

The Wisdom Academy

16 Windsor Street South, Nechells, Birmingham, West Midlands B7 4HY

Inspection dates

1–3 May 2018

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

- Pupils achieve well in this school. Leaders have made important improvements since the last inspection which have improved the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- The school has recently changed its leadership from a sole proprietor to the United Children’s Foundation Trust. As a result, leadership capacity has grown.
- Teaching is good. Teachers plan and deliver interesting lessons that often challenge pupils to reflect on their learning and to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- Most children in the early years make good progress because teachers make effective use of information about children’s starting points when planning children’s learning.
- Most pupils make good progress in a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- Pupils behave well right across the school. They are polite, courteous and willing to learn.
- Safeguarding is effective throughout the school.
- A small minority of the most able pupils are not making enough progress. This is because staff do not have a clear enough idea of this group of pupils’ abilities and capabilities.
- Staff do not yet share information about pupils’ progress from Year 6 to Year 7 and this has a negative impact on the progress pupils make in Year 7.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (‘the independent school standards’) and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for the most able pupils by:
 - ensuring an appropriate level of challenge for pupils in their lessons, especially in writing in key stage 2 and mathematics and geography in key stage 3
 - ensuring that teachers know what the most able pupils are capable of by accurately assessing their starting points, abilities and capabilities.
- Improve the rates of progress in Year 7 by:
 - making sure leaders and Year 6 teachers share accurate and detailed information with Year 7 staff during transition to ensure that no learning time is wasted.
- Leaders should make sure that they end the school's unlawfully discriminatory practice of segregation by sex for students in key stage 3 (although not taken into account in this inspection when determining the judgements, this will be taken into account following September 2018 – see the 'Information about this school' below).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, including the proprietor, have been effective in making sure the school meets all of the independent school standards.
- Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. Leaders set demanding targets for the vast majority of pupils. These are based on a careful assessment of almost all pupils' abilities. Planning for learning has improved since the last inspection because leaders now have a clearer understanding of what most pupils can achieve. The result is that pupils' progress is rising and is good overall.
- Leaders are having less success in securing good progress for the most able pupils in writing in key stage 2 and mathematics and geography in key stage 3. Leaders are beginning to address this effectively through staff development and training. For example, leaders are starting to work with other schools to standardise and moderate teachers' assessments of the most able pupils' knowledge and understanding in mathematics and geography.
- Leaders are ambitious for their school. They have successfully opened their second site for key stage 3 pupils. They have recently changed the status of their governance. At the last inspection, the school was led by a sole proprietor. This year, with the approval of the Department for Education, they have transferred governance to a charity called the United Children's Foundation. This is because they want to expand the number of leaders overseeing the school. There are now three trustees. This has increased the capacity of the proprietor to monitor, evaluate and review the work of the school effectively.
- Leaders provide teachers with effective training that develops and improves a wide range of teaching skills. For example, training in literacy has helped to improve teachers' literacy teaching. This has led to key stage 2 reading scores being higher than the national average in 2017.
- Leaders provide effective support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities during lessons and through additional support. For example, pupils receive intervention sessions at lunchtime. Staff have detailed plans for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to help them meet challenging targets. Additional teaching staff are well deployed to support teachers in classrooms.
- Leaders have put into place a broad and balanced curriculum throughout the school. It is designed to help pupils achieve essential skills for life, such as in English and mathematics. Staff make sure that pupils' creativity is promoted through art, music and drama. Pupils have had their imaginative writing published in a national anthology of poetry.
- The school's provision for social, moral, spiritual and cultural education has many strengths. Leaders make sure that pupils are required to represent themselves as role models of their faith, showing courtesy, understanding and being welcoming to each other and visitors. The school's curriculum enables pupils to learn about other faiths. Inspectors saw pupils' work of high quality that showed understanding of Christian, Buddhist and Sikh traditions. The school has strong relationships with its community partners.

- Leaders and staff have helped pupils gain a clear understanding of right and wrong and of personal responsibility. As a result, pupils enjoy working on the school council and are polite in their lessons and round the school. Staff help pupils to learn about democracy through, for example, visits to the House of Commons. Leaders and staff teach respect for the law through assemblies and invite local police officers to come into school to talk with the pupils.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive. Those who responded to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire had very positive things to say. A typical comment was: 'The leadership is very good and understands the needs of children and parents alike. The headteacher is approachable and accessible, as too are the teachers. Suggestions made by parents and students are welcomed.' Parents who spoke to inspectors also felt their children were in a well-led school.
- The school provides key stage 3 pupils with clear careers guidance. This programme offers individual and independent advice on which subjects will suit their career and educational ambitions. Leaders take pupils to two universities to explore the possible routes for academic and vocational study.
- Leaders have plans for improving the quality of information that is passed between staff on each site. At the moment, information about pupils' progress in Year 6 is not being well enough used by staff when pupils start Year 7.

