

# Venturers' Academy

Withywood Road, Withywood, Bristol BS13 9AX

## Inspection dates

11–12 June 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The passion, dedication and determination of the principal to provide the very best care and education for pupils is demonstrable. Together with the vice principal there is a fervent drive to become a beacon of excellence.
- The school continues to grow rapidly. There has been a number of leaders recently appointed. As a result, the work of some leaders is embryonic and not yet embedded securely.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teaching staff and therapists work together in a highly effective way to meet the needs of pupils. However, leaders recognise that teaching is underdeveloped for the youngest pupils.
- Outcomes for pupils are good. Pupils make considerable progress from, often, extremely low starting points. However, pupils' writing in English and across subjects is not as good as it could be.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are powerful and enable pupils to thrive in an environment where they are nurtured and cared for.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff are vigilant in their work to minimise risk to pupils and keep them safe.
- Pupils' behaviour is typically outstanding. Staff understand pupils' needs exceptionally well and manage their complex needs with expertise.
- The 'curiosity curriculum' enables pupils to explore interesting topics. It inspires pupils to be inquisitive in their learning.
- Pupils benefit from enriching social and cultural experiences. These experiences challenge them and help them to learn about the world in which they live.
- Governors have a good knowledge of the school's work. They are effective in ensuring that leaders meet pupils' emotional and learning needs through an effective curriculum.
- Most parents speak positively about the school. They welcome the care and quality of education which their children receive.
- Pupils enjoy school. This is reflected in their regular attendance and their positive attitudes to learning.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that it is consistently good across all year groups and across the curriculum.
- Further improve outcomes in writing for all pupils.
- Continue to embed the work of new leaders to drive forward improvements in the provision for the youngest pupils at the school.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- 'Charismatic, ambitious and visionary' and 'no-limit thinking' is how the leadership of the principal was described to inspectors. His passion and determination for the school to become a beacon of excellence is unfaltering.
- The principal's and vice principal's leadership and desire to work in partnership with others are galvanising the staff to provide the best learning opportunities and experiences for pupils. The school's motto, 'where everything's possible' is tangible throughout the school.
- The school has grown rapidly since opening and there has been recent expansion within the leadership team. New leaders demonstrate the skills and knowledge to drive forward the identified areas of improvement. However, as yet, their work is embryonic and plans have not yet had time to come to fruition. For example, leaders are aware that work with the youngest pupils is underdeveloped to ensure that they make the best possible progress in their learning.
- Leaders are supported ably by the wider staff team, including the therapists the school employs, who share their vision. Staff welcome the support and guidance they receive from professional development and mentoring to improve their practice. 'It is a very positive place to work', 'leaders listen to us' and 'we are encouraged to maintain a healthy work-life balance' are just three of the positive remarks from staff regarding the leadership of the school.
- Exceptional relationships between staff, pupils and parents have been pivotal to the early success of this new school. Staff are passionate about pupils in the school and demonstrate a desire for them to be successful learners. Staff have a deep knowledge of the many challenges pupils face, which enables them to support pupils extremely well. For example, pupils can make use of the sensory rooms at times of stress to reduce their anxious behaviours and successfully return to their learning.
- Leaders, including governors and trustees, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation is accurate. Academy improvement plans are in place to make the necessary improvements. The local board of governors and trustees monitor the impact of actions closely.
- Leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Lesson observations, looking at pupils' work and checking progress are carefully timetabled. Leaders' expectations of staff are high. When teachers do not consistently meet these high expectations leaders do not hesitate in taking rapid actions to eradicate underperformance.
- The curriculum is evolving as the school grows. The 'curiosity curriculum' inspires pupils to be inquisitive in their learning. It covers a range of subjects with a key focus on pupils becoming mathematicians, authors and readers. However, while pupils enjoy the subjects they learn about, they are not achieving as well as they can in their development of writing skills.
- Therapeutic provision works seamlessly alongside the curriculum. Therapists and teaching staff are highly skilled in ensuring that provision precisely meets the needs of

pupils and develops their interests well. For example, music therapy enables pupils to reduce their anxiety, self-regulate their behaviour, and develop positive learning attitudes while undertaking an activity that they love and can excel in.

