

Firbeck Academy

Firbeck Road, Wollaton, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG8 2FB

Inspection dates

9–10 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Senior leaders have not secured sufficiently rapid improvements to the quality of education since the last inspection.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has been reduced, but the overall rate of their attendance is still not high enough.
- Though teaching has improved, it is not consistently good across all year groups. As a result, pupils are making better progress, but this is not strong enough for them to attain well by the time they leave.
- Leaders have introduced new approaches to the reading and mathematics curriculum to help pupils catch up, but these have not had time to become fully embedded. Too many gaps remain in pupils' knowledge.
- Leaders do not give sufficiently targeted support to teachers who need advice to improve aspects of their teaching.
- Pupils are not moved on to more challenging work quickly enough. This limits their progress. While pupils no longer disrupt learning, some still become disengaged because the work is too easy for them.
- Leaders have not ensured that, in subjects such as history, geography and religious education, the curriculum is delivered well enough. Pupils do not remember enough of what they are taught.
- Teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to explain their mathematical reasoning, or to practise improving their written work.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have a good understanding of the school, staff and pupils, and are focused on sensible actions to address the remaining weaknesses. They are checking continually that the changes they are bringing about are having the impact they intend.
- Phonics teaching is much improved. A large majority of pupils are able to read fluently and with confidence.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are happy and feel secure. They are taught how to stay safe from a range of risks, including the internet.
- Due to consistently good teaching, children make strong progress in the early years. A greater proportion of children attain a good level of development compared to the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, and thereby outcomes, by ensuring that:
 - the new approaches to teaching reading and mathematics are fully embedded
 - the remaining gaps in pupils' knowledge are closed urgently
 - subject leaders give bespoke support to colleagues to improve the specific aspects of their teaching that are not strong enough
 - leaders review the quality of education in subjects other than mathematics and English and take action wherever needed, so that learning is consistently well sequenced for pupils to acquire and remember sufficient knowledge
 - teachers move all pupils, and particularly the most able, on to more challenging work as soon as they have demonstrated they are fluent in what they are doing, thereby eradicating any remaining disengagement
 - all teachers give pupils sufficient opportunities to explain their mathematical reasoning
 - teachers show pupils consistently well how to redraft and improve their writing, so that they can apply the features they are taught.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - increasing pupils' attendance further so it is at least broadly in line with the national average.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- There has been considerable turbulence in staffing since the last inspection. This has hampered leaders' work to secure consistently good teaching across the school. Nevertheless, improvements have not been sufficiently rapid.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics are having a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching in these subjects. However, this is not proving effective enough, because they do not give important bespoke advice to individual colleagues on how they can improve the weaker aspects of their teaching.
- Leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics have not ensured that the curriculum is planned sufficiently well across the school in the subjects for which they are responsible. They do not have a clear overview of what important knowledge they want pupils to remember across different year groups. They do not help their colleagues to plan sequences of lessons that will help pupils remember sufficiently.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils' attendance is sufficiently high. Though fewer pupils are persistently absent, pupils' overall absence remains greater than that seen in other schools nationally.
- Leaders have brought about clear improvements to the quality of teaching. They have introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics, to mathematics and to reading. They have ensured that staff have received much-needed training. A large majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire confirmed that the professional development they are having is helping them to be more effective in their role.
- Leaders ensure that they monitor all aspects of the school well, and with frequency. From this, they have a clear, accurate and honest view of the school's strengths and its weaknesses. They have based this on a wide range of robust evidence, and have sensible actions planned to address the weaknesses. The weaknesses inspectors identified reflect those leaders have also noted as requiring the most attention.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. In the early years, children learn about different sea creatures and visit the National Sea Life Centre, while, in Year 5, pupils study the Ancient Greeks and make intricately decorated replicas of Greek pottery. The curriculum includes an extensive programme of visitors, such as archaeologists and zoologists, who help pupils to learn.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a range of after-school clubs that pupils enjoy. These include music, sports and, in conjunction with lecturers from Nottingham University, engineering.
- The curriculum allows for pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They develop a love of nature and the ability to reflect on, for example, the intricacy of a spider's web. The new behaviour strategy has improved pupils' responsibility for, and understanding of the consequences of, their own actions. Pupils work cooperatively with a wide variety of groups and are polite to visitors. A signing choir attends events in the community to promote the positive work of the school. Pupils who arrive from other countries help their peers to understand their different lifestyles and cultures.

- Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils have a good understanding of British values. They say that staff teach them that it is important to respect others, regardless of whether they are similar or different from themselves. They know why they should follow the school rules, and that adults must not break the law. Pupils can explain the concept of democracy in British society, and how they enjoy taking part in electing members of the school council, who raise money for charity and have secured better playground equipment for lunchtimes.
- Leaders spend the pupil premium well. Although the teaching for disadvantaged pupils is not sufficiently effective across all year groups to ensure they make strong progress, leaders nevertheless use this funding to help disadvantaged pupils catch up with their learning.
- Senior leaders ensure that the primary physical education (PE) and sports funding is appropriately spent. Increasing proportions of pupils have regular access to sporting activities, including the opportunity to participate in tournaments with other local schools in, for example, table tennis, football and basketball. Vulnerable pupils, and particularly those who leaders judge would benefit especially from sporting activities, are given preference in joining clubs. The school has very recently been awarded the silver Active Sports Mark for the quality of its sporting provision.
- The coordinator for provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) ensures that their needs are a priority for staff. She has a good understanding of these pupils and the support each one is receiving and is tracking their progress. Where this is not fast enough, she has introduced new support packages to accelerate their learning. These are showing early signs of positive impact. The executive headteacher is the trust's leader for SEND and is helping the coordinator to develop her skills further. Additional funding to help these pupils is appropriately spent, and work with external services, such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists, is well developed. Staff who can sign support their colleagues to learn this skill, so that they can communicate more effectively with pupils who have hearing impairments.
- Parents' and carers' views of the school are positive. Four in five parents who responded to Parent View would recommend the school to others. This reflects the views of parents in the school's own survey.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body asks leaders challenging questions about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and attainment. It is led by a confident chair, who is ensuring that all aspects of the school are being monitored efficiently. Governors are also keeping the multi-academy trust well informed of both successes and the remaining aspects of concern, such as particular year groups where pupils' attainment is too low. Governors play their strategic role well. They are also skilled in making appropriate financial decisions and are aware of the short- and longer-term impact of factors such as staffing costs and pupil numbers on roll.
- The trust has helped to ensure better teaching is taking place across the school and that there is no reduction in the pace of improvement. They have provided training for teachers to improve their skills, including on ensuring that the feedback pupils receive

is both timely and helpful to them. They have also ensured that teachers can network with colleagues in other schools in the trust, so that they can share best practice. Trust members both provide support to the local governing body and hold it to account appropriately.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are safe in the school. There is a clear culture of vigilance in place. Staff know their responsibilities fully, including that they should never hesitate to report any concern, however slight. They are well trained in safeguarding and communicate well together, so that information is shared clearly.
- Leaders keep good records of any safeguarding concerns, and the action they take to help vulnerable pupils is both swift and well judged. Records show that leaders work well with parents. The school website also contains a good range of helpful information for parents regarding how to keep their children safe when online, including links to 'Think U Know' and 'Know IT All'.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers are using a new approach to the teaching of mathematics and are working to address the many gaps pupils have in their learning. Nevertheless, teachers do not consistently move pupils, and particularly the most able, on to more challenging tasks once they have demonstrated they are can complete something with speed and accuracy. This limits pupils' progress.
- Teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to explain their mathematical thinking. Not enough teachers teach them how to explain clearly why they have reached the answers they have.
- The teaching of writing is inconsistent. Not all teachers give pupils opportunities and guidance to redraft and improve their work. As a result, pupils are not sufficiently able to compose complex sentences, or to use language and punctuation to sufficient effect.
- Science is taught well. The curriculum is characterised by frequent and increasingly complex coverage of many aspects, which helps build pupils knowledge over time.
- Teachers do not plan other subjects, such as history, geography and religious education, well enough. They are not clear about the knowledge they want pupils to remember, and often do not teach it sequentially. High expectations exist in the early years, where children are taught about continents and physical features of geography, including adverse weather conditions. This is then built on in Year 1. However, in subsequent year groups, this is not developed further. Older pupils are asked to complete work that is not increasingly challenging. In some instances, an aspect is covered but not revisited at all, so that pupils forget too much of what they have learned.
- Teachers' subject knowledge in lessons is good overall. They use this to help pupils understand technical language. For example, pupils learn words such as 'pulpit' and

'lectern' when learning about the inside of a Christian church.