Material change

- The school has submitted plans to the Department for Education for a material change to increase the age range of pupils from 4 to 14 to 2 to 16.
- This will allow pupils currently at the school in key stage 3 to be offered the chance of staying on into Years 10 and 11. Inspectors saw detailed and clear planning for this change. The school has committed to offering a broad and balanced key stage 4 curriculum from September 2018. Staff intend to offer a wide range of appropriate GCSE qualifications, including in English, mathematics and separate sciences. Inspectors saw development plans for each of these subjects. They provide challenge for pupils of different abilities. There is provision for resources for each subject, such as scientific equipment, additional reading materials and specialist equipment for computing science.
- Staff are being recruited by leaders to teach the additional subjects. The timetable has been written, so current staff know what they will be teaching. Most of the current staff have experience of teaching to GCSE level. Leaders have plans for linking with local schools to moderate and standardise their assessments to ensure that pupils are given accurate help and feedback.
- In addition, leaders want to open a Nursery class. Inspectors were shown plans for the relocation of classroom resources, additional training needed of staff, curriculum plans and the ways in which children's welfare and safety would be managed. Inspectors were satisfied that the school is likely to meet the independent school standards if these plans are implemented.
- Leaders have effective plans for the safeguarding needs of a growth in numbers and have risk assessed their training and school classroom provision to ensure that the existing safeguarding culture is maintained.

- As a result of these plans, the school is likely to continue to meet the independent school standards if the Department for Education approves the material change.

Governance

- The school changed its governance in March this year. Instead of a sole proprietor, the academy is led by three trustees from the United Children's Foundation. The intention is to further strengthen leadership. The chair of the trust wants The United Children's Foundation to offer wider learning opportunities to pupils at the school.
- Since the last inspection, the chair, when he was sole proprietor, led the school's successful development from a single-site school to being able to offer primary and secondary education provision across two sites. Key stage 3 education has been offered at the second site, the Pioneers' Academy, since the previous material change application was granted by the Department for Education in 2016. The chair has ensured that safeguarding, curriculum delivery, and leadership and management are effective at the second site. This has happened while improving standards at the primary school site.
- The trust works effectively with leaders to communicate their vision and ethos and the strategic direction it wishes the school to take. The chair of the trust has a clear idea of the role he wants the school to play in the community: a place where young people develop personal responsibility and achieve well. School leaders understand this and the result is that pupils do well and are safe.
- Leaders and the chair of the trust meet every two weeks. The headteacher presents a formal report to the chair every month. The chair ensures that agreed actions are completed. This results in the consistent application of policies across the two school sites.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a safeguarding policy that is fit for purpose and is available to staff and parents. Staff understand their responsibilities to put into practice the safeguarding policies of the school, for example those relating to the 'Prevent' duty, children missing from education and female genital mutilation.
- The school is safe. Leaders place the highest priority on pupil welfare and developing a safeguarding culture. Leaders do this by helping pupils learn about leading safe and healthy lives, for example through well-planned lessons on personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.
- Staff are well trained in how to identify and report any issues that concern them about pupils' welfare. Any referrals to the designated safeguarding leader are followed up promptly and effectively. Leaders work with parents and other local agencies to offer support to pupils.
- Inspectors saw the school's records on bullying and the use of derogatory and racist language. Incidents of this kind are extremely rare. Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy coming to school.
- Staff recruitment is conducted to a high standard. Anyone leading job interviews has been trained to do so safely. Leaders put into place rigorous checks on a candidate's suitability

for employment. The school's single central record is detailed and comprehensive.