- Pupils have access to an exciting and diverse range of enrichment activities. For example, older pupils spoke with excitement about the recent experience of the 'wettest classroom on earth', an opportunity for pupils to learn, work, eat and sleep for seven days on board a ship sailing around the coast of Britain. Pupils spoke eloquently to inspectors about the impact of this experience on their lives. Being away from home and learning to cook and work as a team provided pupils with valuable life skills, equipping them well for their future.
- Leaders skilfully plan for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They carefully and sensitively design activities to meet the needs of pupils. For example, a visit by the police enhanced pupils' understanding of social justice and the consequences if they do not follow the rule of law.
- Pupils have a growing awareness of what it means to live in modern Britain through their personal, social and health education lessons. They understand democracy, respect and equality. This understanding is because they are taught well and provided with a range of opportunities from which to learn. For example, pupils talked with knowledge about the impact on today's society of the Holocaust and 9/11, and the importance to eradicate radicalisation and terrorism.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors work closely with leaders to ensure that the needs of each pupil are met well. Governors demonstrate a good range of skills and expertise. They provide strong support and challenge to leaders. They do not rely solely on information provided by the leaders but gather first-hand evidence for themselves through visits and conversations with staff and pupils.
- Governors understand the importance of safer recruitment. All checks are undertaken carefully to ensure that appointed staff are appropriate to work with these vulnerable pupils. Governors check that the single central record is accurate and well maintained to ensure that it continues to meet statutory requirements.
- The trustees of the school check regularly the work of leaders to ensure that they are providing pupils with high-quality care and an effective standard of education.
- Finances are closely checked and monitored to ensure the financial stability of the school. For example, governors know how pupil premium funding is spent and the positive impact it is having on improving the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding which permeates the school. There is a shared understanding by all staff, governors and trustees of the need to protect these highly vulnerable pupils from all potential risks.
- Pastoral leaders, who are designated safeguarding leads across the school, work tirelessly to support staff in their determination to minimise risk to pupils and to keep

them safe. They are tenacious and have no hesitation in escalating their concerns when they believe a pupil to be at potential risk of harm.

- Staff receive high-quality training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe. Controversial issues are not avoided. For example, staff have undertaken training on child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' duty. This means that staff are knowledgeable and have the confidence to take rapid action should they have any concerns regarding the safety of a pupil.
- Staff, irrespective of their role, know the pupils and their individual needs exceptionally well. Staff are highly vigilant. They monitor pupils carefully and are quick to respond if they notice any changes in a pupil's behaviour or manner.
- Leaders, governors and trustees understand the importance of safer recruitment. Diligence is shown in staff recruitment and safeguarding. Records are detailed and of high quality.
- Parents are confident that their children are well looked after and kept safe.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teaching staff and therapists work closely together to ensure that learning opportunities meet the needs of pupils well. As a result, pupils make strong progress in their learning.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. Teaching staff demonstrate resilience and determination to provide pupils with a range of learning opportunities across the curriculum. For example, pupils were enthused in their Spanish lesson. They were able to link pictures of fruit to the Spanish vocabulary. The look of joy on their faces was tangible when they were successful in their verbal responses.
- Teachers provide pupils with activities which excite and motivate them to learn well. For example, pupils were making a positive contribution to their lesson on 'Romeo and Juliet', thinking about what is meant by a patriarch. Pupils were able to articulate well their responses to the teacher's questions.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they plan activities to meet pupils' needs. However, teaching does not always build on what pupils know, can do and understand well enough. The sequencing of small steps of learning is not always sufficiently clear to enable pupils to consistently learn well.
- The teaching of reading is good. Pupils have access to a range of reading materials and enjoy being read to. Early reading is being supported by effective phonics teaching.
- Developing good communication skills is pivotal to pupils' success in learning. Teachers use a range of communication tools to support strong communication, including Makaton and electronic devices. Pupils work hard with their writing. However, planned opportunities do not precisely meet the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils are not consistently making the progress of which they are capable. Also, pupils are not always sure what steps they need to take in order to improve their work.

