

Blackthorns Community Primary Academy

3 Blackthorns Close, Lindfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 2UA

Inspection dates

18–19 September 2018

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Pupils thrive at this school because their needs are met extremely well. They live up to adults' very high expectations and succeed as a result.
- Leaders have a deep understanding of their school. They reflect accurately on its many strengths and address weaknesses promptly and successfully. Leaders' high expectations pervade the school.
- Governance is very effective. The local board and wider trust work very well together to ensure that legal duties are met. Their collective rigorous challenge to leaders ensures that standards in the school are high.
- In lessons, pupils engage enthusiastically with their work and are keen to do well. Teachers plan learning activities carefully so that they match pupils' needs closely. Pupils' thirst for learning is evident.
- Pupils understand very clearly how to improve their work. They set about this with determination as a matter of routine. This supports their strong progress.
- Pupils attain highly, especially in reading. Above-average proportions of pupils reach the higher standard in reading by the end of key stage 2. Leaders are determined for similar proportions to attain the same standard in writing and mathematics in the future. Their actions to achieve this are already under way.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make very strong progress. Leaders ensure that staff support pupils' specific needs. They seek extra help tenaciously for this group of pupils.
- Pupils in The Alps specialist resource base are supported extremely well. Staff understand their needs and meet them sensitively. Consequently, pupils make very good progress, academically and in other ways.
- Pupils learn very well across a broad range of topics that are both relevant and interesting to them. They use their literacy and numeracy skills effectively in other subjects, working at similarly high standards.
- Leaders make creative use of resources to enrich pupils' learning beyond English and mathematics. This stimulates pupils' interest in learning about the world around them.
- Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes towards school. They attend regularly and are proud of what they achieve. Their behaviour is exemplary.
- Provision in the early years is highly effective. Children engage confidently in their stimulating environment, which leaders adapt skilfully to meet their needs. Consequently, children are very well equipped for future learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils who attain a higher standard of learning in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2, so that pupils achieve as well as they currently do in reading.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal and vice principal's clear vision and high expectations are shared by all involved in the life of the school. Everyone works together resolutely to help pupils achieve their very best. High standards are an expectation, not an aspiration.
- Parents and carers really value how well staff know their children and work to meet their needs. One parent described how 'every aspect (of the school's work) is steeped in genuine care and affection'. This highly nurturing environment empowers pupils to work hard and to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding that equip them well for the future.
- Leaders monitor classroom practice routinely, focusing closely on the impact of adults' work on pupils' learning. They make valid judgements about evident strengths and relative weaknesses, based on the secure and detailed evidence they gather. This enables them to hold staff very effectively to account for the difference their work makes to pupils' achievements. Underperformance is addressed promptly.
- Teachers work very effectively together to maintain and develop the quality of teaching across the school. They understand the priorities for ongoing improvement and tackle them with collective determination. They are receptive to support from each other and from sharing useful expertise across the multi-academy trust. Training experiences are shared across the school as a matter of expectation, which results in prompt and meaningful learning opportunities for pupils in the classroom.
- The curriculum inspires pupils by evolving constantly in response to their needs. Leaders consider learning opportunities carefully, making highly effective use of resources and expertise beyond the school to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding very successfully. Consequently, pupils make useful links between their work in different subjects and are inspired about the world around them. They relish chances to influence how their work develops over time, such as a study of disposable plastics that captured their imaginations during a beach walk.
- Leaders use every opportunity to promote the school's core values. Meaningful experiences are planned deliberately into the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, and pupils practise applying their knowledge successfully. For example, pupils learned about the value of money, then successfully used what they learned during a 'big business' project. Similarly, pupils' homework task to discuss how equality works in their household helped them to consider different perspectives, while practising their speaking and listening skills. Pupils understand the importance of learning to be a good citizen and what this means in practice.
- Pupils benefit greatly from rich experiences that enhance their wider learning, such as trips and visits from relevant experts. Leaders have very clear intentions for these activities, which link successfully to relevant world events and specific aspects of the curriculum. Pupils' participation in sporting activities and competitions has improved measurably over time because leaders use the sports premium very well.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have experiences beyond their community which widen their cultural understanding. 'Treat everyone as you want to be treated' is a mantra

that is evident in pupils' interactions with others, regardless of race or religion.

