

Inspection of an outstanding school: Bristol Cathedral Choir School

College Square, Bristol, BS1 5TS

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 September 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Bristol Cathedral Choir School. There is a deep sense of community. Pupils enjoy strong friendships with each other and have positive relationships with adults. Most pupils are confident that if bullying occurs staff deal with it well. Pupils are respectful and are interested in the world around them, particularly in social justice and climate change.

However, in some subjects, teachers have not planned the curriculum well enough to ensure that pupils remember important information. Similarly, teaching in a minority of subjects is not always adapted well to meet pupils' needs. This means some pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not do as well as they could in these subjects.

Leaders and teachers have high expectations. Around school and in classes, pupils behave well. However, on occasions, teachers do not ensure that pupils are well prepared to learn in class. Some pupils do not take enough pride in their work.

The wide variety of lunchtime and after-school activities that pupils can take part in enriches their experience. Many of these opportunities focus on the school's musical specialism but extend to sports and other cultural activities. The school has longstanding relationships with other schools in France and Germany and exchange visits happened regularly until restrictions due the COVID-19 pandemic hindered international travel.

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

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum, both during and beyond the normal school day, is broad and engaging for pupils, including students in the sixth form. The school's specialism in music develops pupils' knowledge and self-confidence through participation and performance. In other subjects, such as English and history, leaders have thought carefully about what will be taught and how the content is organised. In these subjects, pupils remember what they have been taught well. Pupils read fluently and competently. However, in a few subjects, pupils are asked to grasp complex ideas before they have been taught the essential knowledge they need first. For example, in geography, pupils lack sufficient knowledge about the climate to fully appreciate different biomes.

Most teaching is based on an accurate assessment of what pupils know and can do. This allows teachers to plan their teaching to achieve the maximum impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding. When this is not the case, however, pupils who have a secure grasp of the content being taught are not set suitably demanding goals over time. Pupils sit quietly and wait for the others to catch up. This is as true in the sixth form as it is in the rest of the school.

Leaders and trustees are clear in their expectation that all pupils should receive a broad, high-quality curriculum. However, typically just under half of pupils are entered for the English Baccalaureate. This is largely due to the small proportion of pupils studying languages in key stage 4. The sixth form only offers A level qualifications and the extended project qualification. However, this is meeting the needs of students who wish to continue to study at the school in the sixth form.

Leaders' and trustees' investment in supporting pupils with SEND and children looked after by the local authority is paying off. Additional teaching, support groups and other programmes are making sure that pupils can access the full curriculum and achieve well. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator has thoroughly reviewed the school's systems and approaches. The information teachers receive about pupils' needs and the teaching approaches they should use is clear and well-thought through. Many teachers have begun to use this information well and pupils thrive, but some teaching does not take enough account of it. So, on occasion, pupils with SEND do not do as well as they should.

Trust and school leaders have a broad overview of what is going well and what needs to improve, taking into account the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The school's development plan reflects this, and leaders are working on many of the right things. However, some senior and middle leaders do not have the knowledge they need to provide the specific support or challenge to colleagues to improve subject curriculums and approaches to teaching.

Leaders are conscious of staff workload and are keen to ensure that it is manageable. Currently, teachers are reworking their plans for GCSEs so that all the schools in the trust can share in resources and staff training. This is causing additional workload temporarily.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that curriculum planning and implementation and the impact of middle and senior leaders may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

As a result of the school's personal, social and health education programme, pupils are knowledgeable about the risks that they may face, including sexual violence and harassment. They are clear about who to report their concerns to and are confident that adults in school will support them.

Teachers and other adults have ongoing training in how to keep pupils safe. Some of the administrative systems are not strong enough. Pupils and staff are clear about reporting their concerns, but some records and referrals lack sufficient detail. Many leaders are involved in these arrangements, but they have not ensured that their systems always reflect their strong practice.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not assure themselves of how well the curriculum is implemented and learned across all subjects. Some staff conducting checks on the curriculum do not have the subject-specific knowledge they need to evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses. This means, in some subjects, leaders do not identify when pupils are not learning as well as they should, for example when sequences of work are not sufficiently demanding. Leaders must ensure that all senior and middle leaders have the expertise to carry out their roles effectively, so that their work strengthens the quality of education pupils receive.
- In a few subjects, there are weaknesses in subject curriculum plans and the use of assessment. This means pupils are expected to grasp complex ideas before they have been taught sufficient knowledge to understand the building blocks they need first. As a result, some pupils, including those with SEND, do not do as well as they should. Leaders must ensure that staff have the subject knowledge and expertise they need to adapt their teaching, so that the curriculum enables all pupils to achieve well.
- Although the culture of care for pupils is strong, some records do not include as much detail as they could. Leaders and trustees must ensure that the systems for managing safeguarding, including record-keeping, are of suitably high quality.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in January 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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	135575
Local authority	City of Bristol
Inspection number	10199491
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1143
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	440
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stephen Parsons
Headteacher	Joseph Thurston
Website	http://bccs.bristol.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	12-13 January 2016

Information about this school

- The number of pupils attending the school, particularly in the sixth form, has increased considerably since the previous inspection.
- Six pupils attend two registered alternative provision settings: Bristol Hospital Education Service and South Gloucestershire and Stroud College. Four pupils attend unregistered alternative providers, namely Education 1st, St Werburgh's City Farm and Urban Pursuit.
- The school's sporting facilities are located at Failand Sports Ground, Beggar Bush Lane, Bristol, BS8 3TG.
- Bristol Cathedral Choir School maintains its heritage as a specialist music school. A tenth of pupils are admitted because of their musical ability.
- This is a distinctly Christian academy. Its last statutory inspection of Anglican and Methodist schools (SIAMS) took place in February 2020.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim headteacher, senior and subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, groups of staff, the chief executive officer of Cathedral Schools Trust and representatives from the trust board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, geography, music, and science. Inspectors visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and held discussions with groups of pupils and groups of teachers.
- Inspectors considered how well the school protects pupils and keeps them safe.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- The inspector considered 170 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including 129 free-text responses, 132 responses to the pupil survey and 71 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

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