

Inspection of Finch Woods Academy

Bailey's Lane, Halewood, Liverpool, Merseyside L26 0TY

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

The headteacher of this school is Laura Dickinson. This school is part of Manor Hall 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 (CEO), Richard Redgate, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Alexander. There is also an executive headteacher, Sarah Martin, who is responsible for this school and two others within the trust.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils of various ages and differing needs have very different experiences at Finch Woods Academy. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Most join the school having struggled in their previous setting. Some pupils settle well and form positive relationships with staff. Pupils said that they feel safe and have staff they trust and can talk to. This is not true for all pupils. Some pupils do not hold positive views about the school. This is because their needs or interests are not met. Their attitude to learning is poor, and they are frequently absent from school.

The school has not ensured that the overarching curriculum offer meets the needs and aspirations of all pupils. Some pupils achieve well and gain academic qualifications in a range of subjects. In contrast, others experience a curriculum that lacks ambition and breadth. As a result, they do not succeed academically. This hampers how well prepared some pupils are for the next steps in their education and in their lives.

The new behaviour policy has had some success in raising expectations of pupils' behaviour. However, some pupils disrupt lessons and struggle to regulate their own actions. For some pupils, this spoils their learning time. In addition, some pupils are subjected to derogatory language.

Pupils have access to the school pledge which outlines a range of experiences for their wider development while at school. For example, they learn about strategies to promote their mental health, take part in trips abroad or act as a member of the newly formed student council. However, the school does not ensure that all pupils get the chance to benefit from this offer.

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

The school, including trustees, have overseen a decline in the quality of education at Finch Woods Academy since the previous inspection. They have allowed variation in the education and personal development offer in different parts of the school to go unchecked. The school has not designed a curriculum that meets the needs, interests or aptitudes of all pupils. A lack of accountability and confusion about roles and responsibilities have made this situation worse in recent times. As a result, some pupils enjoy school and achieve academic success, while others do not. Pupils' access to a good standard of education is uneven. Consequently, pupils' achievement is patchy across year groups and in different parts of the school site.

A period of turbulence and staffing instability have contributed to the shortcomings at the school. However, the local governing body and trustees do not have sufficient oversight of the school's strengths and shortcomings. They have not acted with sufficient speed or decisive action to stem the decline in the standard of education on offer. While they have recently taken steps to shore up additional leadership capacity, this has not, at this point in time, had enough impact.

The curriculum in key stage 2 is suitably broad and ambitious. It has been carefully ordered so that pupils build their knowledge well over time. This is not replicated in key stages 3 and 4. It is unclear who is responsible for making decisions about curriculum content or which qualification routes pupils will follow. Teachers do not receive enough guidance about what should be taught and how this will be delivered. This hinders older pupils from gaining the knowledge that they need to succeed in their next stage of learning.

The school has reduced the range of subjects that are taught in key stages 3 and 4. For some pupils, this is proving to be beneficial. It enables them to develop their skills and interests in non-academic subjects. These pupils receive extra time to develop an understanding of the wider world and enhance their social skills. However, for other pupils, the narrowed offer lacks ambition and choice. It does not set pupils up well enough for their future.

A small number of pupils access their learning in a different building. For the most part, these pupils enjoy nurturing and specialist support for their emotional needs. However, the school has not ensured that it provides a suitable curriculum to meet their academic needs. The curriculum for these pupils lacks structure and coherence. Pupils do not access the same range of subjects as their peers. In some subjects, teachers are not clear about what they want pupils to know and remember. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Teachers typically have strong subject knowledge. In the absence of oversight and guidance on curriculum design, teachers have been proactive in keeping their professional knowledge up to date. They have used this knowledge to identify and organise some subject curriculums that help pupils learn well. Teachers deliver the curriculum effectively for some groups of pupils. They use strategies appropriately to identify and address gaps in pupils' learning. This allows some pupils to build on their prior learning and achieve qualifications, including GCSEs. However, this is not the case for all groups of pupils, including many who are disadvantaged.

The school has successfully prioritised reading. All pupils have dedicated time to read each day, and they do so with increasing confidence and fluency in lessons. Gaps in younger pupils' reading knowledge, including their grasp of phonics, are identified and addressed. This is helping these pupils to catch up with their peers and to access the wider curriculum. However, similar systems for older pupils are in the early stages of development.

The school assesses and identifies the additional needs of pupils appropriately. Staff receive useful information to help them shape their delivery of learning to meet pupils' needs. However, some staff lack the training and understanding to adapt the delivery of teaching effectively to meet pupils' wide range of learning needs. This means that some pupils are not supported as well as they could be to access the curriculum.

The school has recently improved its approach to managing pupils' behaviour. There are some early signs of positive impact. In many classrooms and social areas, pupils

interact in a calm and friendly manner. However, the school does not use the information that it gathers about pupils' behaviour as well as it could to reduce behaviour incidents. Some staff do not use the new systems consistently well. As a result, some pupils continue to exhibit challenging behaviour that disrupts the learning of others.