- The school's material change plans for Nursery and a key stage 4 provision are all built on the paramount need to keep pupils safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. Teachers have a secure understanding of the knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to most of the pupils' ages and abilities. Teachers have developed resources for learning that help pupils understand and develop an interest in subjects across the curriculum. As a result, lessons are better planned so that they meet the abilities and aptitudes of most pupils. However, a small minority of the most able pupils, for example in mathematics and geography in key stage 3, are insufficiently challenged and achieve less well.
- Lessons are often interesting to pupils. For example, inspectors saw a lesson where pupils were motivated through drama and understood aspects of medieval English history. In another, pupils were developing their understanding and confidence in art by working imaginatively using print media.
- Most teachers' subject knowledge is strong in both the primary and secondary phases. In the secondary school, for example, teachers are well qualified and are specialists in the subject they teach. This means that they are well prepared for the challenges of the material change application should this be approved by the Department for Education.
- Pupils are eager to improve their work. Inspectors saw examples in English, mathematics and art where pupils had been diligent in making improvements by planning their work and making corrections to ensure accuracy.
- Teachers set homework appropriately in most subjects. In art, for example, we saw homework with appropriate challenge, well connected to the next stage of pupils' learning.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They told inspectors that they enjoy their lessons, find their teachers helpful and see learning as important to their lives and career aspirations. Throughout the school, inspectors found high levels of commitment to school work. Pupils quickly settle to their lessons and are often eager when responding to teachers' questions.
- Since the last inspection, teachers use much better information about pupils' progress to set targets. They are able to give accurate information to pupils and parents about a pupil's achievement. Leaders and staff know that the most able pupils will do even better when teachers have a clearer idea of how well these pupils can do.
- Pupils learn how to challenge stereotypes and discrimination. They spoke positively about their own faith and people from other faith traditions and those who hold no religious beliefs. Pupils engage positively with the wider community.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are well cared for. They learn about how to stay healthy and safe. The school has a well-taught curriculum that encourages pupils to be responsible, to have a clear sense of right and wrong and to use the internet with care.
- Pupils know how to protect themselves when they are online. They understand how to use mobile phones carefully. Pupils know who they can go to in the school if they need help with anything that concerns them. Pupils enjoy coming to school and say that their teachers encourage them to do well.
- Pupils are confident. They approach learning in a resilient manner, responding to their teachers thoughtfully. They carefully correct their work.
- Pupils have polite and courteous attitudes. They are welcoming, friendly and respectful.
- Staff help pupils to think about their futures and the options available to them in terms of course choices and possible careers. Staff encourage pupils to develop their aspirations. Key stage 3 pupils spoke to inspectors about wanting to become doctors and teachers, for example, and wanting to continue in education for as long as they could.
- Pupils are well prepared for their lessons. They are punctual and have the equipment they need to complete their learning.
- Pupils value education. Key stage 2 pupils told inspectors, for example, 'School helps you learn about important things,' and 'I want to learn so I can get a good job and help people.' Pupils work hard in lessons and are willing to attend lunchtime classes and enjoy the extra-curricular activities offered by the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well and are self-disciplined. Inspectors did not see any disruption in lessons. School records show it is very rare. When it occurs, staff are swift to deal with it effectively.
- Staff work hard to maintain the good standard of behaviour. In most lessons, inspectors saw teachers promoting good discipline and rewarding pupils' effort. Teachers do not allow pupils to distract each other, shout out or cause a nuisance to others.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors and those who responded to Parent View are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's approach to promoting good behaviour.
- Staff are vigilant in protecting their pupils from stereotypical or derogatory language. Teachers promote civility, tolerance, acceptance and courtesy in their pupils. Staff say they want pupils to be excellent role models of their faith in modern Britain. Pupils are proud of their beliefs but they welcome other points of view and traditions.
- Levels of attendance are high, especially in key stage 2. Persistent absence is rare. This is because staff work well with families and with other agencies to promote habits of good attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They say it is a safe place where they like their lessons and respect their teachers.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils achieve well across almost all year groups and in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. In the main, pupils of different abilities make good progress in all key stages. Pupils' test results in key stage 2 in 2017 were higher than the national averages in reading. Test results were in line with national averages in mathematics.
- Leaders know that the most able pupils do not make strong progress from their starting points in some subjects, such as writing in key stage 2. This is the reason why test results in writing in 2017 were slightly below national averages.
- Leaders carefully developed teaching so that most lessons are interesting and engaging. Leaders have worked hard to build the confidence of pupils. As a result, most make good progress.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress. Plans are regularly reviewed and appropriate support is put into place. Families are closely involved in their child's education. As a result, pupils do well.
- Pupils are making good progress in English in key stage 3. This is because, for example, planning is thorough. Pupils use skill target sheets and these are effective because pupils can see where they are improving and what they need to do next.
- Pupils make good progress in other subject areas such as art, history and science. Pupils are meeting the targets the school has set for them and these are in line with their age and ability.
- In key stage 3, pupils' progress in geography is less strong. Leaders know that they need to do more to engage pupils' interest and there are plans to offer more educational visits and resources that engage their curiosity.
- A few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school provides one-to-one sessions, extra home-school support and lunchtime sessions. As a result, these pupils make good progress in subjects such as English and history. They are keen to do well and grow in confidence.
- Pupils make good progress in their reading skills in all key stages. For example, in the Reception Year, inspectors could see pupils making good progress with their phonics skills. The school does undertake the national phonics screening check. Detailed records kept by leaders, however, show a significant majority of pupils achieve phonics skills appropriate to their age. At key stage 3, we saw a lesson where pupils were reading aloud from Chaucer with interest and growing confidence.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education when they leave key stage 3. They follow a broad and balanced curriculum. The content of the curriculum is well matched to pupils' age and, in the main, to their ability.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have ensured that the school meets the independent school standards relating to early years provision.
- Children learn successfully in the school's Reception setting. As a result, they are ready to start Year 1.
- Most children start school with lower starting points than other children their age. This is particularly the case in reading, writing and mathematics. They make good progress in these subjects. This is because teachers quickly find out what children need to do better and set clear targets for improvement.
- Leaders carefully check each stage of children's development. They provide extra help for children if they begin to fall behind.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of teaching and learning in Reception. They know that children's progress in understanding of the world is less strong than their progress in literacy and mathematics. They are making improvements, such as providing more interesting learning resources to engage children's interest.
- The school has a strong relationship with parents. Teachers keep in close contact with families to alert them to the extra help they are providing and to help pupils stay safe and attend regularly.
- Children are safe in the setting. There are clear and effective plans to support children who face difficulties in their lives.
- Staff are well trained in safeguarding the welfare of children. There are a suitable number of qualified paediatric first aiders. Children spoke enthusiastically about their learning and how they feel safe and enjoy coming to school.
- Staff know that they need to do more to offer challenge to children so that children who start school with more advanced language skills and number skills can make faster progress through their stages of development.