- Leaders' use of extra funding for pupils who have additional needs is commendable. The inclusion manager oversees this aspect of the school's work with clear understanding and unwavering determination. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities flourish at the school.

Governance of the school

- The University of Brighton Academies Trust has overall responsibility for governance of the school. Trustees use carefully constructed systems and routines to devolve this responsibility appropriately, so that governance is suitably rigorous and effective. The local board supports the trustees successfully in fulfilling their legal duties successfully. They are rightly proud of what pupils achieve, both academically and socially.
- Collectively, governors know the school very well and are highly ambitious for pupils to be as successful as possible. Governors make wise and appropriate use of experts from beyond the school to check and challenge what leaders tell them about standards in the school. This keeps governors well informed and enables them to maintain a constant focus on ensuring that pupils get the best possible experience.
- Trustees work closely with members of the local board to ensure that policies are fit for purpose and reviewed in a timely way. Their diligent and detailed approach to managing staff performance ensures that leaders, teachers and support staff are held very effectively to account for the difference their work makes, specifically to pupils' achievements. Consequently, standards in the school are high.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils are very well cared for because adults take time to get to know them and their families well. This supports the nurturing and safe environment that pupils and parents value highly.
- Leaders ensure that policies and procedures for identifying and supporting vulnerable pupils and their families are highly effective. Staff use their detailed knowledge skilfully to identify any worries that arise about a pupil, no matter how insignificant they may seem. Leaders' careful records enable them to identify any emerging patterns in concerns promptly. Their persistent work with experts beyond the school ensures that swift and appropriate action is taken and is always focused on what is best for the pupil involved.
- Throughout the school, safeguarding is promoted very successfully. Leaders place great importance on teaching pupils the skills and attributes that help them to manage risks appropriately. As a result, pupils know how to keep themselves safe and are reassured by the adults around them. Pupils are confident that adults will support them if events cause them anxiety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Pupils learn very well across the curriculum, attaining highly throughout their time at the school. This prepares them successfully for their future learning.
- Teachers have very high expectations for pupils' engagement with learning in class. Clearly established classroom routines enable pupils to make extremely effective use of time and resources. Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are consistently positive.
- Teachers use their clear understanding of pupils' knowledge and working methods to plan learning that engages them very well in their learning. Adults' questioning challenges pupils effectively to think deeply, focusing on learning strategies that help them to solve problems successfully. Subsequently, over time, pupils develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding across the range of subjects that they study. Occasionally, pupils could be moved on to more challenging work more promptly in mathematics, so that learning time is maximised.
- Pupils reflect on and improve their work as an integral part of their learning routine. They support each other well in this, demonstrating highly cooperative behaviour and a desire to learn. For example, during the inspection, two pupils worked together unprompted to 'upskill' their writing, using a dictionary to identify a suitable antonym to enrich the quality of their text. Others chose from a range of available resources that enabled them to tackle mathematics problems successfully with limited need for guidance and support from an adult.
- Pupils are passionate about reading, which enhances their learning across the broader curriculum. Teachers promote reading at every opportunity, using stimulating texts to contextualise learning across a range of topics. Pupils place great value on reading for pleasure, including as an integral part of home learning. Pupils across the school read fluently and with a sophisticated understanding of the suitably challenging texts they are exposed to. This enhances the high quality of their writing. One pupil described their love of reading perfectly when they said: 'I get lost in a book.'
- Pupils who are accommodated in the specialist resource base make very good progress. Adults understand their learning and other needs extremely well. They work skilfully to manage pupils' specific needs in a reassuring and sensitive way. Consequently, pupils engage successfully with their academic learning and achieve very well, sometimes despite only being at the school for a relatively short period of time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils' welfare is an absolute priority for everyone involved in the life of the school.
- Children who have previously been in care are particularly well supported. Families value highly the personalised assistance they receive that helps pupils to flourish academically as well as emotionally. The unusually high proportion of pupils at the school who have previously been in care indicates parents' confidence in the

effectiveness of leaders' work in this regard.

