

# Inspection of City of Birmingham School

The Minerva Centre, Thornthwaite Close, Frankley, Birmingham, West Midlands B45 0DS

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Inspection dates: 9 and 10 March 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a time of exciting change at the City of Birmingham School. A brand-new curriculum and refreshed approach to behaviour are making a notable difference. The school motto says that the community is 'moving forwards together'. Inspectors agree.

As a result of poor experiences in the past or exclusions from mainstream schools, many pupils' education has been disrupted. Many have not had their additional needs met or even identified before they arrive, such as special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

In a very short time at City of Birmingham School, pupils begin to recover their self-belief. Pastoral support and opportunities such as forest school, skiing and theatre visits enrich their experiences. However, lessons do not always consider what pupils know, remember, or can do.

When challenging behaviour happens, most staff work hard to understand why pupils struggle and provide the right support. Consequently, there is generally a calm environment. However, too many pupils do not attend enough, meaning they miss valuable learning to prepare them for the future.

Pupils, staff and leaders know that bullying can happen, but pupils are confident that staff will support them if they feel bullied. Leaders investigate all incidents and act when needed.

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

Since the last inspection, the leadership team has driven improvement. A new curriculum and a new approach to behaviour are improving both provision and outcomes. All senior leaders are ambitious for the school to continue to improve and are taking the right actions to make this happen.

Leaders have thought carefully about the curriculum they provide for all pupils. They do not want any pupils to fall behind their peers. For this reason, pupils follow all subjects of the national curriculum. Courses in health and social care, hair and beauty and BTEC National Diploma sport broaden the vocational education of older pupils. However, how this curriculum is taught does not always consider what pupils have learned, know, or remember. When pupils arrive, City of Birmingham School often does not receive much information about pupils' needs. Staff at City of Birmingham School work hard to make sure they quickly gain an accurate understanding of what pupils can do, but this information is not always used well to plan learning. This means too many pupils struggle to understand new knowledge or find that lessons are far too easy.

Many of the pupils start at City of Birmingham School not being able to read well. In the primary part of the school, teachers work quickly to provide pupils with the right support to help them to read. In the secondary phase, the profile of reading has not been as high. This means that the pupils who come to City of Birmingham School not being able to read do not always learn to read during their time at the school. This affects how well they can access different lessons or the world around them.

Since the last inspection, a great emphasis has been placed on ensuring that pupils with SEND get the support they need. A new team is starting to support all staff in providing the right support for those pupils with SEND. However, pupils' special educational needs are not always identified quickly enough. This means the curriculum is not always adapted well to help these pupils learn in the best possible way.

Leaders know that life in modern Britain is challenging for many pupils. Many pupils are at risk of gang affiliation or criminal exploitation outside of school. Leaders involve various services to support pupils, including individual mentoring and mental health support. Enrichment sessions in the secondary phase provide pupils with opportunities to learn skills such as rock climbing. Trips to the beach and countryside widen pupils' experiences.

Too many pupils do not attend school enough. This affects how well they learn and their long-term outcomes. Most pupils have only recently started at the school, and attendance at previous schools was poor for many. Leaders are tenacious in addressing the reason why they do not attend. Leaders work closely with the local authority attendance officers to support more to attend more often. Even when pupils choose not to attend, staff will make daily contact with them and provide work for them to complete at home.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

When staff are worried about pupils' well-being, they act quickly to report these concerns. Regular communication between leaders at different sites and additional alternative providers means that concerns are swiftly raised and acted upon no matter where a child is based. Training is regular, and staff knowledge is tested so leaders can be assured the culture of safeguarding is strong.

Leaders know that pupils could be at risk when absent from school. To reduce the risk of harm, they work closely with social care services, the police and youth offending teams to make sure daily contact is made with all pupils.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the curriculum is inconsistent across the school. Teachers do not always plan lessons based precisely enough on what pupils already know, so some find work too difficult while others are not appropriately challenged. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum matches all pupils' abilities well to ensure that pupils make the greatest possible progress.
- Provision to help those secondary-aged pupils who do not yet read well is underdeveloped. This means that too many do not develop those essential reading skills to help them access the school curriculum or life in general. Leaders need to ensure that the good practice in the primary phase is continued into the secondary phase so that all pupils learn how to read properly whilst at City of Birmingham School.
- The identification and assessment of SEND are not always timely and accurate. Many pupils start with undiagnosed and unmet needs that the school does not always spot. This affects how much progress pupils will make. Leaders need to ensure that, on entry, SEND needs are accurately identified and assessed and the right provision put in place to support access to the curriculum.
- Too many pupils do not attend school frequently enough. Attendance dropped due to the pandemic, but attendance is still too low and has not recovered. Leaders need to continue to raise the level of attendance of all pupils at the school so that they can access the provision and curriculum that will help them be ready for the next steps in education, employment and/or training.

## How can I feedback 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	103146
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10202640
<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	426
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Barry Bowles
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steve Howell
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.cityofbirminghamschool.com">www.cityofbirminghamschool.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The vast majority of pupils at City of Birmingham School have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools.
- A smaller number are placed at City of Birmingham School because they are at risk of permanent exclusion from their own school. Some have recently arrived in the local area, and appropriate specialist provision has not yet been identified.
- Since the last inspection, the school has been reorganised into seven different sites, based on key stages.
- The Minerva Centre is no longer used as a teaching centre.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers that a small number of pupils attend full time. In most cases, these are to access specific work-related learning opportunities.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors focused on the following subjects: reading, English, mathematics, art, science and personal, social, health and economic education. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils and staff about the way these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff, leaders and governors about safeguarding arrangements. They scrutinised the record of employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records. They also found out about safety procedures and routines.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors visited the three alternative providers that the school uses to review the quality of safeguarding and commissioning and provision.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, governors, teachers, and pupils. Inspectors spoke to representatives from the local authority, a school improvement partner, headteachers of schools that have used City of Birmingham School, and local authority officers who have worked with the school. They also talked informally with parents, carers, escorts, drivers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.

## Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Yates	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Price	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gemma Mann	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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