life.
- Leaders are outward-looking. They work well with the local authority, the Birmingham Education Partnership and a range of outside agencies. Staff also support almost 200 schools in order to improve their behaviour management systems and develop their inclusive practices.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. Members of the management committee use their wide range of skills and experience to offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they work closely with leaders to improve further the provision offered in the different centres.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are robust procedures within every centre and leaders have ensured that staff understand that keeping pupils safe is everyone's responsibility.
- Staff are very well trained and they have a clear understanding of their duties related to safeguarding. They care deeply about the welfare of pupils and follow up concerns tenaciously.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of their responsibilities and processes for

reporting concerns are clear and used well. Referrals are timely and appropriate action is taken when required. Leaders work productively with outside agencies to the benefit of pupils at the different centres

- The school's single central record is compliant and information is stored securely. Pupils, staff and parents correctly believe that pupils are safe in the different centres. Pupils who attend alternative provision are also visited regularly in order to ensure that providers are keeping pupils safe.
- Pupils are taught to stay safe in a range of situations. The curriculum is adapted to reflect local matters and current issues of concern.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- There is some good teaching in the school but there are inconsistencies in the quality of practice within and across centres.
- Where teaching is less effective, staff do not plan activities that allow pupils to make strong progress from their different starting points. They do not routinely help pupils to fill gaps in their knowledge or show them exactly what they need to do. Where aspirations are not high enough, pupils make slower progress.
- Leaders acknowledge that many pupils in key stage 4 are not challenged enough to make rapid progress. They are also aware that the quality of teaching at some alternative providers does not meet the needs of the pupils. Plans are in place to change the key stage 4 provision.
- Pupils enjoy good relationships with staff and work well together. They behave well in class and usually show positive attitudes to learning.
- Where teaching is most effective, it is carefully planned to provide challenge for pupils with different starting points. Staff have high expectations and use questions and their subject knowledge well to deepen pupils' understanding. Activities are rooted in real life and interest pupils. This promotes pupils' engagement and speeds up the progress that they make.
- Outdoor education and activities in the forest school support learning in the classroom very well. Pupils are encouraged to develop their interests and use their skills in different contexts.
- Literacy and numeracy are promoted effectively across the curriculum. There is now a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics and pupils are given opportunities to write at length in a number of subjects. Pupils are also actively encouraged to develop their communication skills in most lessons.
- There are some very high-quality teaching assistants in the school but not all teaching assistants are equally effective. Where they have less impact, teaching assistants are not primarily focused on improving pupils' learning.
- Pupils usually present their work well and staff follow the school's marking and assessment policy to help pupils to improve their work. Homework is also set in line with the school's policy.
- Assessment is accurate and many teachers use this information effectively to help their

planning. Leaders are aware of those staff who need further training to use assessment information well.

- The school gives parents clear information about their child's academic, social and emotional progress and what they need to do to improve. Meetings with parents give them opportunities to discuss their child's progress with staff in more depth.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff know the pupils well and pupils trust the adults in the school to help them to overcome any difficulties that they may encounter.
- Most pupils present their work well and respond positively to teachers' expectations. They are proud of their school and they are keen to take on responsibilities for the benefit of others. Older pupils read with younger ones and help them to develop their confidence in the forest school environment. Pupils promote physical activity as sports leaders, and as school councillors they take their roles very seriously.
- Pupils are given opportunities that they may have missed in their previous schools. They participate in sports days; work experience; trips and visits; awards presentations and musical and dramatic performances. This helps a number of pupils return to mainstream settings or settle into places in special schools. Pupils are encouraged to develop more positive views about schooling.
- Staff promote pupils' physical and emotional well-being very well. Fundamental British values and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are firmly embedded within the positive ethos of all of the centres.
- Pupils feel safe in school and bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that staff will deal quickly and effectively with any incidents should they happen. Clear routines and a visible staff presence help pupils to feel secure in school.
- Pupils are taught to stay safe when using the internet, and they learn about how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation, gangs, substance misuse, drugs, including alcohol, and child sexual exploitation.
- Staff at alternative provision settings nurture pupils' personal development and well-being. School staff work closely with providers to ensure that the behaviour and welfare needs of pupils are met.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good as it is very well managed. Pupils usually behave well in lessons and around the school. Learning is rarely disrupted as a result of inappropriate behaviour.
- Pupils respond positively to high expectations of their conduct. Staff apply the behaviour policy consistently and pupils who find it more challenging to manage their own actions are effectively supported to improve their behaviour.

