

Central Academy

Newhall Street, Ladywood, Birmingham, West Midlands B3 1SJ

Inspection dates

18–19 June 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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Although achievement is beginning to improve, the progress of successive cohorts has been insufficiently strong and below the national average.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. They do not use the information they have about pupils' prior ability consistently to ensure that work is sufficiently challenging.
- Teaching is sometimes uninspiring and fails to engage pupils' interest.
- Subject leaders are not consistently effective in raising standards in their curriculum areas.
- Opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activity are limited and do not always meet the interests of pupils.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are not consistently positive and there is some low-level disruption in lessons. Although behaviour is much improved, some pupils still do not follow the school's expectations about conduct and punctuality.
- The implementation of the school's curriculum for personal development is inconsistent.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has had a positive impact on the progress that these pupils make.
- Leaders have implemented a new curriculum at key stage 3. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this on pupils' outcomes.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher leads the school with unwavering determination. He is supported effectively by the trust.
- Following a challenging period, the leadership team is ambitious and committed to securing rapid improvement.
- School and trust leaders have taken swift action to improve teaching and reduce the proportion of lessons taught by temporary staff. These changes are beginning to lead to improvements in current pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders' decisive actions have led to rapid improvements in pupils' behaviour.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders, including governors, sharply evaluate the use of additional funding so that its expenditure has a positive impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND
 - all subject leaders are effective in raising standards in their curriculum areas, taking sufficient account of pupils' attitudes to learning and the progress made by different groups of learners
 - teachers implement the school's curriculum for personal development more effectively
 - inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are eradicated.
- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - pupils are purposefully engaged in activities that inspire and enthuse them, challenging them to think more deeply about their learning
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and support them in knowing how to make good progress
 - teachers consistently use assessment information when planning learning, so that they build upon what pupils already know and can do
 - disadvantaged pupils receive consistently effective support, so that they make the progress of which they are capable
 - all pupils know how to improve their work and commit to doing so, through teachers consistently following the school's policy on providing feedback.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
 - staff apply the whole-school policy for behaviour consistently and that pupils follow it, including by arriving punctually to lessons
 - the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school, particularly disadvantaged pupils, is reduced
 - the school offers more opportunities for extra-curricular participation that meet the interests of pupils
 - pupils develop greater confidence and resilience, so that they concentrate in lessons, engage fully and have consistently positive attitudes towards their learning.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The determined leadership of the recently appointed headteacher is bringing about rapid improvements at the school, notably in securing the stability of school staffing and in standards of behaviour. The headteacher has successfully halted the school's decline of recent years.
- The headteacher has communicated a clear vision for the future of the school to all staff, underpinned by the values held by the school and the trust of collaboration, opportunity, respect and excellence. However, leaders have not yet taken sufficient action to ensure that all teaching is good and that all pupils make good progress.
- The support and investment from the CORE Education Trust has been instrumental in ensuring a stable financial foundation for the school and in the recruitment of staff. The proportion of teaching provided by temporary staff has reduced considerably. Trust leaders have secured effective support for middle leaders, and this has enabled them to begin to improve the quality of the school's overall provision.
- There is a sense of optimism about the future of the school, and, despite very challenging circumstances, the morale of staff has been re-energised and is now positive. Leaders now have a strong visible presence around the school.
- Leaders, strongly supported by the trust, have identified accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses. Improvement plans focus on the school's key priorities. However, not all leaders, including governors, evaluate the impact of their actions precisely enough to inform future actions. The weak use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is an example of this.
- Until recently, there has been a lack of strategic oversight for pupils with SEND. Although this aspect of the school's work is beginning to improve and leadership is strengthening, it remains a key priority for the school.
- The effectiveness of subject leadership requires improvement, because the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. Recently, leaders' monitoring of learning and checking of the accuracy of assessment have begun to improve. This results from the tailored and well-received professional support that the senior leaders and the trust have provided.
- Leaders have recently introduced new programmes of professional training for staff. The training is proving effective in motivating staff and sustaining morale, but it is too soon to judge its impact on raising standards of achievement.
- Leaders provide effective support for teachers whose practice has sometimes been ineffective. Coaching and mentoring programmes are leading to improvements. However, consistency in the quality of teaching needs to improve more rapidly.
- Leaders have implemented a new element to the curriculum in key stage 3, based on learning skills and competencies, called 'literacy for life'. This initiative is in its infancy, and it is too soon to see the full impact on pupils' outcomes. However, inspectors' observations of learning and examination of pupils' work supports the school's performance information showing that pupils are beginning to make stronger progress.