School details

Unique reference number	135882
DfE registration number	330/6206
Inspection number	10052008

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	United Children's Foundation
Chair	Saeed Al Ghadie
Headteacher	Sakhawat Ali
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,600
Telephone number	0121 333 7066
Website	Under development
Email address	admin@thewisdomacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–16 September 2016

Information about this school

- The last standard inspection of the school was on 14 to 16 September 2016.
- Since the last inspection, the school has changed its proprietor. There is now a trust called the United Children's Foundation responsible for governance. The Department for Education have approved this change.
- Since the previous inspection, the Department for Education have approved a material change application and the school has opened key stage 3 provision on a site called the Pioneers' Academy.

- The school uses no alternative providers.
- The school has an Islamic religious character.
- Girls and boys are taught together in all primary classes. The school operates a policy of segregation by sex in all key stage 3 lessons. This segregation is for religious reasons only, rather than for genuine educational reasons and, accordingly, it is not possible for the 'positive action' exception, under section 158 of the Equality Act 2010, to apply. The segregation policy causes the following detriment to pupils: a denial of choice offered to the opposite sex. For example, boys cannot choose, in lessons, to interact with girls, and vice versa, and therefore they miss out on the educational benefits of doing so, including preparing them for life in modern Britain.
- In key stage 3, boys and girls are not segregated as they move about the corridors or during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- In 2017, the Court of Appeal affirmed that segregation by sex in schools, in analogous circumstances, is direct sex discrimination contrary to the Equality Act 2010. The Court of Appeal also said there is a strong argument for the Secretary of State and Ofsted to recognise that, given the history of the matter, the schools affected should be given time to put their houses in order in the light of the conclusion that this is unlawful sex discrimination. Ofsted and the DfE have accepted this. Therefore, the school's policy of segregation has not been taken into account in this inspection when determining the inspection judgements. We intend to write to the Secretary of State and to suggest that he commissions a further inspection of the school in or after September 2018. Following September 2018, we will take any ongoing breach of the Equality Act 2010 arising from segregation into account in relation to key inspection judgements made.

Information about this inspection

- As part of the Department for Education commission for this inspection, they asked inspectors to consider the school's material change application to offer nursery and key stage 4 provision.
- Inspectors were asked by the Department for Education to consider a complaint made about the school to the Department for Education.
- Inspectors observed learning and teaching in lessons throughout the school, including the Reception Year and key stages 1, 2 and 3.
- Inspectors evaluated the work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors held a range of meetings with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team and middle leadership staff.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body and the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors met with pupils and discussed with them their learning and workbooks.
- Inspectors scrutinised the single central record, met with the designated safeguarding leader and scrutinised a range of records of recruitment, welfare plans and actions taken to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors met with parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation the school produces as part of its self-evaluation and development planning, and policies and documents published on the website and made available during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the 100 responses to the Parent View questionnaire, including the 21 responses to the free-text option. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire or the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Graham Tyrer, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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