

Inspection of Birchensale Middle School

Bridley Moor Road, Redditch, Worcestershire B97 6HT

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 September 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Emma James. This school is part of Bordesley Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Adrian Ward, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Deborah Andrews.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' outcomes have been too low at Birchensale Middle School for too long. The school has not ensured that pupils receive an acceptable standard of education. This means that pupils routinely leave school ill equipped for the next stage of their education.

Teachers do not ensure that work is matched well to pupils' academic needs. This means that pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make poor progress because the school has not ensured that they receive effective support to help them achieve well.

Recently, the school has taken some action to address the decline in standards. Leaders have a better understanding of what they need to do to address the school's weaknesses. Pupils told inspectors that standards of behaviour have improved, but there remain some inconsistencies in how adults manage poor behaviour in class. Pupils find this frustrating.

Pupils appreciate the opportunities to enrich their learning that staff organise for them. However, too few pupils take advantage of these opportunities.

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

A legacy of ineffective teaching has meant that pupils have not been well served by the school. It is only recently, with the appointment of the new headteacher, that the poor educational provision has started to be addressed with appropriate urgency. The school has reviewed the curriculum and made sure that it is broad. Leaders have worked to ensure that what is intended to be taught is appropriately ambitious. However, the school has not ensured that teachers are sufficiently skilled in delivering the curriculum. Teachers' checks on pupils' understanding are missed, so misconceptions remain unaddressed. Pupils' needs are not considered well enough, including for those pupils with SEND. As a result, the work that pupils are provided with is frequently ill suited to their understanding, which means that they often complete work that does not move their learning forward.

Pupils with SEND do not have their learning needs accurately identified. This means that teachers are not well informed about these pupils and how they can best be supported. Teaching assistants are not effectively deployed in lessons. As a result of these weaknesses, pupils with SEND do not achieve well.

Weak oversight of pupils' outcomes has meant that some pupils have not had the support to enable them to learn to read well for their age. The new leadership team has only very recently addressed this, meaning that it is too early to see any sustained improvement in pupils' reading.

Leaders identified that changes were needed to help pupils develop more positive attitudes towards their learning. Effective work has been undertaken by the new leadership team to launch a new behaviour policy. As a result, pupils' behaviour around the school is better. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors. They play happily at break- and lunchtime. There remain, however, too many inconsistencies in how teachers manage the behaviour of pupils in class. Sometimes, off-task or inattentive behaviour in class is ignored or left unchallenged. Leaders have ensured that bullying is addressed and dealt with when reported.

Some groups of pupils do not attend school regularly enough, especially disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. Leaders are at the initial stages of implementing a new attendance strategy, so it is too early to measure the impact at this stage.

Work to develop pupils' personal development has been more effective. Pupils benefit from a planned careers programme, including a careers fair to help them make informed decisions about their future. The school provides a range of extra-curricular activities, including ones related to physical education and music. However, not enough pupils participate in these opportunities. While there has been an increase in the number of disadvantaged pupils who take up these opportunities, the majority do not.

The trust's evaluation and monitoring of the school's work have been imprecise, lacking in urgency and have not had an impact on standards of teaching. Governors have not held leaders to account effectively for the quality of educational provision. For too long, leaders in the school have not had the capacity to fulfil their roles.

The school's use of pupil premium funding is ineffective and has not improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, these pupils achieve poorly. Several parents and carers expressed concerns about communication and standards in their responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a culture of safeguarding and pupils are safe at the school. However, the new headteacher is aware that the strategic oversight of safeguarding is not as effective as it should be. This means that there is sometimes a lack of clarity about processes and staff's roles and responsibilities.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The trust has acted too slowly to address some of the long-term failings at the school. As a result, standards have been too low for too long, and pupils' education has suffered. Trust leaders should ensure that leaders at all levels have

the capacity to fulfil their roles and are supported to improve and address the long-standing issues affecting pupils' education.

- Teachers do not check pupils' understanding and so do not adapt what they teach to match pupils' needs. This means that misconceptions develop, and pupils do not successfully build their learning on what they already know. The school should ensure that teachers use assessment effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and then adapt the curriculum to enable pupils to learn effectively, building on what they already know.
- The school has not provided enough support to help pupils who struggle with their reading. As a result, too many pupils cannot read well enough. The school should ensure that its programme of support for reading, including phonics teaching as necessary, is well matched to pupils' reading needs and is provided for all pupils who need it.
- The school has not ensured that pupils with SEND receive effective support to achieve well. Provision for these pupils is weak, and they make poor progress. The school should ensure that staff are provided with precise information to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to enable pupils with SEND to make good progress.
- Some pupils' absence rates remain too high. Pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or those with SEND, miss too much school and therefore learning. The school needs to work closely with parents and external agencies to instil the importance of regular attendance, especially for these more vulnerable pupils.
- Staff do not yet apply the new behaviour policy consistently well. This means that they sometimes do not challenge pupils' disengagement or inappropriate behaviour in class. As a result, sometimes pupils do not focus on the learning, and other pupils are distracted. The school needs to ensure that all teachers apply the behaviour policy as intended, so that no time is lost to low-level disruption.
- The strategic oversight of safeguarding is not as sharp as it should be. There are too many different approaches to managing safeguarding without clear oversight. The school should ensure that there is more incisive oversight of all safeguarding processes, and that everyone is clear about others' roles and responsibilities.

Having considered the evidence, we strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146699
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	10278839
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	594
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Deborah Andrews
CEO of the trust	Adrian Ward
Headteacher	Emma James
Website	www.birchensale.worcs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Bordesley Multi-Academy Trust in April 2019.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- As a part of this inspection, inspectors met with trustees, the chair of the governing body, the trust's chief executive officer (CEO) and deputy CEO, senior leaders, subject leaders, teaching staff and other employees in the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science, geography and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also visited lessons in some other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's extra-curricular activities, enrichment programme and its careers and personal development programmes with leaders.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, at various points during the inspection. They took account of responses to a staff survey and to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Andrew Madden, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Patrick Amieli	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Warner	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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