

Inspection of Birches Head Academy

Birches Head Road, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST2 8DD

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The principal of this school is Katie Dixon. The executive principal is Tom Quinn. This school is part of The Frank Field Education 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), Tom Quinn, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Dr Chris Hampshire.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has not ensured that pupils consistently behave with respect for adults and other pupils. Around the school, and especially at breaktime and lunchtime, too many pupils behave in a way that leaves other pupils feeling afraid or unsafe. Bullying and incidents of discrimination are too common. Some pupils do not report concerns as they consider that doing so makes little difference.

Leaders have redesigned the curriculum to ensure that it is ambitious. In lessons, pupils generally work well and focus on their learning. However, too often the selection of activities does not build on previous learning, and checking for understanding is inconsistent. This means that too many pupils struggle to remember what they have been taught. The high rates of absence also mean that pupils often do not recall important learning.

Parents' and carers' views of the school vary. The school has worked to engage parents. Some recognise the efforts to improve the school and are pleased with the welcome their children have had since starting. Other parents feel that leaders are not responding to their concerns, especially around the behaviour of some pupils.

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

Pupils at Birches Head are not always supported to learn effectively. The school has ensured that the planned curriculum is suitably ambitious. However, leaders have not ensured that all teachers are supported well enough to deliver this curriculum consistently well. This means that sometimes the activities that are selected do not build on what pupils already know. Checking for pupils' understanding is also variable. This means that at times, some pupils disengage from learning. Too often, teachers are not given the information they need about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). When this happens, their needs are not met. This means that often, pupils with SEND do not make good progress.

Leaders have worked to improve behaviour in lessons, and learning in class is generally not disrupted by poor behaviour. However, poor behaviour around the school persists. Groups of pupils experience regular discrimination and bullying, and do not have confidence in leaders' ability to resolve this. The school's actions to improve the behaviour of pupils who do not meet the school's expectations has not had enough impact. Attendance is too low for many pupils, and leaders' actions have not been successful in improving this.

Leaders have ensured that there is a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education in place. Pupils are taught about tolerance and respect. However, pupils do not apply this well to how they treat each other. The school has worked to encourage pupils to take an active part in the 'Be More' curriculum, and some pupils could speak positively about the Frank Field Award they have received where they led activities in the school. However, many pupils do not take advantage of the opportunities provided. The school provides an 'experience week' where each

year group has a range of trips, including to universities and visits with a focus on degree apprenticeships. Pupils also have suitable careers education, so they learn about future employment and the world of work.

When leaders introduced changes to the way in which behaviour is managed, they faced challenge from some parents. The trust is working alongside school leaders to communicate to parents about expectations and ongoing developments to improve the school.

Leaders' understanding of the effectiveness of the school is not as accurate as it needs to be. Those responsible for governance do not use the information they receive to challenge and support leaders with precision, especially around behaviour and attendance and the quality of education. Nevertheless, staff appreciate the improvements that leaders are putting in place, and state that they are mindful of staff's workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Although safeguarding is secure, leaders are aware that they need to have a clear strategic oversight of records and actions, so that they are clear about what actions have been taken to support pupils who are at risk.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils regularly experience unacceptable discrimination or bullying from others. They do not have confidence in leaders' ability to address this, so they do not report it. Leaders need to ensure that all discrimination or bullying issues are challenged and resolved consistently and effectively when they occur.
- The school's work to improve pupils' behaviour has not had sufficient impact. A significant number of pupils misbehave and experience consequences too often, including being removed from lessons or suspended. These pupils miss out on valuable curriculum time. In addition, some parents are unclear about the school's expectations. Leaders should review their approach to behaviour management so that it leads to improvements in pupils' behaviour, ensuring that parents are clear about how they can support the school too.
- Leaders have not addressed the high rates of pupil absence well enough, especially for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. A significant number of pupils regularly miss too much school, which adversely affects their education. Leaders should take all possible steps to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.
- In some subjects, teachers do not use assessment well enough to check that pupils have understood what has been taught. When this happens, teachers do not adapt their teaching to take account of what pupils can do. Leaders need to

ensure that all teachers use assessment consistently well to check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching and curriculum planning where necessary.

- Trustees and governors do not have a sufficiently accurate view of the school's effectiveness. This means they are not precise enough in their support and challenge for leaders, especially around the quality of education, and behaviour and attendance. Those responsible for governance need to ensure that they offer more precise challenge, so they can hold leaders to account and address areas for improvement effectively.

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	148220
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10290676
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,024
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Chris Hampshire
Principal	Katie Dixon
Website	www.bircheshead.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined The Frank Field Education Trust on 1 December 2020.
- The school uses three alternative providers, one of which is unregistered.
- 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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.

- 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.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 governors, the chair of trustees, the trust CEO, trust personnel, senior leaders, subject leaders and teaching staff, as well as other employees in the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in: English, mathematics, science, art and modern languages. 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 their careers and personal development programmes with leaders. They also visited some scheduled extra-curricular activities. They also reviewed the school's reading programme.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's behaviour and attendance records with school leaders. An inspector also visited the school's internal exclusion room.
- The lead inspector spoke to a leader of the unregistered alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, at various points in the inspection. They took account of responses to a staff survey, a pupil survey and Ofsted Parent View. They also met with groups of pupils selected by the inspection team and by the school.

Inspection team

Andrew Madden, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Hermitt	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Godden	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Scott	Ofsted Inspector

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