

Birkenhead Park School

Park Road South, Birkenhead, Merseyside CH43 4UY

Inspection dates

10–11 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Outcomes for pupils require improvement because not enough of the most able pupils are making good progress in English and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils are catching up with other pupils nationally but achievement remains too low.
- Standards in mathematics are rising but remain below those attained by pupils in English.
- Teachers across a range of subjects are not effectively supporting the development of pupils' literacy and communication skills.
- Teaching is not strong enough across all subjects to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress. Some teachers move learning on too quickly before pupils have fully grasped the basics or lack skill in using questions to promote pupils' learning.
- Attendance is below the national average and has only recently started to improve. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced but remains too high.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, well supported by the deputy headteacher and faculty leaders, has taken decisive action to improve the school. The impact of their leadership is evident in rising standards, better teaching, high staff morale and good levels of satisfaction from parents.
- The school provides good pastoral care for all pupils. Children looked after by the local authority and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are enabled to make the best of their education. Transition arrangements into Year 7 are good.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good. Professional development is a strong feature of the school.
- Pupils' conduct around school is calm and orderly. Pupils feel safe in school and free from bullying. They know how to keep themselves safe in risky situations, including online.
- Governors have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school.
- The Wirral Academy Trust has acted promptly since taking over the management of the school to establish a secure financial basis for school improvement. It has enabled the school to share good practice with other schools and has brokered effective support from a local teaching school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to accelerate pupils' progress in all subjects by:
 - ensuring that pupils clearly understand what they are to learn and how they will achieve success
 - planning appropriate support as well as challenge so that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable, including the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged
 - refining teacher questioning to check that progress is secure before moving learning on
 - allowing pupils sufficient time to reflect on their learning and express themselves successfully.
- Consolidate recent improvements to the quality of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening monitoring systems so that leaders at all levels evaluate which strategies are the most effective and why
 - further reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent by working closely with their families to raise their awareness of the importance of full attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has led key improvements in the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes so that staff and pupils know what is expected of them. The headteacher has been supported well by governors and by the Wirral Academy Trust. Leaders have reversed the dip in outcomes in 2016 and have put the school in a much stronger position. The effectiveness of their good leadership is evident in all areas of the school's management.
- Leaders have rightly made improving the quality of teaching a priority in their drive to improve the school. A wide range of training opportunities has contributed to greater consistency and recently a greater proportion of good teaching in English and mathematics, according to school records. Leaders' commitment to learning from best practice in other schools has been a successful strategy. Increasingly, teachers are moderating their assessments with other colleagues to ensure greater accuracy and confidence.
- Leaders have acted on the areas for development in teaching from past inspections so that marking and feedback clearly follow the school's agreed policy and staff are providing more-challenging work for the most able pupils. An 'open-door' strategy adopted by all departments has led to a complete culture shift, with staff welcoming outside expertise and sharing their own increasingly good practice. This attitude was reflected in the responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire, which were overwhelmingly positive.
- Faculty leaders make a significant contribution to school improvement by checking on the provision in their areas, ensuring that there is greater consistency within and across departments and working together as a team. All staff know that they are accountable for the progress that their pupils make. The quality of pupil outcomes is a key component in performance management and review and is linked to salary progression.
- Regular progress meetings every six weeks in Year 11, and every term for other year groups, enable all staff and governors to know exactly how well pupils are progressing in all subjects and enable leaders to take prompt action when any underperformance is identified.
- The introduction of a Year 7 base has been very successful in giving pupils a sense of security and building their confidence as they move into secondary school. Parents voice strong approval of the base and the good outcomes for pupils in Year 7 this year are further evidence of the effectiveness of the strategy. The effective use of the Year 7 catch-up funding also is contributing to good outcomes for the youngest pupils.
- Pupil premium funding supports school-wide strategies because there is such a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils are catching up with others, but not fast enough.
- Leaders have developed an ambitious curriculum which suits pupils' needs and interests, with different pathways at key stage 4. The curriculum makes a good

contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their understanding of British values. A new strategy is focused currently on Years 7 and 8; this is a course designed to support pupils' mental and physical well-being and build their resilience and confidence. Leaders plan to build on initial success and embed the strategy across the school. A small number of pupils benefit from alternative provision to follow courses in hair and beauty and construction. Pupils have good access to impartial careers advice.

