

# Inspection of Birkenhead High School Academy

86 Devonshire Place, Prenton, Merseyside CH43 1TY

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Inspection dates: 25 and 26 April 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

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

Pupils are proud to attend this school. They feel happy and safe. Pupils understand the importance of tolerating people who are different to themselves. They embrace diversity. Leaders deal with any incidents of bullying quickly and effectively.

Pupils enjoy the wide range of opportunities that are available to them as part of the school curriculum and beyond. For example, pupils in key stages 3 and 4 appreciate the enrichment sessions at the end of each day. Sixth-form students benefit from developing a wide range of leadership skills.

Most pupils value their education. Across the school, teachers encourage pupils to do their best. Overall, pupils are keen to learn new knowledge and information. For example, pupils enjoy participating in discussions and debates about topical issues. Children in the early years and in the junior school enjoy learning outdoors. In the main, the curriculum is enabling most current pupils to achieve well. In this all-through school, staff prepare pupils well for the next steps in their education.

Typically, staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Most pupils conduct themselves well. In the early years, children are taught to share and take turns. In the sixth form, students demonstrate independence and behave with maturity.

Pupils have a strong voice. For example, through the school council, they help to shape changes to how the school is run. Many pupils participate in the school's cadet group. Overall, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

Leaders have thought carefully about how to design a curriculum that meets pupils' learning needs. They have ensured that the school's curriculum is designed to flow from the early years through to the sixth form. For example, leaders have taken care to ensure that staff know exactly what knowledge pupils have learned in the previous key stage. As a result, most teachers design new learning that builds on what pupils already know and can do.

In this all-through school, leaders ensure that staff access quality ongoing training. Staff benefit from learning together, regardless of the phase in which they are teaching. This enables staff to have an appreciation of how the curriculum is delivered in each key stage. This training also helps teachers to think about the most appropriate activities to deliver new learning to pupils as they move through the school.

Current pupils are benefiting from the improvements that leaders have made to the design and delivery of the curriculum. Although pupils' outcomes by the end of key stage 2 in 2022 were not consistently strong, leaders have taken the necessary action to improve the quality of education for pupils. For example, current pupils in

the junior school are learning well across the range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 are also achieving well. Children in the early years are well prepared for key stage 1. While there remains a few issues with how well some disadvantaged pupils are learning and progressing through the curriculum, leaders are taking effective steps to address this.

Leaders have put into place a range of appropriate systems to assess pupils' learning. However, in some subjects, these systems are not implemented as effectively as they could be. At times, some teachers move on to new learning before they have checked that pupils are ready. This means that a small number of pupils, including a few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not have secure enough foundations on which to build new knowledge.

The leaders and staff responsible for pupils with SEND have created effective plans to support those pupils with additional learning needs. Staff understand how to implement these support plans and how to adapt the delivery of the curriculum for most pupils with SEND. Leaders are also taking the necessary steps to provide staff with additional training to develop further how well they meet these pupils' learning needs.

Leaders have successfully prioritised reading across the school. Pupils read a wide range of high-quality texts. Staff build opportunities into the curriculum for pupils to develop a love of reading. As a result of leaders' work to promote reading, pupils can discuss confidently a range of authors and genres. Pupils benefit from the school's well-stocked libraries. For example, older pupils, including sixth-form students, have access to high-quality non-fiction texts.

Leaders have implemented a phonics programme into the junior school, which includes the early years. Staff in the junior school have been trained to deliver the programme with fidelity. Consequently, most pupils in Year 1 can read fluently and confidently. Leaders have put in place sessions to help those pupils who find reading more difficult to keep up and catch up.

Leaders have designed appropriate support for those pupils who need extra help to develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills in the senior school. However, leaders have not ensured that those pupils in key stage 3 who are at the earlier stages of learning to read get the phonics lessons that they require. This means that a small number of older pupils who find reading more difficult struggle to access all that the curriculum has to offer.