- Pupils behave well during social time. Younger pupils cooperate with others as they play, and lunchtime for all pupils is very well managed. Pupils eat with staff and display good manners within a calm and orderly environment.
- Most pupils are punctual and many pupils have better attendance at COBS than they had in their previous settings. Although there are thorough and consistent systems for following up absence, attendance rates vary between the different centres. Younger pupils attend more regularly than older pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- There is variation in the rates of progress made by pupils in the different centres. The progress made by both primary- and secondary-aged pupils is inconsistent.
- Too many pupils do not make fast enough progress at some alternative providers and attainment at the end of key stage 4 is too low. However, more opportunities for accreditation are now in place and some pupils leave the school with a range of qualifications, including GCSEs.
- Many pupils who attend regularly make good progress from their different starting points, but frequent absence has an impact on the progress made by some. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to others in the school; children who are looked after make slightly faster progress; and pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan make the most rapid progress in the school.
- Primary-aged pupils, who attend regularly, make good progress in reading and speaking and listening across the different centres. Pupils who attend one of the primary settings make consistently strong progress across a range of subjects.
- Pupils are encouraged to read regularly in school. However, as few pupils read at home, this is limiting the impact of this strategy.
- As a result of actions taken by leaders to improve the quality of teaching, current pupils are making improved progress. However, many of the changes are in the early stages of development so they are yet to have their full impact.
- Many pupils make good progress from their starting point at COBS. As they are helped to develop academically and socially and adopt more positive attitudes towards themselves and education, many return to mainstream settings. Additionally, a large majority of key stage 4 pupils move onto further education, work-based learning, apprenticeships and sixth forms. Supported by good-quality and independent careers education, information, advice and guidance, many are well prepared to move on to the next stage of their education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	103146
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10044267

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	470
Appropriate authority	Pupil Referral Management Committee
Chair	Philip Haynes
Headteacher	Steve Howell
Telephone number	0121 303 0272
Website	www.cityofbirminghamschool.com
Email address	enquiry@cobschool.com
Date of previous inspection	7–8 May 2014

Information about this school

- The City of Birmingham School (COBS) is a large pupil referral unit. Most pupils who attend the school have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from other schools. COBS also provides places for children looked after with no school place, interim provision for pupils who have a statement of educational needs or an EHC plan, identified school refusers and young people who are on remand.
- Almost all pupils have SEN and/or disabilities, and some have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The school has eight specialised teaching centres across the city offering personalised educational programmes.
- The school uses 20 alternative providers and 114 key stage 4 pupils attend off-site

alternative provision. A few pupils attend part-time at Blue Whale and Orion Training and small groups attend full-time at Bournville College; iMedia; NOVA; Oscott Academy; Ryan Academy; Silver Birch; Solihull College and St George's Academy. Larger groups of pupils attend Bridging Skills; Envirohort and Southside Learning on a part-time basis and City United; CUL Academy; Flexible Learning Hockley; Flexible Learning Magnet; Learnfit; Premier Training and South and City College full time.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited each of the school sites and observed learning with school leaders. An inspector also visited three off-site alternative providers.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally, and observed behaviour in lessons and during social time. The four responses to the pupils' questionnaire were also considered.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, heads of centres, other leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke to five members of the management committee, including the chair, and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- There were not enough responses to Parent View for the results to be analysed, but two free-text comments and the school's recent survey of parents' views were reviewed. Inspectors also considered the 21 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and inspectors looked at published information on the school's website.

Inspection team

Simon Mosley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derek Barnes	Ofsted Inspector
Rowena Green	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Ellis-Martin	Ofsted Inspector
Jonathan Keay	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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