

Inspection of a good school: Birchills Church of England Community Academy

Farrington Street, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 8NF

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 December 2022

Outcome

Birchills Church of England Community Academy continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Birchills stands as a beacon within its community. Pupils behave beautifully. Leaders and staff show great care and kindness. They also set the highest expectations for pupils' learning. From this secure base of care and challenge, all pupils flourish and fly.

Leaders have created a safe haven where pupils learn to respect people of all faiths and none. Adults deal with bullying if it should happen. Pupils show a maturity beyond their years. Everywhere you look, you see acts of kindness. Pupils know the right things to do. For example, the youngest children help each other to put their yellow jackets on to go out to play. The older pupils help their peers to retrieve their work on a computer.

Pupils value their learning. They know it is important and will help them to go on and get a job later in life. They are inspired by the author and artist studies they do. Pupils make connections between what they learn now and potential opportunities. For example, knowing that learning about medicines and drugs may lead on to studying to be a doctor. They say these opportunities can help make our Earth a better place as we find cures for diseases.

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

Leaders have set out an ambitious and aspirational pathway of learning for all pupils. The trust's shared belief of 'children first' is clearly visible. Leaders have given great attention to placing the right staff in the right places to get the best out of both staff and pupils. This is successful. Staff are happy and proud of what they do. From learning to play the ukulele alongside pupils and having hot chocolate and marshmallows around the campfire as a staff team, they feel cared for, valued and looked after.

Leaders are true believers in demanding the best for, and of, pupils. They say, and they are, 'The voice for those pupils who don't have one.' This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders and staff take the time to really know and understand the specific needs of pupils. From here, they put the right help and support in place. This is for both pupils' personal and learning needs. Leaders keep a close eye on the difference the support makes. They make changes if required. They stand firm in challenging outside agencies to get what each pupil needs and deserves. All of this adds up to pupils, including those with SEND, achieving well and being successful members of school life in the fullest sense.

Leaders make sure that all staff teach phonics and reading in the same way. This helps pupils to build what they know, starting in Nursery with many songs, rhymes and stories. Pupils learn how sounds go together to make words, and how words go together to make sentences. They combine this learning to read increasingly complex texts. Clear systems of support are in place for pupils who find learning to read tricky. As a result, pupils learn to read well. They enjoy reading. They can recall authors they have studied and the many books they have read or had read to them. Pupils appreciate that they learn about inspiring authors from a range of backgrounds and faiths.

Pupils' thirst for, and excellent behaviour in, learning starts in the early years. The inside and outside areas are set up to make the most of every minute of learning. The environment hooks and engages children into exploring, enquiring and gaining expertise. Staff play their part in extending children's learning. Children show that they get better at mixing paints and controlling their use of colour. They show that they can count and use numbers in different ways. Staff help these youngest children gain the essentials in all areas of learning so they are ready to move into Year 1.

Pupils build on these essentials lesson by lesson, term by term and year by year for their time in school. This step-by-step process across subjects is helping pupils to achieve well. They are remembering their learning over time. For example, pupils spoke of how they get better at manipulating texts and images on the computer. They can explain the process of creating an animation using technical words correctly. They know this could lead them to becoming games designers.

There is a richness of moral purpose that can be seen, heard and felt across the school. The school's values are woven throughout the school day. The inspector experienced a beautiful, mindful moment of Year 6 pupils and staff skilfully playing ukuleles to the Lord's Prayer. There was unity in this special moment. This is just one of many special moments that pupils have during their time at Birchills.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are relentless in their safeguarding rigour, including checking that staff are safe to work in school. Clear systems and processes make sure that 'niggles are noted' and that everyone knows what to do, when and how to do it. Staff and pupils follow these expectations exactly. Whether managing behaviour, sharing concerns or providing food,

clothing and household items, nothing is too much trouble for this school community. This makes a real and daily difference to pupils and their families.

Pupils know much about safety. From knowing it is indoor play due to the dangers of ice, or understanding the consequences of peer pressure in friendships, they are well equipped to keep themselves safe.

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 an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good on 28 February and 1 March 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.

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	139435
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10226880
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	441
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alison Primrose
Principal	James Dean (Executive Principal)
Website	www.birchills.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 February to 1 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of St. Chad's Academies Trust.
- The school runs a breakfast club.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- There has been a recent leadership restructure in September 2022. The substantive principal became the executive principal in September 2022. Several other senior leader roles changed at this time, too. There is now a head of school, an assistant principal and family support worker in place. The special educational needs coordinator took up the role in September 2021.
- The school is part of the Church of England Diocese of Lichfield. The school's section 48 inspection was carried out on 23 June 2016.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, computing, and art and design. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also looked at pupils' work, spoke to leaders and visited lessons to consider mathematics.
- The inspector also spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects, including history, geography and English.
- The inspector listened to a sample of pupils read.
- The inspector had formal meetings with the executive principal, the head of school, other leaders, school staff and pupils. They also met with the trust's chief executive officer, director of learning and two members of the local academy council, including the chair.
- The inspector had a phone call conversation with the chair of the trust and the Christian Distinctiveness Adviser from Lichfield Diocese.
- The inspector talked informally with pupils and staff to gather general information about school life. In addition, they took account of the responses to Ofsted's surveys of staff's and parents' and carers' views.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at lunchtime. They spoke formally with groups of pupils as well as talking to pupils in lessons and around school.
- The inspector met with leaders about the school's safeguarding procedures. They reviewed policies and records relating to safeguarding and behaviour. The inspector spoke to pupils and staff about pupils' safety.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and information on the school's website.

Inspection team

Kirsty Foulkes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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