- Teachers notice when pupils do not understand something. They attend to this well and without delay, revising or explaining things in other ways so that pupils can learn.
- Relationships are positive. All staff, regardless of their roles, know pupils well. Staff are courteous and respectful to pupils and expect them to behave likewise.
- Pupils say that most lessons are interesting. Inspectors saw pupils measuring how many of them could fit into a square metre, and using this to estimate and then calculate, using a correct formula, how many pupils would fill their classroom.
- The high proportion of teaching assistants support pupils' learning effectively. They promote pupils' independence and ask them incisive questions, such as: 'Why do you think that?'
- Teachers' assessments of what their pupils know and can do in reading, writing and mathematics are now accurate. They are able to judge whether each pupil is on track to attain the expected standards.
- Higher expectations from teachers have resulted in classrooms becoming positive, calm and purposeful learning environments. Teachers ensure that pupils do not disrupt the learning of others.
- The teaching of phonics has improved considerably. Teachers in the early years teach phonics to children in the Nursery and this is continued seamlessly into Reception from the first days of the autumn term. The books that younger pupils read are appropriate and give them confidence and opportunities to practise their reading.
- Teachers are improving pupils' vocabulary. They give pupils good and improving opportunities to learn new words and to use them to positive effect when they write.
- Teachers plan highly effective opportunities for pupils in all year groups to learn in the school's extensive wooded area. Pupils were very excited to describe how they cooperate when learning knotting techniques to help construct shelters, and how to make fires from flint. Inspectors saw how pupils were taught how to behave safely while learning new skills.
- Teaching in the focused provision for pupils with a hearing impairment is a strength of the school. Staff have high levels of expertise in how to meet the needs and support the progress of these pupils. They monitor the gains that they make, using a wide range of appropriate systems. From this, they plan flexibly, setting personalised targets for each pupil. Pupils are fully included in the life of the whole school at every opportunity.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Teachers show pupils how they need to persist in their work, even if they get something wrong. Pupils enjoy being challenged and do not mind making mistakes.
- Pupils the inspectors met told them that they and their friends feel safe in the school,

that there is little bullying in the school and that, if it happens, it is well dealt with by staff.

- Pupils are taught to stay physically healthy. They understand the importance of a balanced diet and the benefits of exercise. They can also explain how poor health can increase the risk of obesity and diabetes. They greatly enjoy taking part in the opportunities staff provide for them in PE and sport.
- Pupils are also given guidance regarding their mental well-being. Pupils in Year 1 learn a variety of mindfulness and relaxation techniques, while older pupils develop this through their work on Buddhism and Hinduism.
- Children are taught to behave safely from the early years onwards. They move around with care when using equipment and scooters, knowing that they may accidentally hurt themselves or others if they do not.
- In the focused provision for those pupils with a hearing impairment, pupils are helped to understand how body language and facial expressions can give important messages. This helps these pupils understand and articulate how others are feeling and also raises their awareness of the indicators of potential harm from someone.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe from a range of risks and are taught to swim well. They are also shown how to reduce the risks of using modern technology, such as the internet and mobile phones.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Published data shows that the proportion of pupils' absence has been above the national average over time. Information provided to inspectors by leaders shows that it is still too high. This is having a negative impact on pupils' progress, as these pupils are missing important learning.
- Leaders have successfully reduced the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school. This is now in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils excluded from the school has fallen considerably. There have been no fixed-term exclusions this term.
- At the last inspection, it was reported that learning in lessons was slowed by instances of low-level disruption. This is no longer the case. There remain occasions when a small number of pupils lose focus in class, but this is because the work they are receiving is unchallenging.
- Pupils' presentation of their work has improved, and most take care when completing work. A new handwriting scheme is helping pupils to write clearly and legibly.
- Around the school, pupils' behaviour is now much better, including at lunchtimes. They are polite to visitors and they look after school resources with respect.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics has been

too weak. Pupils have not made the gains they have needed to in key stage 1 or 2. Though pupils' exercise books show that there are clear signs of improvement in these subjects across key stages, their progress is not consistently strong enough across all year groups.

