

The Birkenhead Park School

Park Road South, Prenton, Merseyside, CH43 4UY

Inspection dates 23–24 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement in mathematics requires improvement. Although students' achievement in this subject is improving and more students are now making at least the expected rate of progress, too few do better than this. Standards in mathematics lag behind those in English.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics, although strengthening, remains variable and requires improvement.
- Expectations of what students can achieve are sometimes too low to enable students to make good progress. Work, particularly for the most able students, sometimes lacks challenge. Students are not always inspired to do their best.
- The quality of marking, notably in mathematics, is variable. Some students are not clear how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. They do not always respond to their teacher's advice.
- Although leaders at all levels are bringing about improvements to teaching, they are yet to ensure that the good teaching practices that exist, such as in English, are shared widely and effectively among staff.
- Leaders are yet to ensure that all staff adhere to the school's agreed marking policy.
- The wide gaps that have existed in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students compared to others in the school and nationally are not yet closing at a good rate in mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher's aspirational vision, determination, passion and commitment, along with the effective support from governance, senior and middle leaders, has ensured the school has improved since the last inspection.
- In English, students' achievement has significantly improved. Students, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress due to good teaching, effective support and challenge. Standards in English in Year 11 are now close to average.
- The school's evaluation of its own performance is highly accurate. Plans to further improve students' progress in mathematics are well underway.
- Leaders have improved student attendance significantly from low levels to average.
- Students' behaviour has also improved. They behave well and show good attitudes to learning.
- Students know how to keep safe and feel safe. Systems to safeguard students are effective.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and they are well prepared for the diversity of life in modern Britain. Students have a good awareness of respect, self, responsibility and tolerance of others.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve well because they are taught well and receive effective support from adults.
- School leaders are challenged well to improve by an astute and diligent local governing body and academy sponsor.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons and parts of lessons, two of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Formal discussions were held with six groups of students, the local governing body and academy sponsor, the local authority and with senior and middle leaders.
- Informal discussions were held with students at break time, lunchtime and around the school to gather their views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in students’ books, both as a formal exercise in mathematics, English and science as well as in all lessons observed during the inspection. Additionally, a separate work scrutiny of mathematics was carried out jointly with a senior member of school staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation in regard to safeguarding and child protection, minutes of governors’ meetings, performance management, progress data and external reports.
- Inspectors took into account the 44 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the 32 responses to the staff questionnaire and a telephone call from a parent.

Inspection team

Colin Scott, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Neil MacKenzie	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Alyson Middlemass	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school, previously known as The University Academy of Birkenhead, changed its name to The Birkenhead Park School in March 2015 when new academy sponsorship arrangements came into effect.
- The new academy sponsor is the Wirral Academy Trust, led by the Birkenhead Sixth Form College.
- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school located in the centre of Birkenhead.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium funding is very high and now accounts for 85% of its students. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- Most students are of White British heritage. Very few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is twice the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend off-site provision at on a part-time basis in vocational studies at Livava Hair and Beauty and Everton Free School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good in all subjects in order to raise students' achievement, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and that any unfinished or poor quality work is challenged
 - all teachers plan lessons so that students of varying abilities are effectively challenged, and inspired to do their best, particularly the most able
 - the quality of feedback including marking is improved, particularly in mathematics, so that students know how well they are doing, what they need to do to improve and act on their teacher's advice.
- Further strengthen the impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - middle leaders robustly check that all staff adhere to the school's agreed marking policy and that all students are challenged well
 - the best teaching practice evident in the school, is shared widely among staff
 - the provision for disadvantaged students ensures that they make good progress in mathematics so that the gaps in their achievement compared to others in the school and nationally close at a good rate.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong and effective leadership. He has formed a strong and capable team of senior and middle leaders. Together, and with the effective support of governors, they have worked tirelessly to drive school improvement and to transform the school following the last inspection. Their successes are already clearly evident. Students' good achievement in English, a weakness reported in the last inspection, is now good. This is due to significant improvements in the quality of teaching and its leadership. Standards in English are rising quickly. Leaders know that they are yet to ensure students make consistently good progress in mathematics. Their plans and actions to do so are well underway and starting to pay dividends.
- Leaders have ensured that students are now much better equipped for good learning, such as by improving their attendance and behaviour. As a result of effective leadership, students' attendance has risen markedly. Good monitoring and support by leaders has ensured that students now attend school more frequently.
- The leadership and management of student behaviour are effective. Behaviour is no longer a barrier to student progress. Students now behave well and their attitudes to learning are good. Students learn in a calm and harmonious environment. Learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour.
- Leaders have worked tirelessly and effectively to enlist the support of staff, students, parents and the local community in their quest for improvement. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of leadership and know that standards and teaching across the school are improving quickly, particularly in English. Students acknowledge how much the school has improved. They now come to school more regularly and behave well. Parents also demonstrate clear support for leadership and recognise the improvements made to the school and express confidence in the school's leadership. Although applications to join the school in Year 7 previously fell, they have now risen sharply.
- Timely, accurate and effective external challenge and support from the new academy sponsor and the local authority over time, helps to drive the school improvement forward at a good rate. Leaders value this additional support. The new academy sponsor is holding the school effectively to account for raising students' achievement.
- The leadership of teaching is good. This reflects, for example, in the good improvements made in the teaching of English. Leadership of English is particularly strong. Leaders know precisely where teaching is effective and where further support is needed to improve it further, such as in mathematics. Teachers generally receive good support to improve their practice. However, leaders are yet to ensure that the best teaching practice evident in the school is shared widely among staff.
- Middle leaders have strengthened their effectiveness since the last inspection and most are effective, especially in English and history. They are now more focussed on checking the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their area of responsibility and relish opportunities to work collectively. Mathematics leadership however does not ensure students make consistently good progress as a result of good teaching. Middle leaders do not ensure, that all staff adhere to the school's marking policy or ensure that students, especially the most able, are challenged well.
- Strong leadership of the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs ensures that these students achieve well.
- Leaders are making increasingly effective use of additional government funds to improve students' achievement. The Year 7 catch-up funding, for example, is used effectively. Some students have made rapid gains in improving their reading skills as a result. Leaders are now working effectively to narrow any gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students with others in the school and nationally. Gaps have already narrowed impressively in English. Even so, leaders know that they are yet to close the gaps in mathematics, which although narrowing, remain too wide.
- The effectiveness of the school's curriculum has been strengthened. It is wide and varied and now promotes greater enjoyment of learning, successfully capturing students' interests. Students are now making good progress in English because they are given plenty of opportunities to use and apply their literacy skills across the various subjects. Opportunities to do so in mathematics are now also improving.
- The school's work to promote British values and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding of students is strong. Students clearly describe their understanding and demonstrate good empathy with those from other different faiths, other cultures and lifestyles. They say this has been developed through activities such as for Remembrance and Holocaust Memorial Days and through a good programme of assemblies and use of form tutor time. Discrimination of any kind is tackled effectively and is not tolerated.

