

Blackwater Academy

23–31 Vittoria Street, Birmingham B1 3ND

Inspection dates

22–24 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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders influence the quality of the school's provision effectively. They have ensured that all the independent standards are met so that pupils make good progress.
- The leadership team is highly effective in its drive to nurture and teach pupils who have personal, social and emotional needs. Pupils feel safe, secure and valued.
- A strong culture of safeguarding ensures that pupils feel safe at all times. This feeling of security contributes to the growing confidence that pupils show in their attitudes to learning and developing positive relationships.
- The curriculum includes a strong emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Consequently, pupils make good progress both academically and personally.
- Pupils at the school have missed months, and sometimes years, of education. The team's skills in teaching, learning and behavioural support ensure that pupils settle down and work hard to catch up.
- Parents greatly value the school's work in making a profound difference to their children's behaviour and confidence.
- Leaders make sure that the views of pupils are considered in the day-to-day running of the school. As a result, pupils feel that they are valued and in return they treat staff with respect.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge ensures that pupils develop a wide knowledge of subjects. Teachers' use of questioning, however, does not consistently ensure that pupils think deeply about what they learn.
- Teachers rightly place emphasis on the use of correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. The development of pupils' spoken and written vocabulary is less well developed across the curriculum.
- Teachers plan and execute their lessons well to include good links to other subjects across the curriculum. However, leaders do not provide them with sufficient opportunities to share their good practice.
- Pupils are too often late for school because of transport arrangements. As a result, they miss valuable lesson time.

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?

- Increase the opportunities for teachers to share their teaching skills with each other.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - pupils develop a wide vocabulary to enhance their oral and written communication skills
 - teachers improve their questioning skills so that pupils develop their learning in more depth.
- Improve the transport arrangements so that pupils arrive punctually to school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met. Their evaluation of how well the school is doing is accurate. They are clear about the improvements they need to make in the future.
- The vice-principal, who has led the school since the start of November 2017, has created, in a very short time, a cohesive teaching, learning and pastoral care team. The combination of well-qualified teachers, teaching assistants and experienced pastoral care specialists ensures that pupils are well supported in every aspect of their development. Two mentors, who provide counselling for pupils when necessary, strengthen the school team. The vice-principal is held in high regard by parents and pupils alike.
- The bespoke nature of the curriculum enables pupils to follow education programmes for pre-GCSE, GCSE, functional skills and entry-level Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications. Alongside these, they have opportunities to develop creatively by writing their own poetry and songs and setting them to music. They also have opportunities to develop their artistic abilities and to take part in a wide variety of sports and physical education activities.
- Staff morale is high. Relationships at all levels are good. All staff who completed the Ofsted inspection survey indicated that they very much enjoy working at the school and that the management are considerate of their well-being. A typical written comment was: 'Management are very supportive with everything that happens at the school. They are open to any concerns, opinions and issues that may occur.'
- The school keeps excellent records of all pupils and their individual needs. Education, health and care (EHC) plans for those pupils who need them are well documented and carefully followed. Records of each individual pupil's behaviour and starting points are thorough and provide a reliable basis for discussing their academic and social progress. Strong leadership ensures that pupils' individual needs are catered for well.
- Before pupils join the school, leaders work closely with parents and other stakeholders to gather relevant information, which assists with the smooth transition process. The school's work with a variety of other agencies contributes well to sustainable improvement in pupils' personal and academic development. A local authority adviser praised the 'nurturing approach' of the school.
- Leaders have put in place assessment procedures to ensure that pupils' progress is effectively monitored and recorded in English and mathematics. Consequently, they know pupils' starting points and how much progress they have made. They are also able to identify gaps in pupils' previous knowledge so that these can be addressed in teaching. Teachers take effective measures to arrest any slowing of progress.
- Leaders also assess, monitor and track pupils' behaviour. This enables them to be supportive to individual pupils and to the teaching staff. They make improvements in behaviour explicit to pupils so that they are motivated and encouraged to do even better in the future. Leaders have employed experienced staff who are able to pre-empt emotional outbursts and support pupils to regulate their feelings.
- The school promotes well the British values of tolerance and respect. Themes of the week

are fully explored in focus group tutorials at the start of every day. These themes include racism, teamwork, marriage and commitment, self-responsibility and caring for others. Consequently, leaders ensure that pupils have daily opportunities to discuss what it means to live in British society.

