

# Inspection of Silver Birch School

170 Packington Avenue, Shard End, Birmingham B34 7RD

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Inspection dates: 27 to 29 June 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
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Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
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Personal development	<b>Good</b>
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Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	<b>Yes</b>
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## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils get a fresh start at Silver Birch School. Many have had difficulties in other schools and have missed a lot of education. At Silver Birch, staff take an interest in their lives. They find out what motivates them, and they support them to set goals and feel good about themselves.

Pupils study a broad range of subjects. English, mathematics and science are taught every day. Pupils work towards qualifications that will help them get jobs or a place at college. In addition, they have access to job-related training and work experience placements.

Poor behaviour does happen. In response, staff are patient, kind and treat pupils fairly. They also set very clear rules that pupils have to follow. Bullying is not accepted. Pupils are taught how to recognise it and to understand the damage it causes. Over time, many pupils' behaviour and attendance improves. However, some pupils have too many absences, which means they miss out on the positive and supportive activities that happen there.

Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. They keep them safe at school and support them to believe in themselves. These optimistic expectations help pupils to re-engage with education and raise their aspirations for the future.

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

The school's leaders are positive role models for staff and pupils. They set clear boundaries for pupils and make sure these are enforced. For example, mobile phones are handed in at the start of each day. These consistent expectations help to reduce potential distractions in lessons. While some disruptive behaviour still happens, staff manage it well and it reduces over time.

When pupils first start at the school, many have missed a lot of education. They are at very different places with their learning and behaviour. Most have gaps in what they know. The staff use simple assessments well to check on this and to make sure the curriculum meets pupils' needs. They ensure that pupils read every day and choose texts that match pupils' interests and reading levels. Staff provide phonics teaching for those pupils who need it. However, the resources that staff use for this are not always suitable.

Leaders have designed the curriculum well. English, mathematics and science are taught every day and pupils work towards qualifications. Other subjects, such as physical education, music, art and design, are taught each week. Leaders also use two outside providers effectively in order to increase pupils' options. Pupils can take vocational courses such as social care or landscaping. This gives pupils workplace skills and supports the school's successful careers guidance programme. All of the Year 11 and 12 pupils who are leaving this year are going on to a job, training or further education.

As well as academic and vocational studies, staff aim to build up pupils' feelings of self-worth and confidence. They build constructive relationships with them and guide them to take responsibility for their actions. They support them to talk about their feelings and to manage their behaviour in constructive ways. For some pupils, this is a slow process. However, staff do not give up and continually look for positive aspects to praise.

Staff also take pupils out and about to meet new people and try new things. From team-building activities in a nearby woodland to visiting an art gallery, staff support pupils to broaden their interests. Staff also give freely of their time out of school hours, including at weekends, to provide extra-curricular activities.

The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme teaches pupils about safe, healthy respectful relationships and what is meant by consent. It also includes specific teaching about the protected characteristics. Pupils learn about different types of relationships and why prejudice and discrimination are wrong. They also interact respectfully with local people of all ages by, for example, joining in with weekly community lunches in the well-being centre canteen.

Leaders' keep careful records of pupils' attendance at school. They offer daily online lessons to any pupils who cannot attend due to medical or emotional problems. This means that staff have regular contact with pupils, and it helps them to keep up with their learning. Even so, some pupils do not attend regularly enough, nor do they engage with online learning. Leaders work closely with parents, carers and other agencies to try to improve this, but, in several cases, pupils' non-attendance persists. This means they miss out on the opportunities provided at school.

Staff say that they feel supported by leaders and the rest of the school team. They receive appropriate support to manage their work, including the management of pupils' behaviour.

Classroom and social spaces are fit for purpose. Pupils can use gym and sports hall facilities on the ground floor of the well-being centre. There are adequate toilets and changing rooms and the site is secure. Regular checks on fire and water safety are carried out by council-approved contractors.

The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, has a noticeable impact on the ethos, aims and ambitions of the school. He has ensured that the school meets the independent school standards and complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Parents who responded to Ofsted's survey were very positive about the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The proprietor has ensured that staff have up-to-date guidance about safeguarding risks and how to spot them. Staff meet every day to share information and know what to do when they have concerns. All the correct checks on adults in school are carried out and recorded. The school's safeguarding policy is up to date and available to parents on request.

The staff teach pupils about safeguarding and how to manage the risks they may face. They help pupils to learn about safe behaviours. This supports them to grow in self-respect and to show respect to others.

Staff supervise pupils at all times. First aid is available, if needed. Smoking or vaping are not permitted.

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

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- The school's work to support those pupils who have gaps in their phonics knowledge could be better. Reading books are not always well matched to pupils' current level of phonics knowledge. This slows their progress. Leaders should review the school's programme for teaching phonics. They should make sure staff have sufficient training and resources for teaching phonics well to those pupils who need it.
- Some pupils' attendance is poor. This means they miss out on learning and other help available in school. Leaders should continue to work with parents, local authorities and other agencies to support pupils to attend school regularly.

## **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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138971
<b>DfE registration number</b>	330/6013
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10267663
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 17
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	24
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Noel Thomas
<b>Headteacher</b>	Noel Thomas
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£40,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 747 4430
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://silverbirchschoo.com">silverbirchschoo.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:noelthomas@silverbirchschoo.co.uk">noelthomas@silverbirchschoo.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	11 to 13 June 2019

## Information about this school

- Silver Birch School is an independent day school situated in Shard End, Birmingham. The school is in Shard End Well-Being Centre. Pupils have access to facilities within the centre, including a sports hall, gym and dining area.
- The school offers up to 24 places to pupils aged 11 to 17 who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils choose to stay at the school in Year 12 to give them more time to study the key stage 4 curriculum.
- All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Almost all have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are referred to the school by local authorities. Four different local authorities currently place pupils at the school.
- The school has a website address. At the time of the inspection, the website was not operational.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative providers.
- The proprietor is also the headteacher.
- The school was last inspected in June 2019, when it was judged to be good. Since then, it received a material change inspection in September 2021 and a progress monitoring inspection in February 2022.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first standard 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.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, science, art and design and PSHE. In these subjects, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work. They observed some pupils reading in class. Inspectors also looked at the curriculum in other subjects in less detail to check how they were organised and taught.
- The inspectors asked school leaders and pupils about safeguarding arrangements and safety routines. The lead inspector examined the record of employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records.

- Inspectors talked with pupils and staff to gather general information about school life. They took account of the responses to Ofsted's surveys of staff and parents' views. The lead inspector spoke with a parent on the telephone.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class, at lunchtime and when moving around the school.
- As part of their work to check compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors had formal meetings with staff and leaders. They also inspected the premises and checked documents and records.

### **Inspection team**

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Mike Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

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