- As a result, pupils' attainment is not high enough overall. Last year, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in these subjects was below the national average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils' work shows that too many pupils have remaining gaps in their knowledge.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make sufficient progress. Their progress is not strong enough to diminish the differences in their attainment compared to other pupils nationally. Not enough of these pupils are well prepared for secondary school.
- The most able pupils do not make the progress they need to. The proportion who attain a greater depth of understanding, or the higher standards in subjects, is too low. Some of the most recent work these pupils are completing in mathematics shows evidence of greater challenge, but it is too recent to result in them attaining as highly as they should.
- There are promising early signs of improvements in the progress of pupils with SEND overall. This is particularly the case in reading.
- As a result of the high-quality education that meets their needs, pupils in the focused provision for those with hearing impairments make good progress academically from their starting points. Staff's attention to the welfare and social interaction of these pupils also supports their progress. They can, and do, communicate effectively and positively with both adults and other pupils.
- Pupils' phonics skills are rising quickly. The proportion who attain the standards they need to at the end of Year 1 has improved considerably this year, along with a greater proportion of pupils who have caught up in Year 2. Pupils can explain how they sound out words, and were observed to do this repeatedly by inspectors, including with words that were not familiar to them.
- Pupils make good progress in science. They demonstrate impressive recall of the aspects they have learned, even for knowledge that they have been taught in previous years.
- In other subjects, their knowledge is not secure enough. Pupils the inspectors met were unable to remember much of the content they had covered in, for example, religious education, geography or history.

Early years provision

Good

- Although relatively recent to her role, the head of the early years has worked rapidly to gain a good understanding of the needs of the children and to secure consistently good teaching. She is being well supported to develop her effectiveness further by the executive headteacher.
- Children begin the school with skills that are below those typically found in children of a similar age. This is particularly the case in oral communication. Staff adapt the curriculum to give frequent opportunities for children to practise their speaking. They

ask children good questions and build their confidence. As a result, they quickly begin to catch up.

- Staff are caring and kind. This helps children to feel safe and secure.
- A positive partnership exists with parents. Teachers communicate well with them and use information from them to build an accurate picture of what each child can do and needs next. They let parents know the progress their child is making.
- Staff plan a variety of exciting activities for children across all areas of learning. As a result, children want to come to the school. Staff ensure that all groups, including those with SEND, are continually included and engaged so that they can make strong progress.
- Staff in both the Nursery and Reception classes plan well together so that children's progress does not weaken as they move from one class to the next. Older children build on and develop the skills they have learned previously.
- Staff plan lots of opportunities for children to learn rhymes and songs, and read acclaimed modern fiction, such as 'Room on the Broom', in addition to classic fairy tales.
- Children's work shows that they make consistently good progress in mathematics. Their books show that, though many begin with very little understanding of number, they quickly learn to count and to order numbers. Towards the end of the academic year in Reception, they are writing simple addition sums and sharing amounts equally.
- Pupils are taught to write well. Inspectors saw many examples of children writing about, for example, their visit to the Sea Life Centre. Pupils had written imaginative sentences, spelled in the main correctly and with generally accurate punctuation, such as: 'I saw one fish swim backwards in the pool.'
- The most able children are challenged in their work. A good number of examples of their writing that inspectors saw show skills which exceed those usually found in others of a similar age.
- Phonics are taught well from the Nursery Year onwards. Children have a good and age-appropriate understanding of sounds and can identify and read specific sounds and simple words with both accuracy and speed. One child told inspectors: 'I love phonics because it helps me to learn to read.'
- Children are well behaved. They take turns to share equipment, cooperate and persist with their activities. Both classrooms and outdoor learning areas are calm and well ordered.
- Due to consistently good teaching, children leave the early years well prepared for Year 1. The proportion of children who attain a good level of development is now above the current national average.

School details

Unique reference number	139326
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	10057658

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	John Mills
Headteacher	Vicky Hayles (Executive Headteacher)
Telephone number	0115 915 5739
Website	www.firbeck.org.uk
Email address	admin@firbeck.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 November 2016

Information about this school

- This school is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is higher than average.
- The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average. Two in three pupils in the school are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is slightly higher than average. The school has a focused provision for pupils with a hearing impairment.
- The school is part of the Nova Education Trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classrooms. Almost all of these observations took place with senior leaders. In total, learning was observed in 24 lessons. Inspectors also scrutinised examples of children’s work from the early years, along with a wide variety of pupils’ exercise books for many different subjects in all year groups and from a range of different groups of pupils.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of the early years, the coordinator for pupils with SEND, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, the Nova Education Trust, and members of the local governing body. They analysed the 10 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire – Parent View – and spoke with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors met with different groups of pupils. They also analysed responses to Ofsted’s questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school’s development plan and self-evaluation, policies and records related to safeguarding and pupils with SEND, and the school’s information about pupils’ achievement and attendance.

Inspection team

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