- Where necessary, leaders do not shy away from challenging those whose job it is to support them in helping vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders' determination to be successful in this aspect of their work is unwavering. Their actions help these pupils to stay safe, but also to be ready to learn and to value their education.
- Pupils flourish because of rich opportunities that support their personal development. They are proud to take ownership of appropriate aspects of their school, for example by acting as peer mediators and playground buddies. Their success in these roles is evident and builds pupils' pride, confidence and responsibility within their community.
- Pupils have a clearly developed understanding of the different types of bullying and what they should do if it happens. They are adamant that bullying is not an issue at their school, and parents support their views. Pupils are confident that adults would address any bullying-related concerns promptly and effectively if they were to happen.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Throughout the school, pupils behave warmly and compassionately towards each other and the adults that they meet. They are always respectful. The caring way that older pupils look after the younger ones during playtimes and lunchtimes is a pleasure to see.
- Pupils come to school very regularly and are rarely late. Attendance rates are well above national figures and improving over time. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is extremely low. Leaders' astute understanding of the families behind the statistics helps them take sensitive, but effective, action to improve attendance for the small number of pupils who do not attend as regularly as they should.
- Pupils' desire to learn is evident in every classroom. They treat each other, their teachers and the working environment with absolute respect. Pupils are rightly proud that their learning is 'never disrupted' by poor behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is high across the school. Over a sustained period, the proportion of pupils who reach the standard expected at the end of early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 has been well above the national average. This shows that pupils are prepared well to access their secondary school education.
- Standards in reading are particularly high across the school. The percentage of pupils working at least at the expected standard is well above what is expected for their ages in every year group. More than a third of pupils currently in Years 2 and 4 are working at a greater depth of learning in reading. Slightly lower proportions meet that standard in Years 5 and 6, but this still reflects very high levels of achievement.
- Pupils develop consistently effective phonics skills. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics check has increased steadily over the past three years as a result of leaders' considered work. Most of the very small number of pupils not achieving the standard by the end of Year 1 go on to meet it by the end of Year 2.

This ensures that they are suitably prepared to meet the demands of key stage 2 learning.

- In 2017, pupils' progress across key stage 2 overall was slightly above average in reading and mathematics, but not as strong in writing. Provisional performance information indicates a similar, but slightly more pronounced, variation in 2018. This is because, while the majority of pupils make very good progress during the key stage, some pupils joined the school partway through, including some whose needs were met by the specialist resource base. These pupils made rapid progress during their time at the school, but their progress measured from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 was less convincing overall.
- The progress of pupils currently in the school is increasingly strong over time. Notably, those who join the school with below-average starting points progress rapidly, attaining at least the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1.
- Pupils with additional needs make particularly strong academic progress because their needs are met closely. Most of the small number of disadvantaged pupils catch up with and attain as well as other pupils nationally. The inclusion team's effective work with pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities impacts very positively on these pupils' progress. In some instances, pupils supported by the specialist resource base make twice as much progress as other pupils in the same time period, helping them to plug the gaps in their knowledge.
- The work in pupils' books demonstrates the high standards they consistently achieve. They write confidently and with increasing sophistication across a range of subjects, topics and genres. Their mathematical skills and understanding are similarly convincing. Occasionally, the accuracy of their spelling and grammar reduces as they try to incorporate more complex and colourful language into their work.
- Although standards are undoubtedly high, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard in writing and mathematics is currently lower than it is for reading. This is a clear area of focus for all staff this year, who are keen for pupils to attain equally well across the three core subjects. The impact of their current work is emerging across the school, but remains a priority moving forward.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children thrive in the early years because of the high-quality provision they experience. Consequently, they are prepared very well for their transition into more formal learning during key stage 1.
- Children's positive experience is supported by how carefully leaders manage their introduction to the school. Staff rapidly develop very effective working relationships with parents, which help them get to know children quickly. This enables staff to ensure that children's emerging needs are identified and addressed quickly, so that limited learning time is lost.
- Leaders have developed a safe and very stimulating learning environment which children really enjoy. This promotes their successful learning across all aspects of the early years curriculum. Adults make the most of opportunities that arise, incorporating