- Leaders have created strong relationships with parents and carers. They are highly supportive of the school and very much appreciate the support their children are given to make a new start. A typical comment was: 'The school has saved my child. They understand him. He never has a day off.' Another comment was: 'Our child has become a very happy young man, full of knowledge, eager to go to Blackwater Academy.'
- Leaders have provided high-quality training for staff, especially in safeguarding and the management of behaviour. However, they have not encouraged skilled teachers to share their expertise with their peers.

Governance

- The new governing body supports the school well. The chair of governors has significant expertise in effecting change successfully where necessary. As a result, leaders are challenged to pursue improvements in working towards excellence for pupils.

Safeguarding

- Leaders have created a strong culture of shared responsibility for protecting pupils. Consequently, pupils are safe and well supported.
- Leaders have ensured that a good-quality safeguarding and child protection policy is available on the website. The safeguarding policy and practice are effective and meet current government requirements.
- All staff are appropriately trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders are tenacious in following up concerns and ensuring that they inform outside agencies when a pupil is at risk or missing from education. Staff keep appropriate records that detail safeguarding concerns and actions. Staff are well trained to recognise signs of extremism and radicalisation.
- The building is well maintained and kept to an appropriately safe standard, with clear access to doors in case of fire. The health and safety officer regularly checks the building for fire risk and other safety hazards. Leaders rigorously maintain risk assessments for all aspects of school life and for individual pupils where necessary. This includes risk assessments of all off-site facilities that the pupils use.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is good overall. Consequently, pupils make good progress. The curriculum ensures that pupils catch up in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) while offering them a variety of opportunities to learn art, song writing, history, geography, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, citizenship, religious education (RE) and physical education (PE).
- Pupils arriving at the school take appropriate assessments so that teachers can establish their starting points. Regular diagnostic assessment identifies gaps in learning that have

developed because of the length of time that pupils did not attend their previous schools. Teachers are then able to ensure that these gaps in learning are filled. Teachers offer pupils the opportunity for catch-up sessions after school if they have fallen behind or if they find a subject difficult. Pupils frequently take advantage of these opportunities and are appreciative of the teachers' support and guidance. The views of many pupils were summarised by pupils, who said: 'The teachers go out of their way to help us,' and 'These teachers are passionate about what they are doing and want to help you.'

- Teachers are highly skilled at managing pupils who have presented high levels of challenge to teachers in other schools. They manage behaviour well because they develop trusting relationships with the pupils.
- Teachers plan and provide clear links between subjects to enable pupils to develop further in their learning. Themes of the week are fully explored in focus group tutorials as well as in English and mathematics. For example, in an ICT lesson the teacher taught the pupils about keeping healthy by adopting a good sitting position at the computer and by taking regular rests. In an English lesson, pupils learned about dialect, with the teacher also encouraging discussion of race equality and fundamental British values. Consequently, pupils make good progress in a variety of subjects.
- Teachers are very keen to listen to pupils; they ask them about the success of their lessons and their views on a variety of issues. For example, pupils can choose whether or not they want to work in groups or individually. They often have opportunities to vote for their preferred choice, for example a favourite menu. Pupils keep a log of their feelings and wishes so that staff are able to take account of them in lessons. For example, they write comments about their enjoyment of activities or they make requests for additional learning. As a result, they know that teachers pay attention to their thoughts and feelings.
- Teachers plan and deliver their lessons well. Lesson content consolidates previous learning as well as moving on to new learning. Teachers use good resources and their specialist subject knowledge to make lessons interesting for pupils. They give clear explanations of what they expect and show the pupils good examples. They pace their lessons well so that pupils maintain their interest and work hard. However, teachers do not place sufficient emphasis on pupils developing a wide vocabulary to use in their speech and writing across the curriculum.
- The calm learning environment in the classrooms ensures that pupils feel secure and able to focus on their learning. Relationships between adults and pupils are based on mutual respect. All of this helps pupils to become involved in their learning and to make good progress. However, occasionally teachers' questions do not ensure that pupils think deeply enough about what they are learning. Consequently, their thinking and reasoning skills do not develop well enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The quality of the school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils begin to develop greater confidence in themselves as they spend more time in the school. Pupils spoke confidently to the inspector about their social development.

