

Balaam Wood School

New Street, Frankley, Birmingham, West Midlands B45 0EU

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- In the past, senior leaders have not been rigorous enough in identifying priorities and monitoring the impact of actions and have not adequately addressed the recommendations noted in the previous section 5 inspection report. However, current leaders have now begun to evaluate the school's provision accurately and have started to identify the right priorities for improvement.
- Middle leaders and subject leaders have not routinely taken sufficient responsibility for their areas of work.
- Leaders have not ensured that teaching is good. Many teachers' expectations are often too low. They do not use assessments of pupils' learning and progress well enough to enable pupils to improve their work. Teachers do not consistently extend pupils' learning, especially through questioning.
- The progress of pupils who have special education needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is poor.
- Pupils are not making enough progress. There is too much incomplete work in pupils' books. The presentation of their work is often poor.
- National assessments show that pupils have underachieved, especially in mathematics and humanities subjects. In these subjects, standards remain too low. The progress of disadvantaged pupils in some subjects was well below average in 2017.
- Pupils' attendance is low. Some pupils engage in low-level disruption during lessons, and rates of fixed-term exclusions remain high. Not all teachers enforce the school's behaviour policy consistently. Despite this, the majority of pupils are proud of their school.
- Leaders do not have robust systems to ensure that the use of additional funding is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Governors, while committed to improving the school, have not been successful in ensuring that the effectiveness of the school is good.

The school has the following strengths

- Teaching in textiles (design and technology) and the arts in key stage 4 is strong. Pupils achieve well in these subjects.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and staff have created a strong culture of safeguarding and are very committed to the well-being of pupils.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils make better progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers assess pupils' work and progress accurately
 - providing the right level of challenge in lessons for pupils with differing needs and abilities
 - improving teachers' ability to use questioning to extend pupils' learning
 - giving timely and effective feedback during lessons to help improve pupils' work
 - making sure that pupils complete their work and do their best in lessons
 - strengthening and improving teaching in humanities subjects and in mathematics.
- Improve pupils' achievement and raise standards by:
 - making sure that leaders and staff regularly check pupils' work and progress to identify any gaps in their knowledge and understanding
 - reducing the difference between the progress disadvantaged pupils make compared with other pupils nationally, particularly in mathematics and science
 - making sure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive more effective support to help them reach their individual learning targets.
- Improve attendance and pupils' behaviour by ensuring that:
 - there is a more robust oversight of attendance procedures
 - staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently to reduce incidents of disruptive behaviour.
- Improve leadership, management and governance in order to build further capacity for sustained improvement. Do this by:
 - identifying the most important priorities for improvement in the school's strategic action plans, particularly those focusing on the quality of teaching
 - setting out in the school's improvement plans clear measures of success so that leaders and governors evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve teaching and pupils' achievement
 - making sure that middle leaders and those responsible for subjects regularly evaluate the impact of their actions and share these assessments with senior leaders so that areas of poor practice are acted upon immediately
 - ensuring that governors are vigilant in holding leaders to account and have access to objective and accurate information in order to do this.

- An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Although senior leaders have begun to address areas needing improvement, there is still too much weak practice and expectations of what pupils might achieve are too low. Senior leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching has not been effective. As a result, teaching is inadequate and many groups of pupils do not make the progress that they should across a range of subjects.
- Senior leaders do not consistently hold middle leaders to account and do not involve them sufficiently in strategic planning. As a result, the quality of leadership provided by middle and subject leaders is variable and their evaluation of teaching and learning is not always accurate. This has an adverse effect on the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders do not have sufficiently precise plans for the use of additional funding. Success criteria are vague and, as a result, there is no evaluation of the impact of these funding streams on pupils' outcomes.
- Although a small number of parents and carers are concerned about the quality of education at the school, written responses from parents about the school, submitted during the inspection, were positive.
- The headteacher and his senior team, all of whom are relatively new to their posts, have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have produced a strategic plan with challenging targets and clear milestones. Leaders have now started to accurately chart progress against these targets. These developments are relatively recent and indicate that current leaders have the capacity to bring about further improvement.
- Leaders know what actions are required to secure improvement. For example, following direct intervention in mathematics by the headteacher, there are improvements in pupils' attainment. The school's assessment of attainment and progress is now more accurate. However, standards in mathematics are still well below the national average.
- Senior leaders have begun to address some aspects of poor teaching. For example, the school has made key appointments that are intended to strengthen provision in mathematics and science. Experienced leaders of mathematics and of science are soon to take up post. Senior leaders are implementing robust performance management plans, in order to have a clear oversight of teachers' performance.
- Leaders responsible for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development have carefully planned a range of experiences outside of the taught curriculum. Pupils have a clear understanding of difference and similarity in their school community. Through various trips and visits, pupils are aware of different cultures in the United Kingdom.
- Senior leaders are now responding more effectively in order to reduce levels of absence, which have been unacceptably high. They have allocated clear roles to staff and created a simple system to monitor absence, with clear milestones and identified success criteria. This approach to strategic planning demonstrates that senior leaders have the capacity to bring about improvement.