Pupils in the junior and senior schools benefit from a wide range of opportunities to widen their horizons. For example, they benefit from visitors to school who speak on a range of topics and issues, a wider variety of trips and a broad selection of clubs and enrichment opportunities where they can develop their skills and talents.

Leaders have taken care to enhance the personal development opportunities provided to students in the sixth form. Sixth-former students value discussing and debating a wide range of important issues around their social and personal well-

being. Subject leaders have provided sixth-form students with a suitable range of resources to spark their imagination and to help them to learn beyond the taught academic curriculum. For example, leaders have included links to wider reading and research to prepare students for university.

Leaders have created an effective careers programme for pupils in the senior school. They have considered the skills needs in the local area to ensure that pupils are prepared for a range of careers which are in demand. Leaders also use links with their alumni to provide pupils with a range of opportunities to hear about specific career routes first hand. Furthermore, in the junior school, pupils are given appropriate encounters into the world of work. As a result of leaders' effective work in this area, most pupils go on to appropriate study either post-16 or post-18.

The trust has effective oversight of the school and successfully holds leaders to account for the quality of education that pupils receive. Staff and pupils benefit from the wider opportunities available to them through the trust training programmes. Staff feel well supported in this school. They appreciate that leaders listen to their views and are approachable if there are any concerns.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are vigilant to any safeguarding concerns. Staff are appropriately trained. They are knowledgeable about the different forms of abuse that pupils may face. Adults know exactly what to do if they have any potential concerns about pupils. Staff make safeguarding referrals in a timely manner.

Leaders have created strong relationships with pupils' families. Leaders use their knowledge of pupils and families to identify the most appropriate range of support. For example, they engage external agencies, when required.

Leaders provide plentiful opportunities to help pupils learn how to keep safe, including in the local area. Pupils can apply their age-appropriate knowledge of safety in practical situations. Pupils know who to turn to if they have any concerns or worries.

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

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

- A small number of pupils are at the earlier stages of learning to read. Leaders have not provided suitable phonics teaching for these pupils. This means that some of these pupils struggle to access elements of the curriculum because they cannot read with fluency and accuracy. Leaders must ensure that they implement a phonics and early reading programme for those older pupils who find reading more difficult.

- Some teachers do not use leaders' assessment systems consistently well to establish what pupils, including some pupils with SEND, know and can do. At times, teachers move pupils on to new learning before they have sufficiently secure foundations on which to build new knowledge. Leaders should ensure that all teachers are confident in how to use assessments systems to establish where pupils are in their learning.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135877
<b>Local authority</b>	Wirral
<b>Inspection number</b>	10199458
<b>Type of school</b>	All-through
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Girls
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,202
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	124
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Ann Ewing
<b>Principal</b>	Rebecca Mahony
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.birkenheadhigh.gdst.net">www.birkenheadhigh.gdst.net</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	13 and 14 October 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school has been a member of the Girls' Day School Trust, an academy trust, since January 2009.
- The principal, chair of trustees and chief executive officer have been appointed to their roles since the previous inspection.
- Leaders use two registered and three unregistered providers of alternative provision for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

- 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.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, history, English, science, and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited some lessons, spoke with pupils and teachers, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors heard pupils read to a trusted adult.
- Inspectors met with the principal, other senior leaders, the special educational needs team, subject leaders and teachers. The lead inspector also spoke to the chief executive officer of the trust and with a representative from the local authority.
- The lead inspector spoke to the chair of the trust and the chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors checked safeguarding procedures, including the recruitment checks made on staff. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead, as well as staff and pupils, to discuss wider aspects of safeguarding. They scrutinised a range of documentation relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including that relating to the curriculum. Inspectors also reviewed information about pupils' behaviour. They scrutinised leaders' improvement plans and their self-evaluation documentation.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in corridors, at breaktimes, at lunchtimes and in lessons. They also spoke with pupils about behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their programme of wider personal development.
- Inspectors considered the responses from parents and carers to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

## Inspection team

Elaine Mawson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector
Gil Bourgade	Ofsted Inspector

Claire Cropper  
Joe Barker

His Majesty's Inspector  
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