- The academy trust and the local authority view the school as a model of good practice in its provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The strong support provided for these pupils enables them to achieve well. The school uses outside agencies to support a range of specific needs and mental issues.
- The very great majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire recommended the school.
- Leaders have acted quickly to bring about improvements. Inspectors saw important and positive changes at the school. However, the techniques that school leaders use to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies are underdeveloped. However, at present their systems to clearly evaluate and identify which strategies are making the greatest difference are underdeveloped.

Governance of the school

- Governance is good.
- Governors know the school well and are well informed about its strengths and the areas to improve. Governors are rightly proud of the support given to the many vulnerable pupils. They know which issues are the most important to address and constantly challenge school leaders to bring about further rapid improvements. Governors often attend pupil progress meetings so that know exactly how well pupils are achieving and how effectively teaching is promoting learning. They are proud of the fact that the school's reputation is growing and that pupil numbers are starting to increase.
- The Wirral Academy Trust has been very effective in leading school improvement. The trust successfully managed a complete staff restructuring in 2015/16, put the school on a secure financial footing, brokered strong support within their other schools and from a local teaching school, and provided regular support for senior leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has developed a culture of safeguarding through of the vigilance of all staff and the rigour of its systems to ensure that pupils are safe.
- Appropriate training is provided for all staff with regular updates. A restructuring of the pastoral support systems has allowed the school to focus on improving attendance more effectively in the current year. The large cohort of significantly vulnerable pupils is very well managed. The school's multi-agency work is effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching is improving because of action taken by school leaders and the enthusiasm of staff to further develop their skills. However, it is not yet sufficiently strong to be judged good overall because inconsistencies in practice remain.
- Sometimes pupils are unclear about what they are to learn because of lack of clarity in teachers' planning. Sometimes work is too easy and sometimes it is too hard. Occasionally, in mathematics and science, work has been pitched too high, so that pupils are unable to make progress. In other subjects, such as geography, learners are merely copying from the board and so are not engaged or challenged.
- The questioning skills of some teachers are underdeveloped because they allow pupils to provide one-word answers, do not give them sufficient time to explain and extend their answers to show real understanding, or do not ensure that pupils have mastered important terminology for the subject.
- Where teachers do not set high enough expectations for the quantity and quality of pupils' work, their books do not provide good revision and learning material.
- Poor literacy skills are a barrier to learning for many pupils and this is not being tackled effectively by all subjects.
- Learning is most effective when teaching is enthusiastic and enjoyable. Such learning is evident in physical education, modern languages, music, history and, increasingly, in science, mathematics and English.
- Most learners are building up their confidence and resilience when teachers make them persevere and think deeply. In subjects such as French, history, music and physical education, pupils are developing important skills, reflecting on their work and responding to the high expectations set by teachers.
- Pupils praise the quality of the feedback they receive from teachers about their written work and say that it helps them to know what to do better.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants. Staff are well trained to identify specific problems and help pupils to overcome them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The introduction of the school's new strategy for younger pupils has been effective in supporting pupils as they start secondary school. Leaders and teachers aim to build pupils' confidence and resilience, combat negative thoughts and develop healthy habits.
- The Year 7 base provides pupils with a secure start to secondary school and eases the transition into secondary education. Initially, teachers visit Year 7 in their base. As the academic year progresses, pupils are gradually integrated into the rest of the school so

that by the summer term most are enjoying mainstream lessons and developing the necessary skills to be successful learners.

