

# Silver Birch School

Shard End Wellbeing Centre, 170 Packington Avenue, Birmingham B34 7RD

<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–29 April 2016
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Silver Birch is a small school which makes a big difference to the lives of its pupils in a short space of time.
- The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, is passionate about improving the life chances of his pupils. He gives freely of his own time to take pupils to extra-curricular activities. He supports pupils and their families at all hours to ensure their protection and well-being.
- Senior leaders and other members of staff share this commitment. Pupils quickly respond to the nurturing environment. They feel very safe and well cared for. They begin to take on responsibility for their own academic and personal development. As a result, behaviour in school is good.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Teachers have regular reviews and training to support their professional development.
- Good assessment on arrival at the school, together with the good teaching, enables pupils to catch up and fill gaps in their learning during the short time they are in the school.
- Pupils are accessing an increased range of academic awards which ensures that all pupils can leave with qualifications which match their ability.
- Governors provide highly skilled and knowledgeable checks on safeguarding arrangements.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally pupils are not given hard enough work nor expected to practise their writing skills often enough.
- Senior leaders do not have formal performance management and clear targets for school improvement.
- Governors are not provided with information to help them understand how well pupils are making progress in English and mathematics.
- Although incidents are recorded well, they lack sufficient information to be able to analyse any concerns or patterns.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