them into the children's learning, such as the building work that was taking place during the inspection. This gives children's learning a real and powerful context that captures their interest and imagination successfully.

- Leaders have an accurate and highly aspirational view of standards in the early years. They ensure that legal requirements for safeguarding and the curriculum are met rigorously. They wisely use training and advice from across the trust to develop their expertise and the quality of provision. Consequently, standards are high, including in the creative aspects where they have been slightly weaker in the past.
- Children achieve very well by the end of early years. The percentage who achieve a good level of development is consistently well above the national average. Children typically achieve well across the early years curriculum. The very small number of children who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities do similarly well compared with other children nationally.
- Adults track children's progress carefully, using rigorous and appropriate assessments of their learning over time. Adults use what they learn very well to adapt future learning, so that emerging gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding are addressed promptly. Consequently, children attain equally well across the early learning goals.
- Children settle quickly into the early years, establishing friendships and cooperating with each other and with the adults around them. Well-rehearsed routines support their excellent behaviour effectively. Children enjoy opportunities to integrate into the life of the wider school, such as through their music lessons. These build their confidence and help them move seamlessly into Year 1 at the end of their early years experience.

School details

Unique reference number	141892
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10056694

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	243
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Professor Chris Pole
Principal	Mrs Marianne Brand
Telephone number	01444 454866
Website	www.blackthornsprimaryacademy.org.uk/
Email address	office@blackthornsprimaryacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 March 2018

Information about this school

- Blackthorns Community Primary Academy is an average-sized school for pupils aged 4 to 11. It opened in April 2015, when the predecessor school converted to be an academy. It is part of the University of Brighton Academies Trust. The board of trustees has overall responsibility for governance, but delegates some of these responsibilities to a local board.
- The school has a single-form intake, except for in Year 6 where there are two classes. It also incorporates an eight-place specialist resource base called The Alps, which is funded by the local authority. This base is specifically for pupils in key stage 2 who have an education, health and care plan for additional or speech and language needs. Sometimes these pupils arrive at the school during the latter part of key stage 2. There are currently three pupils placed in The Alps by the local authority. They do some of their learning in the specialist resource base and join their peers for other parts of their curriculum.
- The percentage of pupils who receive support for a special educational need is below

the national average. In contrast, an above-average proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan.

- A very small percentage of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, compared with other schools nationally. Almost all these pupils either are currently or have previously been in care.
- Almost all pupils are of White British origin. Very few are believed to speak English as an additional language.
- The school was first inspected by Ofsted in March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act. At this time, the school demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas that may have indicated the school was improving towards becoming outstanding. The lead inspector therefore recommended that the school's next inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons throughout the school to observe learning across the curriculum. While in class, they talked to pupils about their work and looked at their books. The principal and vice principal accompanied inspectors on some of these visits.
- The lead inspector met with the principal and vice principal to discuss their self-evaluation of the school. Inspectors also met formally with groups of staff, pupils, governors and representatives of the trust, as well as talking informally to pupils and parents.
- The inspection team considered a wide range of additional evidence, including information and documents on the school website, samples of pupils' work, and leaders' records of pupils' attendance, behaviour and academic standards.
- Inspectors took account of 25 staff survey responses. There were no recorded replies to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. Parents' views were also considered via 145 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, which included 67 free-text comments.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Claire Martin-O'Donoghue

Ofsted Inspector

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