

# Inspection of a good school: James Brindley School

Bell Barn Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, West Midlands B15 2AF

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Inspection dates:

28 and 29 June 2022

## Outcome

James Brindley School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, staff and parents agree that James Brindley is one very special school. Pupils are valued, staff are proud and parents are positive. One parent told inspectors that James Brindley helped their child succeed when they could easily have failed. Another said that the positive difference to their child has radiated to the whole family. These views were representative of many.

Leaders and staff are driven to get the best outcomes in whatever site or service pupils attend. Pupils attend teaching centres to help meet their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), while others attend specialist centres to get mental health support. Wherever they go, the level of academic and vocational ambition is high. In the hospitals, staff work at hospital bedsides to ensure pupils' education does not suffer.

Pupils inspectors spoke to said that respecting each other is so important and is what happens at James Brindley every day. Most pupils told us that bullying does not occur, or if it does, the staff are good at dealing with it. Leaders acknowledge that pupils' understanding of bullying varies, but all incidents are investigated if the word 'bullying' is used.

Behaviour across all sites is generally calm and purposeful. Inspectors saw very few cases of unwanted behaviour, but it was dealt with sensitively and quickly when it did occur.

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

Over the past few years, many changes at James Brindley have further enhanced the quality of education for pupils. Since the last inspection, tenacious leaders and supportive trustees have focused on providing memorable and influential learning opportunities for all pupils. Leaders' actions are now leading to even more ambitious outcomes for many pupils.

Pupils start at James Brindley with a wide range of additional needs linked to autistic spectrum conditions (ASC), social, emotional and mental health (SEMH), health or medical or other SEND. In all cases, staff work closely with professionals to accurately identify and assess these needs. When pupils join, teachers work hard to get the information from previous schools to plan a curriculum that builds on pupils' prior learning. In the case of the hospital bases, not a moment is wasted while they wait for this information. Within three days of the pupil being admitted into the hospital, teachers have started with an assessment curriculum to keep the focus on learning. However, in a small number of cases, lessons that follow this assessment do not always prioritise the knowledge pupils they would have learned in their own school should they not be in hospital. This means pupils could be potentially disadvantaged when returning to school.

The work at the specialist teaching centres, where teachers work alongside doctors, nurses, therapists and other health professionals, is powerful. The multi-agency working helps to prioritise pupils' needs at any one time, and leads to overcoming learning barriers. Consequently, most pupils achieve ambitious outcomes, including a broad range of qualifications. Many go on to university and/or independent life and employment.

Reading holds a very high profile, and staff are committed to developing pupils who have a love of reading. Across the curriculum, staff provide regular opportunities to develop reading ability and comprehension skills. In hospitals, regular book trolley visits provide reading opportunities. In the specialist centres, newspaper articles provide the foundation to discuss topical issues and develop vocabulary and word decoding skills.

Lessons in the teaching centres often enrich the pupils' knowledge by providing lessons that build on what they know and understand. Music and art lessons offer opportunities to develop creative and expressive skills. Visits to places such as the Tate Modern and the local ICON gallery provide inspiration from famous and local artists. The school has achieved the Arts Council Gold status. However, on a few occasions, some lessons do not precisely build on what pupils know, and the steps to new knowledge are too large. This can, on occasion, make learning and remembering harder.

Preparing pupils for life in modern Britain is rightly a priority. Lessons in avoiding criminal exploitation and drug and alcohol abuse work alongside visits to museums and art galleries and opportunities to learn kayaking or camping skills. 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' raise the profile of positive mental health. However, in a small number of cases, teachers have not considered what those pupils on short-term placements would be missing out on from their own school's personal development provision, which means that they could miss gaining knowledge that will help them prepare for life in their communities.

Over the last few years, behaviour and emotional well-being have been prioritised. Leaders know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact the emotional well-being of many of the school's pupils. The new approach is now based on responding to behaviour in a different way. Consequently, staff are now more skilled in understanding why behaviour could be challenging, and acting quickly to support when needed.

Staff speak positively about working at James Brindley. Most are proud to be staff members and enjoy working at the school. However, quite a high number have raised

concerns about workload. While they know changes are positive, this impacts on how much work they need to do. Leaders and trustees are mindful of this and the expectations placed on staff. The 'Evolve Together' initiative at the school aims to ensure that more staff can contribute their views and raise concerns when needed.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Regular training aims to ensure that all staff have the necessary skills to act when they feel pupils are at risk. When concerns are raised, those responsible for safeguarding act quickly to investigate. As a result, pupils and families get the support they need.

When issues arise, such as young people becoming drawn into gang culture, leaders act quickly to adapt and change the curriculum to provide support and awareness. Leaders are refining their safeguarding training programme for staff to ensure that this programme equally responds and adapts when those issues arise.

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

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

- When planning sequences of learning, there are times when teachers do not prioritise the most essential content for pupils to learn. This means that pupils may miss learning knowledge that underpins key concepts. Leaders should ensure that teachers identify the core concepts and their components in the curriculum that they want pupils to learn.

## **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 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 good in January 2017.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139526
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10211230
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	421
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	35
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The Trustees
<b>Chair of trustees</b>	Alastair Cowen
<b>Principal</b>	Hardip Bissell
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.jamesbrindley.org.uk">www.jamesbrindley.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	17 and 18 January 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- James Brindley is a provision based on 11 sites and one home teaching service. There are three teaching centres for pupils with SEMH and/or ASC at Northfield, Parkway and Dovedale. Hospital education provision is provided by James Brindley at Heartlands Hospital, Birmingham Children's Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Good Hope Hospital and the Royal Orthopaedic hospital. Specialist teaching centres for pupils with complex SEMH are based at Newbridge Specialists centre, The Willows and the Ardenleigh centre. The school also runs a short-term provision that provides education for those pupils while at home recovering from illness.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership team. The current principal was appointed in September 2019. They joined the recently appointed vice-principal, who was appointed in April 2019. A new assistant principal was appointed in September 2019, and a further assistant principal was appointed in September 2021.

- A new chair of the trustees was appointed in September 2021, having previously served as a trustee.
- The school uses five alternative provisions, two of which are unregistered.

## Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, inspectors focused on the following subjects: reading and English literacy, mathematics, music, art, and personal, social and health education. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, examined teachers' plans and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- Inspectors visited 10 of the 12 James Brindley named sites and two alternative provisions. The remaining two James Brindley hospital school sites currently had no pupils on roll and no staff.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff, leaders and trustees about safeguarding arrangements. They examined the record of employment checks on school staff and other school records. They also found out about safety procedures and routines.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, trustees, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life. One inspector spoke to a local authority representative and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors also spoke to representatives of the mainstream primary and secondary schools commissioning places at James Brindley to gain their views about the quality of communication and impact of the provision.

## Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gemma Mann	Ofsted Inspector
Amjid Zaman	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Hill	Her Majesty's Inspector

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