The school has completely overhauled the systems for addressing the poor attendance rates of some pupils. They are now robust and include rigorous checks on pupils who are educated off site and online. However, as this work is in its infancy, it is too soon to see the impact. Too many pupils, many of whom are disadvantaged, are frequently absent from school. This negatively impacts their achievement and personal development.

The school has designed a suitable programme to promote pupils' personal development. This helps to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils learn about sex and relationships and how to stay safe online. However, some pupils miss out on these opportunities because they access a different curriculum in a different way to their peers. The school does not ensure that all pupils are included. This puts some pupils at a disadvantage.

The school provides a range of activities from Years 7 to 11 for pupils to gain appropriate careers information, advice and guidance.

Historically, the school has not been successful in forging positive lines of communication with parents and carers. Recently, the school has taken some action to renew its engagement with parents. Some parents spoke positively to inspectors during the inspection about the support they have received to help their children achieve. However, there remains a significant number of parents who do not benefit from similar partnerships.

Staff appreciate recent efforts that the school has made to engage with them to try and address weaknesses in leadership. However, some staff do not feel well supported to complete their roles. They reported an atmosphere of mistrust and unease at work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school, including trustees, have overseen a decline in the quality of education that pupils receive. The lack of a well-designed overarching curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils across the school means that some do not achieve as well as they should or could. This situation is compounded further by a lack of accountability and confusion about roles and responsibilities. The school must

ensure that the marked variation in pupils' educational experiences and enjoyment of school are eradicated so that all pupils have the opportunity to thrive, achieve well and be ready for the next stage of their education.

- Trustees and members of the local governing body do not have sufficient oversight of the school's weaknesses. This has stalled them from taking the action required to limit the negative impact of staffing instability and to ensure that pupils receive a good quality of education. Those responsible for governance must ensure that they gain an accurate view of the school's effectiveness so that they are well placed to challenge shortcomings and support the strategies for improvement.
- The curriculum in key stage 4 is not sufficiently broad, ambitious or well designed to enable pupils to learn all that they should. There is a lack of clarity about what examination routes pupils will follow. Some pupils who receive their education at a different site do not have access to a coherent curriculum. As a result, pupils do not achieve well. They are not prepared well enough for the next steps. The school should ensure that there is a well-designed curriculum that enables pupils to learn all that they should.
- Some staff have not been supported well enough to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' different learning needs. This hinders some pupils from building a secure body of subject-specific knowledge. The school should ensure that all teachers are suitably equipped to ensure that pupils access the curriculum and learn all that they should.
- Many pupils are frequently absent from school. They miss learning time and also do not benefit from the wider experiences on offer to enhance their personal development. This hinders their achievement and readiness for the next stage in their lives. The school should review their approach to promoting good attendance so that pupils attend school regularly.
- The school does not use the information that it gathers about behaviour incidents effectively to identify patterns and reduce such incidents over time. Some staff do not follow the new behaviour approaches consistently well. As a result, some pupils do not adhere to the school's rules well enough. This disturbs the learning of others. The school should use the information that it gathers about behaviour incidents to identify and address the key issues so that pupils' behaviour improves further over time.
- Some groups of pupils do not experience the full range of personal development opportunities on offer. This limits their readiness for life in modern Britain. The school should ensure that all pupils can benefit from the full programme of activities that promote their personal development.
- The school does not identify and address the deficits in older pupils' reading knowledge as well as they do for younger pupils. This means that some older pupils have gaps in their reading knowledge. This hinders them from accessing the curriculum. The school should ensure that pupils of all ages receive the extra support that they need to read fluently.

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	141033
Local authority	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	10294378
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Alexander
CEO of the trust	Richard Redgate
Headteacher	Laura Dickinson
Website	www.finchwoodsacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	20 and 21 June 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher of the school is currently absent. An executive headteacher is taking responsibility for the running of the school in the headteacher's absence. The executive headteacher is based at the school site for two days per week.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND (specially resourced provision) who have specific behavioural, emotional and social needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is part of The Manor Hall Academy Trust.
- The age range of the school intake was extended to include provision for pupils in key stage 2 from September 2021.
- The school has a separate specially resourced provision for pupils with additional vulnerabilities and significant needs. This provision is called The Hive. It caters for 10 pupils. This provision is located on a different site to the main school.
- The school uses one unregistered 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. The inspection was extended from two days to three days.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school 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.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders and a range of staff.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the local academy board, including the chair of the board. She also met with the trust leader for school improvement. She spoke with the CEO of Manor Hall Academy Trust on the telephone.
- The lead inspector gained the views of a representative from the local authority and an external school improvement partner who works with the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including early reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors met 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. An inspector also spoke with other subject leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- There were no responses to Ofsted Parent View for inspectors to consider. The lead inspector spoke to some parents on the telephone during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. The inspectors also spoke with staff to discuss the support that they receive from leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils about school life. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and spoke to pupils at social times.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector 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.

Inspection team

Amanda Downing, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Eastwood

His Majesty's Inspector

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