

Inspection of a good school: St Birinus School

Mereland Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 8AZ

Inspection dates: 11–12 February 2020

Outcome

St Birinus School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Birinus School is a vibrant and inspiring place for pupils to learn. Pupils are very proud of their school. They feel it is a friendly and welcoming place where they really feel valued. Pupils say that 'staff really notice when we are doing well in and out of school'. A parent's comment that 'the school is helping to turn our boys into proper young men' is typical of many who say their sons thrive at the school.

Pupils conduct themselves well. They show respect and courtesy to their peers and the adults that work with them. Almost all pupils live up to leaders' high expectations of behaviour. Pupils understand the behaviour systems. They trust adults to manage behaviour and quickly deal with the rare incidents of bullying. The calm atmosphere in most lessons helps pupils to concentrate on their work and do their best.

Pupils take advantage of the extensive range of clubs and activities provided outside of their regular lessons. Many competitive activities, for instance the 'university challenge' and poetry competitions, are organised through the well-established house system. Pupils have numerous opportunities to develop their leadership skills, for example through the advanced learner programme and 'LEAD' days.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have made sure that the curriculum is interesting and well sequenced. They have carefully considered what pupils should learn and the order in which things are taught. For instance, in English, a more ambitious curriculum has been introduced in Years 7 to 9 which equips pupils with the knowledge and skills they need in key stage 4. In geography, leaders have prioritised the important key topics like global development and climate change, which pupils study in detail.

The key stage 4 curriculum begins in Year 9. Pupils study a broad range of subjects, with large numbers choosing to continue to study arts and technology subjects. Engineering is a particularly popular and successful subject. The uptake of languages is below the

national average but increasing. Leaders make sure that most aspects of the key stage 3 curriculum are taught in Years 7 and 8. Nonetheless, pupils do not study some subjects in as much depth as they should at key stage 3. For instance, in design and technology, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of design.

Most teachers use their strong subject knowledge to help pupils learn well. They present information in clear and interesting ways. Most teachers check pupils' understanding of the main ideas before introducing new work. Teaching and assessment practices help pupils to remember important ideas and information. However, leaders recognise that, in some lessons, teachers do not make sure that support is as well matched for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Therefore, pupils with SEND do not always learn and do as well as they could.

Leaders make sure that pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education, employment or training. Most achieve well in public examinations at the end of key stage 4. Outcomes in mathematics and humanities have been strong over time and science is improving. Pupils benefit from a comprehensive careers information and guidance programme, including regular opportunities to take part in work experience. Year 7 pupils were very enthusiastic about the recent 'take-over' day that allowed them to experience a workplace for a day.

Leaders have successfully raised expectations of pupils' behaviour. They support staff to establish clear routines and boundaries. Teachers and the pastoral team work effectively together to support pupils who may need additional help. The previously high rates of exclusions are now reducing.

The trust provides effective support to further strengthen leadership and the quality of education. Parents and carers, staff and pupils recognise the positive difference the new headteacher has made. Staff value the training they receive and leaders' concern for their workload and well-being.

The sixth form is thriving. Students achieve well in a wide range of A levels, particularly mathematics. Sixth-form students are fully involved in the life of the school. They organise many events, such as the mentoring programme to help younger pupils with their reading and mathematics learning. After sixth form, a high proportion of students successfully enter further education, employment or training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff share in the responsibility for ensuring that pupils are kept safe. Leaders set the tone that 'it could happen here'. The safeguarding team works well together to support pupils at risk. They act quickly and maintain good communication with families and external agencies. Leaders regularly update staff on local safeguarding issues through training and the weekly safeguarding bulletin. Staff at all levels know what to do if they have concerns about pupils.

Parents say that their children feel safe at school. Pupils know who to go to if they need help and feel confident that their concerns will be dealt with.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The key stage 3 curriculum is not as well planned in a handful of subjects, such as design and technology. This means that pupils do not learn all key stage 3 subjects in as much depth as they should. Leaders should ensure that what pupils study in Years 7 to 9 is comparable in ambition to the scope of the national curriculum in all subjects.
- Despite leaders' ambitious intentions, support for pupils with SEND is variable. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not access the curriculum as well as others or achieve as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills to make sure that they meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 22 March 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	138762
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10122247
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	853
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	127
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Marcus Gover
Headteacher	William Manning
Website	www.st-birinus-school.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	22 March 2016

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Ridgeway Education Trust. The chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust is also the executive headteacher.
- The headteacher was previously seconded from one of the schools in the trust. He took up the post on a permanent basis in September 2019.
- This is a boys' comprehensive school with a mixed sixth form. There are currently 127 boys and 169 girls in the sixth form, making a total of 296 students. The girls are on roll at Didcot Girls' School.
- The school uses the following alternative providers for a very small number of pupils: Abingdon and Witney College, Meadowbrook College and SOFEA.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the headteacher and senior leaders. We also met with a range of teaching and support staff.
- We evaluated the quality of education by looking in detail at the teaching of English, science and geography. We discussed curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers from the lessons visited about the curriculum. In addition, we discussed curriculum design and looked at pupils' work in art, design and technology, history and languages.
- We evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. We reviewed the school's single central record. We met with the designated safeguarding lead and pastoral staff.
- I met with three trustees, including the CEO of the trust, and two members of the governing body.
- We considered 171 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and the free-text responses. We met with groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school and talked to pupils informally about school.

Inspection team

Mark Bagust, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jane Cartwright

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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