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- All staff, irrespective of their role, receive high-quality training to recognise signs of harm and abuse. They are diligent and act quickly to deal with any concerns. Morning briefings at the start of the day ensure that valuable information is cascaded across the school team, alerting them to any potential issue which needs a watchful eye.
- Pupils settle quickly into school life as a result of the consistent approach to learning and high-quality therapeutic support. Over time, pupils are able to take better care of themselves and gain a better understanding of the risks they may be susceptible to. For example, pupils who spoke with inspectors were articulate in explaining internet safety. They understood the importance of not responding to messages from people they do not know, but to report them to a trusted adult.
- Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and a love of learning. They are enthusiastic learners who want to do well and are proud of their achievements. For example, an older pupil was delighted when they received a principal's award for good learning in their phonics work. The look of pleasure and pride at their achievement was profound.
- Many parents speak passionately about the work of the school and the positive impact it has on their children's development and progress. 'We feel blessed that our son is able to be part of this school community', 'approachable and dedicated staff that are very passionate about the children' and 'I am proud my son attends Venturers' Academy' are typical of the positive comments inspectors received.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils who attend the school have a number of complex needs in addition to their diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Therefore, most pupils have significant difficulties in managing their own feelings and behaviour. Through the excellent support and guidance they receive from staff and therapists, they quickly learn how to better manage their emotions and regulate their behaviour.
- Every pupil has an 'all about me' plan. These plans are detailed and linked closely to pupils' education, health and care plans. Behaviour plans and risk assessments are impressive. Leaders and staff know precisely the triggers which increase pupils' anxieties and can lead to their challenging behaviours. Nonetheless, as a result of the school's excellent and successful approach to pupils' personal development and welfare, the need for physical intervention is rare.
- Pupils spoken with demonstrate a good understanding of behaviours not tolerated at school. For example, they know that physical aggression and being hurtful and unkind are unacceptable. Pupils are knowledgeable in the sanctions imposed for poor behaviour, but they also welcome the rewards for positive behaviours. They spoke with joy about the use of raffle tickets issued for positive behaviours and the rewards they can achieve.

- Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their regular attendance, which is consistently above the national average. Indeed, pupils told inspectors that they wished they could continue to attend the school, saying, 'we want to stay here' when asked what they would like to do when they leave.
- Staff model kindness, consideration and courtesy. As a result, pupils learn from adults about how to behave. Pupils are considerate of the feelings of others and acquire the ability to understand what it feels like to be in other people's situation.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of what it means to attend a rights respecting school. They appreciate the role that staff play in promoting the rights of children. Pupils who spoke with inspectors commented, 'The staff at this school are always looking out for us and following our rights and respecting us.'

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **Good**

- Pupils who attend the school have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and many have additional complex needs. Many pupils have been out of education for long periods of time. Consequently, on arrival to the school, pupils' attainment is often significantly below that expected for their age across all subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics.
- A careful look at pupils' work during the inspection confirmed that, over time, pupils typically make good progress. They are provided with a range of activities to build their knowledge and skills successfully. However, when the sequencing of learning is not consistently secure the progress pupils make is not as strong. This is most noticeable for the youngest pupils.
- There is a focus on developing pupils' skills in speech, reading, writing and mathematics. Typically, pupils make good progress. However, pupils across the school are not making the progress they are capable of in their writing. School leaders recognise this weakness and are taking decisive action to address the quality of pupils' writing. Where pupils do make good progress in their writing, they demonstrate resilience and determination and produce high-quality work, for example in their story writing. Nonetheless, this is not yet consistent to enable pupils to make the best progress.
- Reading is taught well throughout the school. Pupils receive phonics lessons to provide them with the tools they need for their early reading development. Older pupils who read to inspectors did so with confidence, accuracy and flair.
- The good progress pupils make, combined with the high-quality therapy they receive, ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. For example, the impact of speech and language and occupational health therapy is significant. This can be exemplified in the number of pupils who arrive at the school non-verbal and become verbal.

## School details

Unique reference number	142780
Local authority	City of Bristol
Inspection number	10088276

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Gail Bragg
Principal	Trystan Williams
Telephone number	0117 3010805
Website	<a href="http://www.venturersacademy.org">www.venturersacademy.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@venturerssacademy.org">info@venturerssacademy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Venturers' Academy opened in September 2016. The school has grown rapidly in pupil numbers since its opening.
- Pupils who attend the school have a primary diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Many pupils have additional complex needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The academy currently has pupils from three different local authorities: Bristol; Bath and North East Somerset; and North Somerset.
- At the time of the inspection the number of children in the early years provision was below five. The school currently provides education for pupils up to the age of 14.
- The majority of pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.



- The proportion of girls in the school is lower than average.
- The school does not use alternative providers. However, pupils are encouraged to take part in activities off the school site. When this happens, pupils are escorted at all times by members of the school staff.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors viewed learning across the school, accompanied by the principal or a senior leader. The quality of pupils' work was scrutinised.
- Meetings were held with the principal, vice principal, senior leaders, staff, members of the local board of governors and the chair of trustees. Inspectors took account of the 56 responses to staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with two external education advisers to the school.
- Inspectors talked with a group of pupils to listen to their views about the school. The views of other pupils were gathered during lessons and around the school. Inspectors considered 49 responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the academy improvement plan, reports written by external providers and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day and considered the 37 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 23 text messages.

## Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paula Marsh

Ofsted Inspector

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