- Although senior leaders have not addressed many of the areas of improvement identified in the last full inspection, inspectors found that curriculum provision for design technology in key stage 3 has improved and enables pupils to make good progress. Equally, extra-curricular provision, such as that provided in the 'Well Being Wednesday' sessions, is having a positive impact on pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning and behaviour.
- Support commissioned on behalf of the local authority has not been consistently effective. There have been regular visits by external consultants over the last two academic years, and while there have been improvements in the school's work, significant weaknesses remain.

Governance of the school

- Governors are committed to the school and are proud to support its leaders, staff and pupils. The chair and vice-chair of the governing body recognise that pupils' outcomes are weak. They have started to ask searching questions, which are beginning to hold senior leaders to account more effectively for pupils' progress and outcomes. However, this has not led to pupils receiving a good-quality education.
- Plans are in place to recruit two parents to the membership of the governing body. These new parent governors are expected to bring additional skills.
- A member of the governing body regularly checks safeguarding and staff vetting procedures.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils feel safe and talk about specific events where staff have acted promptly to provide protection. For example, pupils told inspectors that the recent implementation of the school's lockdown procedures made them feel very safe.
- School leaders have worked hard to develop an effective safeguarding culture across the school. On the rare occasions that pupils do not arrive to a lesson on time, it is a matter of routine for teachers and support staff to check on their well-being.
- Staff recruitment and vetting procedures are robust, and records meet statutory requirements. Staff receive regular updates and training, including on the government's 'Prevent' programme, to help them carry out their safeguarding responsibilities effectively.
- Posters around the school provide information about the key staff responsible for safeguarding. Staff know how to report concerns in a timely manner. Pupils know which adults to talk to if a concern arises.
- Pupils told inspectors that they know how to keep safe when using the internet. Pupils spoke about how they had developed their understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism through a programme of workshops, including a visiting theatre group.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has not improved. Assessment practice is weak, which means that teaching fails to meet pupils' needs.
- Teachers' expectations are too low. Tasks set by teachers often lack ambition. In many lessons, teachers provide the same piece of work for pupils of all abilities. As a result, some pupils find the work too challenging and some too easy. In both cases, this affects the quality of their learning and also means that they are more likely to become disengaged.
- Leaders have not encouraged teachers to check on pupils' progress or pupils' understanding of the lesson content. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding or extend their learning, for example by the use of effectively probing questioning.
- Teachers have low expectations about the quality of presentation in pupils' work books. They do not consistently apply the school's routine for how pupils should set out their work. Consequently, in too many cases, pupils' work books are untidy.
- In too many work books, there are significant gaps because pupils do not routinely complete the tasks that they are set.
- In some subjects, senior leaders have not been able to recruit subject specialist teachers. This further hampers pupils' progress and contributes to significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. However, senior leaders have secured appointments for the next academic year.
- Teachers do not check progress in lessons frequently enough. As a result, they do not spot gaps quickly enough in pupils' knowledge and understanding or in the amount of work they complete in their books. Pupils repeat spelling errors in their writing. Teachers do not extend the learning of pupils who have already mastered a task or skill. Without close monitoring, pupils fall behind, and the lack of adequate feedback or intervention adversely affects the progress that they make.
- Inspectors found that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive little additional support. Teachers do not plan well to meet these pupils' needs. Few teachers check the understanding of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities during lessons. Consequently, most of these pupils make poor progress.
- Some teaching is effective. Where this is the case, teachers give a clear explanation of the work pupils are expected to undertake. They provide tasks that are relevant and quickly involve pupils. In these lessons, pupils engage in, and enjoy, their learning. Teachers help pupils to structure their sentences accurately and constantly scan their classrooms, looking for pupils who might need help. Feedback is well structured and teachers provide opportunities for pupils to show a good level of recall and understanding. These teachers also take account of the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. In these lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work books shows that they make good progress.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. School leaders have not addressed quickly enough those pupils with a poor attendance record. As a result, persistent absence figures have not reduced.
- Some pupils are absent from school too often. The school authorises too many absences and does not challenge absence requests. There is no significant consequence for taking a day off school. In this academic year, roughly a third of pupils have already received at least one absence authorised by the school. Pupils who attend school are punctual. Pupils told inspectors that there are clear sanctions for lateness.
- The school has worked hard to promote the welfare of pupils. Each week there is a 'Well Being Wednesday', when the school offers a number of activities for pupils to choose from. These activities, which include African drumming and military training, provide pupils with opportunities for teamwork, innovation and self-discipline. Pupils told inspectors that Wednesday afternoons are fun and exciting. Teachers are able to build positive working relationships with pupils during this time. Pupils see their teachers in a different light. Low-level disruption is not evident because pupils are fully engaged and can choose the activity that they wish to participate in. These activities help pupils achieve more in school. Pupils told inspectors that they work better in teams and through group work.
- The school is an inclusive community, where people are valued. Pupils told inspectors that the school treats pupils equally and that there is no place in the community for prejudice or discrimination. On the rare occasion that bullying or discrimination does occur, school staff respond quickly and effectively. Older pupils have a mature and developed understanding of a number of equality issues, including sexual orientation and gender reassignment.
- Senior leaders offer a range of opportunities to help pupils understand the dangers of radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. Older pupils talk about these matters openly, analytically and with intelligence.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They can explain, in detail, how the school is a place of safety. Pupils talk about how staff routinely check on their safety. The school also provides effective support for pupils experiencing mental health problems.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. The rate of fixed-term exclusions has reduced but still remains high. Fixed-term exclusions exceed both the national average and the school's targets. Thus, too many days are lost to exclusion.
- Not all pupils take pride in wearing their uniform, and teachers do not routinely challenge uniform infringements.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are variable. In some lessons, inspectors found evidence of low-level disruption, particularly when teachers did not provide pupils with engaging