They told the inspector that they enjoy the opportunity to work with a small group of people due to the levels of attention they receive.

- Good transition arrangements when pupils join the school ensure that the views and wishes of pupils and parents are fully considered as they become accustomed to the new environment. The school works well with the pupils' previous schools and external agencies to gather important information about each pupil.
- The school is a secure environment where the pupils feel welcome. Pupils' confidence grows as they become more accustomed to the fact that the staff are all striving for their success and well-being. A typical comment was: 'This is the only school that has had faith in me. I settled here straight away. I am really working hard.'
- Staff are highly experienced and skilled at recognising pupils' emotions and are able to pre-empt any difficulties that might occur in lessons. Pupils are offered regular opportunities for counselling before their emotions escalate. This vigilance results in a calm learning environment that promotes learning.
- All adults are involved in teaching the pupils how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations and when online. They understand that they should not open communications from people that they do not know or recognise and know how to block unwanted correspondence. They know how to keep themselves out of 'bad situations'. Teachers encourage pupils to raise issues that affect them.
- Pupils have taken part in young enterprise projects, for example selling lemonade that they made themselves and making money from a carwash in the school grounds. The money they raised went to support a sister-school in Africa. Consequently, they learn about the world of business and about supporting people in the wider world.
- Careers advice and guidance prepare pupils well for their future lives. Teachers provide this guidance during focus group lessons. They also have visits from a careers specialist who helps them to think about what they would like to do with their lives and to realise the qualities they will need for the choices they make. The pupils spoken to by the inspector had clear ideas about their futures.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education effectively supports pupils to develop their relationships and understanding of the community and the world. Pupils have opportunities to learn about serving the community in fundraising events for charities as well as in volunteering. For example, they volunteered for litter-picking with a local councillor and talked to residents in an old people's home. They also volunteer inside the school to clean parts of the building or to serve toast in the morning.
- Pupils have opportunities to vote for things that are important to them. For example, they voted to give some of their fundraising money to a preferred charity. In this way, they see how democracy works.
- Pupils study a variety of religions in their RE lessons. They say that they have good discussions about different religions. They demonstrate a very open attitude to the different religions represented in the school.
- Pastoral support for both pupils and their families is strong. The pastoral leader makes home visits to discuss issues with pupils and their parents. She holds social skill group tutorials and supports pupils in therapeutic art sessions. She also provides one-to-one mentoring when this is needed. The pupils' visiting mentor, an experienced member of

Birmingham's youth offending team, also provides counselling for pupils. As a result, pupils are very well supported with any personal difficulties.

- Teachers support pupils to develop understanding through drama activities. For example, in a game called 'conscience alley' every pupil gives advice to a main character as he or she walks down the alley. Subjects chosen are close to the lives of the pupils. As a result, pupils learn to consider alternatives and make good choices in their lives.
- A variety of visits support pupils' educational and SMSC development. For example, they visited the Birmingham Science Museum Thinktank and the Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum. Invited visitors speak to pupils about a variety of subjects. For example, they have enjoyed visits from the architects in the building next door to the school, members of the police, a local imam, a banker and a world champion boxer. In this way they learn about lives different from their own and as a result, their horizons are widened.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. During the inspection, pupils conducted themselves well around the school and showed respect and consideration for adults. They were courteous when spoken to and showed politeness when holding doors open. They were seen to enjoy relaxing at breaktime with both staff and their peers. They moved swiftly back to class when lessons began again.
- The school's behaviour code is very clear to all pupils and their parents. Pupils understand the sanctions well. Teachers praise pupils frequently. This praise motivates pupils to do well. They are encouraged to show their good work at the end of the day or during the 'Friday feast' assembly. At this assembly the winning team is given a choice about what they have for lunch, rather than the usual sandwiches. Outstanding work is also displayed on the school's website. Team points culminate in a variety of rewards. Pupils have been rewarded by visits to the cinema, to a climbing centre, or to a bicycle motocross (BMX) facility.
- The school keeps detailed records of behaviour patterns and analyses these patterns in order to support the pupils. Both positive and negative behaviours are recorded. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with where necessary by fixed-term exclusions from school. These exclusions become considerably fewer as the pupils settle into school and realise that they can enjoy learning and they are safe.
- The vast majority of pupils have either good attendance or their attendance is improving steadily. The school works exceptionally hard to improve the attendance of the minority who attend less regularly. However, some pupils are frequently late because they come to school from long distances by taxi. As a result, their work suffers because of missed time from lessons.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils make good progress in their personal development because they know that the staff care for them and want them to do well. This is also because of the skills and experience of the staff. Pupils come to this school after being unable to work in their previous schools due to a variety of social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- As pupils settle into school they begin to realise that the staff care for them and want the