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

- Improve the quality of teaching further so that more pupils make outstanding progress by:
  - ensuring that work is provided which always stretches what individual pupils know and can do
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise writing, using handwriting and/or technology, in all lessons of the curriculum.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - setting up a formal performance management process which holds senior leaders to account for school improvement and pupils' progress
  - ensuring that governors are provided with regular information about the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress.
- Improve the management of behaviour further by recording all actions and outcomes for incidents so that leaders and managers can identify patterns or areas of concern which might require action.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher leads his staff team by example. When pupils arrive at Silver Birch they are usually disaffected learners. The headteacher is totally committed to turning around the lives of his pupils and supporting them to reconnect with education. His leaders and other staff share his desire to promote the well-being of all pupils so that they are able to learn effectively.
- The weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment identified at the previous inspection have been addressed. A qualified teacher has been appointed to a senior post. The curriculum has been developed with clear schemes of work for all subjects. There are now effective checks on teaching in the classroom and regular reviews of pupils' work.
- There is a strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn about their responsibilities as citizens in modern Britain. Pupils' personal development is given the highest priority to turn around their attitudes to learning, and to improve their self-esteem and relationships with other people.
- Behaviour is managed extremely well and any incidents causing concern are recorded. However, incident logs lack information about follow-up actions and outcomes for analysis and to inform leaders how to improve behaviour management practice.
- Staff are provided with a good range of professional development activities, most recently including 'What makes an effective teacher?', bullying and anti-escalation techniques. Teachers are mentored on a weekly basis to develop their professional skills.
- The school has begun to collect data about pupils' achievement and progress. Following assessment of what they know and can do on admission, pupils have a follow-up assessment to check on their progress, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. However, pupils are only in the school for a relatively short time so the focus is on improving their basic skills to achieve external awards and to be able to use their mathematical and literacy knowledge in practical ways in their future lives.
- Pupils receive training in social skills which is highly effective in helping them to prepare for life after school. Additionally, the school engages an independent careers adviser to ensure that pupils have good-quality information to make informed choices about the next stage when they leave.
- School numbers are small so that every pupil is treated as an individual with individual needs, interests and barriers to learning. The school ensures that every pupil has an equal opportunity to succeed by taking account of these needs and differences in their work. No group of pupils achieves less well than others because of the highly individualised approach. Children who are looked after by the local authority, and for whom the school receives additional funding, achieve as well as others in the school.
- Partnerships with other providers and agencies are extremely good. The school usually hosts multi-agency meetings and acts as lead agent to develop provision which will meet the future needs of pupils and their families. The deputy headteacher follows up all recommendations from meetings diligently to ensure that they are met.
- Links with parents are very strong. Parents feel very well supported by staff and there are many examples of the headteacher responding to calls for help out of school hours.
- **The governance of the school**
  - There is a small governing body but these few governors have very relevant expertise to support the school's leaders and hold them to account for the well-being and protection of pupils. Checks on safeguarding and the use of the school's resources, particularly for looked after children, are rigorous.
  - Governors have ensured that performance management is in place for teachers and teaching assistants, but have not set up a formal appraisal system for senior leaders to hold them to account for school improvement and pupils' progress.
  - Governors are not provided with regular information to enable them to check effectively enough on the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. However, they do receive information about pupils' examination success so that they have an understanding of the outcomes for pupils leaving the school.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding is given the highest priority. Several staff have undertaken advanced training, often led by the chair of the governing body, who is a safeguarding practitioner and trainer. All staff receive regular updates on safeguarding and understand their responsibilities in this area.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now consistently good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Pupils' knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics, is assessed on admission. Gaps in learning are quickly identified and individualised work provided to help pupils begin to make progress. Their learning needs are met well and some make rapid progress in English and mathematics from the start.
- The curriculum has been reviewed and the new schemes of work for all subjects are now ensuring that pupils make progress over the time they are in the school. Teachers use the curriculum plans for each lesson, generally adapting them appropriately to meet the needs of the pupils.
- Occasionally, some pupils are given work which they may already have covered in previous settings. When this happens, the success they can enjoy often boosts their self-confidence but does not stretch their learning enough. On these few occasions, teachers do not always respond quickly enough by giving more challenging work.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know the pupils well and quickly establish nurturing and respectful relationships with them. Pupils thrive under the trust and respect they are shown, and most are willing to work hard in lessons.
- At times when pupils are reluctant to engage or contribute to lessons, teachers and teaching assistants patiently encourage them so that usually they complete the work required of them. This is sometimes the case when teachers give work which pupils think is going to be difficult. For example, in a GCSE English lesson, pupils were asked to write a piece about whether young people spend too long on the internet. Although they had strong views and were willing to express these verbally, they were less willing to put pen to paper. In this instance, the perseverance and support of the teacher and teaching assistant led to some good pieces of writing. However, teachers do not expect pupils to write frequently enough in lessons other than English and this would help to improve their writing skills. Sometimes there is too much use of worksheets which require only one-word answers.
- Pupils are provided with access to information and communication technology for their work. Teachers encourage them to find out things for themselves and develop their independence skills. However, technology is not used as well as it might be to support improvements in writing.
- Pupils speak very positively about the teaching and their learning. They report that the school makes a real difference to their ability to learn, compared with previous experiences.
- Teaching places a strong emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Lessons in citizenship and in personal, social, health and economic education are timetabled daily so that pupils develop a good understanding of British moral values and of their place in society.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Staff share the headteacher's commitment to ensuring the welfare and well-being of the pupils. The headteacher gives of his own time to take pupils on outings, such as to football matches, laser quest or go-karting so that they can enjoy new experiences. All visits and activities are carefully risk assessed.
- Pupils are only with the school for a relatively short time but the impact of the nurturing approach is highly positive in promoting pupils' well-being. The school's multi-agency work ensures that good plans are agreed and in place when pupils leave the school. Staff will respond to requests for help to maintain placements or sort out problems for ex-pupils.
- The administration of medication is managed very safely, and staff work closely with parents and carers to ensure that necessary medication is provided.
- Pupils are given extensive information about how to be safe on the internet and in different settings. They are well informed about the dangers of misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances. Pupils are guided in understanding careful practice in sex-related education lessons.
- During the inspection, all pupils and staff engaged in a lively team-building session. It clearly demonstrated the mutual respect and trust which permeates the school, and helped to develop the cooperative skills pupils will need in the future.
- Pupils enjoy working for rewards, often in the form of a carefully chosen shopping voucher or a trip out.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils appreciate the respect and care given to them and begin to learn to return it. They want to please the headteacher and other staff. Pupils learn how to manage their own behaviour more positively under the care and guidance of staff. As a result, the need for exclusions is very rare and there have been no fixed-term exclusions in the last year.
- As a result of the positive expectations, pupils quickly gain good attitudes to learning so that poor behaviour rarely disrupts learning. Several pupils commented on the positive change in their attitudes to work and to their relationships with other people since joining Silver Birch.
- Poor language and swearing is a way of life for many of these pupils and occasionally staff are not consistent enough about correcting it.
- Pupils understand about different forms of bullying. They say there is no bullying in Silver Birch although many have experienced it or have themselves bullied others in prior settings. They are taught to understand that everyone is different and to respect those differences. It was evident during the inspection that pupils are very supportive of each other. As one pupil put it, 'We all have our problems and should help one another.'
- Attendance is high because pupils enjoy coming to school where they feel safe and well looked after. Any absentees are chased up and members of staff will go to the home and bring pupils in if requested by parents. Relationships with parents and carers are strongly supportive. Parents say the school works closely with them and helps them to manage their children.

## Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Almost all pupils have been out of school for some time before admission to Silver Birch and many have had multiple placement breakdowns. This means that most pupils have missed out on education and are working at lower levels than they are capable of. Most pupils have additional learning difficulties which may not have been met well in the past.
- Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics because their learning needs are identified when they join the school. Teaching then focuses on filling the gaps in their learning. Because their welfare is given such high priority, pupils quickly develop their self-esteem and confidence which helps them to make good and, for some, outstanding progress from their different starting points.
- Progress in reading and mathematics is often impressive but progress in writing is weaker. Pupils are often resistant to being asked to write because they find it difficult. Apart from in English lessons, they are not always encouraged to do so, either using handwriting or technology, in other subjects.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop their speaking and listening skills which are often quite poor when they join the school. Drama and role play are used and pupils practise good interview techniques and how to respond to situations in the workplace.
- Pupils do begin to learn independently but value the support provided by staff. Wherever possible, they are provided with links to real life so they can see how their learning might be used in the future. For instance, pupils learning about percentages were encouraged to connect it to understanding the value of money-off offers in the supermarket.
- Pupils are taking an increased range of external qualifications. Last year a few pupils gained science GCSE and this year about half of leavers are taking GCSEs in English and mathematics with a high proportion expected to gain good grades. All pupils take alternative qualifications in basic skills as well to make sure that all leave with an award which matches their ability and to ensure success at some level.
- Work experience placements are not always appropriate for these pupils but they are given high-quality support to ensure that moves to their next placements are successful.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138971
<b>Inspection number</b>	10012895
<b>DfE registration number</b>	330/6013

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	19
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	5
<b>Proprietor</b>	Noel Thomas
<b>Chair</b>	Angela Solomon
<b>Headteacher</b>	Noel Thomas
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£6,600 basic
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 747 4430
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.silverbirchschoo.com">www.silverbirchschoo.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:enquiries@silverbirchschoo.com">enquiries@silverbirchschoo.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6–8 November 2013

## Information about this school

- Silver Birch School provides education for up to 24 pupils at key stage 4. At the time of the inspection there were 19 pupils on the roll. Five of the pupils are jointly registered with a pupil referral unit which they attend for up to two days a week.
- Pupils are referred by local authorities, from referring agencies on behalf of local authorities or directly from academy schools.
- Pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs with associated behaviour difficulties. Almost all pupils have additional learning difficulties and disabilities including autism spectrum conditions and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders. Six pupils currently have statements of special educational needs. All pupils are provided with an education, health and care plan during their time at the school.
- The large majority of pupils have been out of education for some time before admission to Silver Birch.
- The large majority of pupils are boys but the school also admits girls.
- Almost all pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds but the school is not in receipt of additional government funding for them. The school does receive additional funding for a small number of children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Since the previous inspection, school numbers have increased and the school has moved premises. Both material changes have been approved by the Department for Education.

- The school has discrete premises located within the Shard End Wellbeing Centre. The school is able to make exclusive use of the centre's sports facilities at times when they are closed to the public. Additionally, the school uses facilities in Shard End Park opposite the school.
- Since the previous inspection, the leadership structure has been reviewed and a deputy and assistant headteacher appointed. Staffing numbers have increased to reflect the increased pupil numbers. The headteacher is also the proprietor of the school.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Teaching and learning were seen in all classes. Most observations were undertaken jointly with the assistant headteacher.
- The inspector observed other activities including a team-building exercise involving all pupils and staff, and a care review meeting.
- Samples of pupils' work in their folders were reviewed. Both formal and informal discussions were held with pupils and staff.
- Telephone conversations were held with the head of a pupil referral unit/referral agency and with two governors.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders and discussions held with two parents.
- The inspector reviewed documents and policies to check for compliance with the independent school standards.
- There were no survey responses made by parents but the inspector took into account a pupil satisfaction survey undertaken by the school.

## Inspection team

Hilary Ward, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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