Pupils in Year 7 told inspectors that they welcome this scheme, although pupils' views in Year 8 were mixed. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced across key stages 3 and 4.

- The programme for pupils' personal, social, health and economic development is well planned, although not always consistently taught by staff. Pupils benefit from a range of experiences which have a positive effective on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their understanding of British values.
- The leadership of safeguarding is effective. Following a thorough evaluation in October 2018, leaders have taken swift action to ensure that the safeguarding needs of vulnerable pupils are met.
- Newly qualified teachers are appreciative of the support they receive, as they start their professional careers.

Governance of the school

- Governance is provided by the local governing body and the trust board of directors. Both share leaders' ambitions for pupils' success. They recognise the areas in need of development and are keen to see rapid improvements.
- While records of local governors' meetings indicate that they ask challenging questions of the headteacher and senior leaders, their evaluation of key aspects of the school's work is not yet sharp enough. This includes their understanding about the impact of additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.
- Governors are well informed about the developments in the school. They have access to a wide range of accurate sources of information provided by school leaders and the trust to help them exercise their strategic responsibilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. A team of trained leaders supports the designated safeguarding lead effectively. The trust's safeguarding lead provides additional guidance and oversight.
- All staff understand what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's well-being. They receive regular training and safeguarding updates, including frequent questioning by designated leaders to check that their understanding is up to date.
- The checks made on the recruitment of staff are effective and monitored by senior and trust leaders. Procedures are now firmly in place for ensuring that all visitors to the school are suitably checked.
- Leaders have improved the curriculum to help pupils in understanding how to keep themselves safe.
- School leaders have recently reviewed their procedures for recording important actions in support of pupils who are vulnerable to harm. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies to ensure that pupils and families receive the right support in a timely manner.
- Pupils reported that they felt safe in the school. They can identify which adults they need to approach if they have any worries or concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent between subjects and between key stages. Pupils reported to inspectors that the quality of their learning experiences was too dependent upon which teacher they had. Inspection evidence confirmed this.
- Although the subject knowledge of teachers is secure, it is not routinely used to plan learning activities which enthuse or inspire pupils to do their best or find out more, particularly at key stage 4.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough, particularly for boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. Teachers do not routinely use information about pupils' prior attainment to ensure that their needs are identified or that work is set at the right level. Consequently, many middle- and higher-attaining pupils do not make as much progress as they should, because they are not sufficiently challenged.
- The use of assessment varies widely. It is not consistently well used to check pupils' understanding or show them how they could be more successful. Many pupils lack confidence in knowing and understanding what good learning is. As a result, the progress made by pupils is not rapid enough.
- The quality of teachers' questioning to ascertain what pupils know and can do is variable, particularly at key stage 4. Too often, questioning does not deepen pupils' knowledge or understanding.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their writing skills, although this is improving. While practice has recently strengthened in English, history and physical education, for example, the quality of pupils' extended writing and their application of subject-specific vocabulary are underdeveloped in several subjects, notably in science.
- The quality of presentation in pupils' work books is too variable, particularly for boys.
- Inspectors found that, in the most effective lessons, the relationships between pupils and their teachers were positive. In these lessons, including those in history, mathematics and Spanish, pupils were keen to do well and worked effectively, both independently and with other pupils. For example, in a Year 10 psychology lesson about schizophrenia, the modelling of expected learning outcomes was particularly strong. Similarly, the teacher's precise explanation and questioning about tense in biographical writing strongly helped Year 7 pupils' understanding in a 'literacy for life' session.
- Subject leaders have recently begun to improve the quality of curriculum planning and resources. The trust's support has provided subject leaders with stronger direction. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving at the school. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this additional support in pupils' outcomes by the end of key stage 4.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Although the curriculum for personal development is well planned and resourced, leaders do not ensure that all pupils receive effective teaching. Pupils report that the quality of their tutor sessions is too dependent on the quality of their tutor. As a result, not all pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school's programme of activities linked to careers education, advice and guidance is developing. Pupils have not all had access to impartial and personal careers advice when they need it, and the training for tutors is at an early stage of development. Leaders now provide pupils with general advice about the different options open to them post-16, and all pupils in Year 10 have undertaken work experience placements. Pupils in key stage 4 are very positive about their learning experiences linked to enterprise activities.
- Pupils reported to inspectors that they felt safe in the school. They have recently learned from visiting speakers about the impact of knife crime. Most pupils who spoke to inspectors expressed their confidence in staff to deal effectively with occurrences of bullying. Inspectors' scrutiny of the school's bullying records showed that incidents of bullying are dealt with.
- Although there are a number of opportunities for extra-curricular activity, mostly sports related, pupils reported that the range of options is narrow and does not always meet their interests and enthusiasms.
- Pupils who attend learning away from the main school campus are making good progress, due to the support and care they receive. Leaders ensure that these pupils follow appropriate courses and make regular checks to ensure that they are attending and behaving well. The school works closely with the North West Sharing Panel to ensure that pupils at risk of permanent exclusion are given every opportunity to remain in full-time education.
- Leaders promote the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. School assemblies and the personal development curriculum, implemented from September 2018, are used well to communicate the importance of themes including Holocaust Memorial Day and Black History month.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' levels of concentration are not consistent, particularly at key stage 4. When learning is not sufficiently engaging or set at the right level, pupils lose focus and low-level disruption results. Inspectors observed this in several lessons.