best for them. The confidence they gain from this ensures that they become increasingly able to self-regulate their behaviour and concentrate on their learning. They achieve suitable qualifications and take control of their own lives. The vast majority of pupils sustain this learning ability and go on to further education or employment and training.

- The vast majority of pupils make good progress from their starting points and some make outstanding progress in English and mathematics. This includes pupils with EHC plans. This is because of the detailed assessments on arrival and detailed learning plans for those who need them. A minority of pupils have made insufficient progress because of poor attendance.
- Year 11 pupils, who have now returned to their previous schools, are taking functional skills examinations and GCSEs. They have been entered for examinations at level 1 and level 2 in functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT as well as entry-level science and additional science. Some Year 11 pupils are also taking GCSEs in science, mathematics, English, sociology and RE.
- Year 10 pupils will take functional skills examinations at level 1 or level 2 in English and mathematics and ICT as well as entry level science, mathematics, English and RE this term. Year 10 pupils will stay at Blackwater Academy next year.
- All Year 11 pupils have successfully secured placements for next year in apprenticeships or further education to study, for example, construction, early years education, football development or performing arts.
- Pupils have good opportunities to read in all lessons. The vast majority of pupils read well and occasionally enjoy reading for pleasure, especially around their own particular interests. They read quality texts and have developed more confidence in reading aloud.

School details

Unique reference number	143039
DfE registration number	330/6026
Inspection number	10039278

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 day school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Adeel Tassarar
Chair	Andra Iordache
Headteacher	Adeel Tassarar
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,000 to £10,000
Telephone number	0121 238 0758
Website	www.blackwateracademy.co.uk
Email address	info@blackwateracademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Blackwater Academy is located in Central Birmingham.
- This is the school's first inspection.
- The school offers alternative provision for boys and girls aged 14 to 16 who have histories of severely challenging behaviour. Many have not attended school regularly for some time, or even for years. Pupils' needs include social, emotional and mental health needs, autistic spectrum disorder or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. A minority have EHC plans.
- Pupils join the school at different times in the year. The school offers places to pupils from Sandwell and Solihull local authorities.

- The school was registered for 60 pupils in September 2016 but had few pupils until November 2017. At this time, a cohort of Year 10 and Year 11 pupils joined the school. At the time of this inspection Year 11 pupils had just left to take their examinations at their previous schools while Year 10 pupils remained in Blackwater Academy.
- The proprietor, who is also principal of the school, has been absent from the school due to illness since November 2017. In his absence the vice-principal, Nauman Tassarar, has led and managed the school, with the support of an experienced part-time consultant who spends two days a week in the school.
- The school has no specific religious ethos.
- The pupils represent a variety of ethnicities. At the time of the inspection there were no pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The school aims to offer young people 'a vision they can look forward to of achievement and high standards in life'.
- The school uses premises in the next-door building, which is a purpose-built gym with facilities for teaching PE.
- The school also uses premises at Oaklands Children and Families Youth and Community Centre to provide activities such as music, producing and writing, as well as art and football.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector jointly observed lessons with either the acting principal or with the part-time consultant. She scrutinised a variety of pupils' books.
- The inspector held meetings with the acting principal, the senior leadership team and with some of the teachers. She also spoke to the pastoral leader and the mentor from the youth offending team.
- The inspector scrutinised schemes of work and lesson plans as well as a variety of documents about pupils and safeguarding. She scrutinised risk assessments about the school building, individual pupils and external visits.
- The inspector toured the school premises.
- The inspector had a meeting with a group of pupils and spoke to other pupils informally.
- The inspector observed pupils at breaktime.
- The inspector took into account nine staff questionnaire responses.
- The inspector held conversations with a number of parents. She also spoke on the telephone to the team manager for children missing education from Sandwell local authority.

Inspection team

Mary Maybank, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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