tasks to complete. As a result, pupils make less progress than they could. In some instances, teachers speak with pupils about being off-task, but this has little impact on the behaviour of these pupils. Teachers do not always use the school's behaviour policy. In many lessons, while pupils are not disruptive, they do not engage in the lesson. Teachers do not challenge this behaviour. Pupils' attitudes to learning are better when the lesson content is interesting and challenging. In these lessons, pupils engage with the tasks set and make good progress.

- Pupils behave well around the school site. They are polite and open doors for visitors. At lunch and breaktimes, pupils behave well together. They converse and interact positively, treating each other with respect.
- At the time of the inspection, a few pupils were attending alternative provision off site. The school monitors these pupils' attendance closely and is aware of any behaviour issues. School leaders have made the necessary statutory checks of these alternative providers. Each of these establishments offers suitable provision for pupils who find mainstream school difficult.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- There are wide differences in the progress of different groups of pupils from similar starting points. For example, girls' progress is much better than boys'. Middle-ability pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have significantly underachieved.
- Pupils' progress in humanities subjects, such as geography, is poor. Year 11 pupils' knowledge and understanding in this subject are weak. For example, in a geography lesson about 'Plate Tectonics', Year 11 pupils did not know the basic terminology. This, taken together with incomplete work, is likely to have a negative impact on their attainment.
- Pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics in 2017 was very poor. Plans are in place to address these failings in mathematics. The school's current assessment of pupils' skills is accurate and showing an improvement on the previous year.
- Pupils' progress overall is variable and, in some subjects, it is inadequate. This is because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Poor attendance contributes further to some pupils' poor attainment. This underachievement means that pupils are less able to benefit from the next stage of their learning or gain access to the next stage of their education.
- Pupils' attainment has not increased quickly enough over the past three years. Pupils' attainment in GCSE English and mathematics examinations has remained significantly below the national average.

School details

Unique reference number	103529
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10047534

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	309
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Valerie Allen
Headteacher	Damian McGarvey
Telephone number	0121 464 9901
Website	www.bwschool.org.uk
Email address	enquiry@bwschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 January 2016

Information about this school

- Balaam Wood School is much smaller than the average secondary school. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The remainder of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The members of the senior leadership team are relatively new to their roles. The current headteacher took up post in April 2017, fifteen months after the previous inspection of the school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average. The proportion of pupils receiving support because they have SEN and/or disabilities is high compared with most schools. The school's deprivation indicator is twice the national average.
- The school is a member of The Oaks Collegiate, which is a group of nine Birmingham secondary schools and one special school that work in partnership. The local authority provides support for the school through a third party.

- A small number of pupils are educated off site. These pupils attend either The Edge Academy or The Flexible Learning Centre.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 30 lessons to observe the quality of learning across a range of subjects. Senior leaders joined inspectors in visiting most of these lessons.
- Inspectors also looked at a range of pupils' work books to scrutinise progress since the beginning of the academic year. Inspectors visited some tutor groups and assemblies.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and a cross-section of staff. They also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the company providing external support on behalf of the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the school's policies, including those for safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the use of additional funding and SEN and disabilities provision. Inspectors also reviewed the school's strategic improvement plan and self-evaluation documentation. Attendance, behaviour, pupils' progress and assessment records were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and the 10 free-text responses received during the inspection. In addition, inspectors took account of feedback from 12 parents provided via email. Inspectors also took account of 28 responses to the staff questionnaire and 17 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Antony Edkins, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Elaine Haskins	Ofsted 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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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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