- In most lessons, pupils follow instructions from their teachers promptly. However, within and between different subject areas, including 'literacy for life' sessions at key stage 3, there is some variability in how well pupils apply themselves to their learning.
- Pupils' conduct around the school is generally calm and orderly. Pupils and staff reported that behaviour has improved greatly during the current school year as a result of leaders' raised expectations. This has led to a spike of fixed-term exclusions as leaders' higher expectations are enforced.
- Most pupils are punctual to their lessons, although some pupils are not. Inspectors found that lateness was particularly evident during lesson changeovers and following periods of social time.
- Overall attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Leaders have taken a range of decisive actions to improve attendance, including strengthening their communication with parents and carers. However, levels of persistent absence are currently above the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school remains high. Leaders are aware of the need to take further action to address this.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In recent years, pupils have not made enough progress in most curriculum subjects. In 2018, pupils' overall progress was low. Disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and those with SEND also made considerably less progress than other pupils nationally.
- The proportions of pupils gaining a standard pass and the proportions gaining a strong pass at GCSE English and mathematics have been below the national average for last two years. In 2018 these proportions were especially low.
- Progress has improved only slightly for pupils currently in Year 11. Stronger outcomes are evident in English, physical education and history, for example. There are clearer signs of stronger progress in the younger year groups. The implementation of a revised curriculum structure has positively supported this. However, the progress made by pupils in science is not improving rapidly enough.
- Leaders' tracking information and inspectors' scrutiny of work in pupils' books indicate that pupils currently in Years 7 to 10 are making better progress than has been the case in the past. Nevertheless, leaders recognise that Year 11 pupils are not on track to fulfil their potential.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is beginning to have a positive impact. Leaders have established a new 'literacy for life' curriculum and package of support for pupils who have fallen behind in Year 7. This programme supports the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, their self-confidence and resilience. Although the new approach is in its infancy, pupils are beginning to make better progress.
- The proportion of pupils securing placements that meet their needs for their next stage in education or training is increasing. Leaders are optimistic that all Year 11 pupils will be purposefully engaged in furthering their education or training by the end of summer 2019. This year, leaders have given much greater attention to ensuring that they support the most vulnerable pupils carefully.

School details

Unique reference number	138200
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10088609

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	513
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jagwant Johal
Headteacher	David Bailey
Telephone number	0121 729 7160
Website	https://corecentral.academy
Email address	enquiry@corecentral.academy
Date of previous inspection	29–30 April 2014

Information about this school

- Central Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The sixth form was closed at the end of the previous academic year.
- The recently appointed headteacher joined the school in September 2018. Two new deputy headteachers are due to join the school in July 2019.
- The school is part of the Core Education Trust, which it joined in March 2018. Directors of the trust are the appropriate authority, with some responsibilities delegated to the local governing body. The chief executive officer, who is also a member of the board of trustees, oversees the six schools currently in the trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is above average.

- Arrangements are in place for a very small number of pupils to access their education at alternative off-site provision on a full-time basis. The placements are the Titan Aston Academy, St John Wall Catholic School and the Arena Academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 32 lessons, all jointly with senior leaders. During these visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at a large sample of pupils' work across a wide range of subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with seven groups of pupils more formally and met with pupils informally during lunch and breaktime.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, and at breaktime and lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' conduct during the changeover between lessons.
- Inspectors met with a range of school leaders, including the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders.
- Two meetings were held with the chief executive officer and representatives from the board of trustees.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the school's self-evaluation; pupils' performance information; the minutes of the local governing body; behaviour and attendance records; bullying records; curriculum plans; and school policies.
- The lead inspector considered the 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

Chris Stevens, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Andy Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Eddie Wilkes	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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