- Pupils representing all year groups, chosen by inspectors at random, said that they felt safe and free from bullying. They believe that pupils are not picked on because they are in any way different from others. School records show a marked decline in bullying incidents. Almost all pupils show tolerance and respect for others.
- Pupils felt that they were well informed about keeping safe in risky situations, including use of social media and the internet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Conduct around the school is orderly and calm. Pupils behave well at breaks and during lunchtimes. They are happy to talk to visitors and are friendly. They wear their smart uniform with pride and are proud of their school. They appreciate their teachers, commenting that 'they put us first' and they 'push us to do our best'.
- Most pupils feel that conduct in lessons is generally good. However, this is not consistently the case. Just occasionally, small numbers of pupils are disengaged but are not allowed to distract others.
- The number of exclusions for poor behaviour has significantly decreased. The 'return to learn' unit is an effective base to support pupils with behaviour needs and return them to lessons.
- Attendance dipped in 2015/16. School leaders have increased support staffing in this area so that it is now starting to improve. In the last two terms, attendance has increased overall and for specific groups. There has also been a reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent, although this remains too high.
- Some pupils are regularly late to school and to lessons, but the number of instances of poor punctuality is steadily decreasing.
- Pupils attending alternative provision are carefully monitored to make sure that they attend regularly and are making progress in gaining useful qualifications.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress of the most able and disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 at the end of the 2016 academic year was significantly below average. The progress of all groups of pupils was below national figures. Attainment in English and mathematics was also below national averages.
- In the current academic year, tracking data which has been moderated by other schools and the work seen by inspectors in pupils' books shows that standards have improved. The school is confident in its new assessment systems. Work in pupils' books increasingly shows good progress, with pupils taking pride, developing key skills and responding promptly to teachers' feedback and comments.
- Progress and achievement is still lower in mathematics than it is in English, but there is strong evidence of steadily improving mathematics outcomes. Inspectors observed

pupils in most year groups confidently tackling challenging work. However, sometimes progress was slowed because the work was pitched at too high a level and some pupils struggled to understand.

- Pupils following both triple science courses and double-award science are also making better progress than previously, with better results forecast.
- Standards are above average in modern foreign languages and there is evidence of improvement in art and history.
- Across the school, progress is faster than at the time of the last inspection in most year groups, and particularly in the current Years 7 and 10.
- The most able pupils are on track to achieve better outcomes because leaders are working to make sure that pupils of all abilities are stretched, instead of allowing teachers to 'teach to the middle' and be satisfied with just achieving a pass at GCSE.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are achieving stronger outcomes this year across all subjects, including English and mathematics. These pupils are well supported in making appropriate career choices.
- Disadvantaged pupils are starting to catch up with all pupils nationally, but leaders understand that there is more to do to achieve this.
- The school supports the development of literacy for younger pupils with additional phonics training and an extra English lesson for lower-ability pupils in Year 7. Across the school, however, weak literacy skills are hampering the progress of some pupils.
- Numeracy is developed in various curriculum subjects as well as in mathematics, and with some work in tutor time each morning. The focus on numeracy is contributing to better outcomes in mathematics and science.
- The school is effectively preparing pupils for the next stage of their education or training by developing character and resilience and gradually improving academic outcomes. The proportion of pupils leaving Year 11 and going on to further education or training has increased each year for the last three years and is now at the national average.

School details

Unique reference number	136411
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10032209

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	537
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Rigby
Headteacher	Helen Johnson
Telephone number	0151 652 1574
Website	www.birkenheadparkschool.com
Email address	offices@birkenheadparkschool.com
Date of previous inspection	23–24 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The academy sponsor is the Wirral Academy Trust.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. There are fewer girls than boys.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is very high and includes over three-quarters of the entire school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language.

- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is high, more than double the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision at Livava Hair and Beauty, Utopia, WRAP and the Hospital School.
- The school has experienced significant changes since the previous inspection. The new sponsor who took over the management of the school in June 2015 carried out a complete restructuring of staffing which resulted in some redundancies and consequent lowering of staff morale. A new headteacher was appointed October 2015. A new chair of governors was appointed in September 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all subjects and across all year groups.
- Inspectors looked at a range of work in pupils' books in many subjects, including English, sciences, mathematics, history, French and geography, either in lessons or as a separate activity.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, faculty leaders, members of staff and groups of pupils in each year group. The lead inspector met governors, including the chair of the governing body, representatives of the multi-academy trust and the headteacher of Weatherhead High School, which has been supporting the academy.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and action plans, information about pupils' attainment and progress, records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, the school's safeguarding and other policies and records on checking on the quality of teaching and learning.
- They observed pupils' behaviour at the start and end of the school day, at breaks and lunchtimes and visited tutor times. They talked to many pupils informally at these times and in lessons.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from the 25 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- The views of staff were gained from the 58 responses to the online staff questionnaire and from discussions with individual teachers.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Marcia Harding	Ofsted Inspector
Deborah Bailey	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017