- Leaders have a wealth of information showing how well groups of students are learning. They are using this information increasingly effectively to ensure that groups of students achieve equally well. They know that the achievement of most groups of students in mathematics still lags behind that in English and are taking steps to remedy this. This shows the school's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity.
- Leaders ensure that the achievement, behaviour and attendance of the small number of students who attend provision off-site are closely monitored.
- Students receive effective support to develop high aspirations for their future lives. The advice, information and careers guidance they are given ensures that the choices they make in their options for GCSE courses, and for choices beyond Year 11, are based on a good understanding of their needs.
- Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures are in place, meet statutory requirements and are effectively implemented.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved since the last inspection and is effective. This has helped to strengthen the school's ability to improve. As a result of training, governors are now well equipped with the skills needed to effectively hold the school to account for its performance. For example, they carefully consider data, both from the school and nationally published information, to compare the performance of groups of students across the school and its performance with other schools.
 - Governors know about the quality of teaching and contribute well to arrangements to manage the performance of staff. They ensure that teachers only progress through the pay scale when it is appropriate to do so and reflects students' achievement. Underperformance in teaching is tackled effectively.
 - Governors check that the school's finances are used to good effect. They know that the pupil premium has already had a very beneficial impact on improving the achievement of disadvantaged students in English but know that it has yet to do so in mathematics.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students mix well in social places and in lessons. They demonstrate clear empathy for each other, are smart, have the right equipment for lessons and are happy.
- Students are polite and courteous to their staff and to each other.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good. Most ensure their books are neat, tidy and well cared for. However, a few students do not always respond to the extra challenges and opportunities given to them to improve their work. Some teachers do not actively encourage them to do so.
- Students say that behaviour has improved and when any poor behaviour is spotted, staff deal with it quickly. A few students described very occasional low-level disruption to lessons caused by a few students that chatter. They say that teachers are making learning much more interesting.
- Most staff and parents agree that behaviour is managed well across the school.
- The behaviour of students who are educated part-time off-site is good because they enjoy what they are doing and value the skills they learn.
- Attendance has significantly improved from the low levels reported at the time of the last inspection and is now close to the national average. The proportion of students who are regularly absent and the proportion that receive fixed-term exclusions have also reduced. This reflects the effective work and determination of leaders to ensure that students can achieve well in school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Procedures in place to check the credentials of staff, the security of the school site and the tracking of students within school are robust and effective.
- Students say that they feel safe and are confident that staff keep them safe in school. Parents agree.
- Students have a good awareness of all forms of bullying. They are confident and happy to report any concerns that they have.
- Students' welfare is monitored well in all social spaces during break and lunchtime. Staff keep a watchful eye on all groups of students. Students play safely and look out for each other.
- Students can describe in detail how to keep themselves safe both in practical lessons and when using

online technologies and social media both in school and at home. They say this is because the school continually reminds them, such as in assemblies and lessons, how to stay safe online.

- Students can detail their understanding of extremist views. They say that the school helps them to understand how to be safe from extremism, such as through the Prevent programme, and recognise that extreme views are not reflective of a whole faith or culture.
- Systems to ensure students are safe when they attend off-site provision are strong. Absence is investigated promptly and rigorously.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Over time, teaching has not enabled students across the school to make consistently good progress. Although the quality of teaching is improving, and notably so in English, it remains inconsistent between subjects. The teaching of mathematics, in particular, still requires improvement.
- Students' improved achievement in English reflects in teachers' higher expectations of them. Lessons are planned carefully to ensure students of varying abilities are effectively challenged. As a result students are excited about learning and inspired to do their very best. In mathematics, however, work still sometimes lacks challenge. Students are not always moved on to more challenging work to deepen their knowledge and understanding once they have mastered the learning. This continues to hamper students' achievement, particularly the most able students.
- The quality of marking is also variable between subjects and therefore overall requires improvement. There is strong practice in English where students know how well they are doing, what they need to do to improve and act on their teacher's advice. Students are now making good progress in English and standards are rising quickly. However, not all teachers adhere to the school's agreed marking policy, particularly in mathematics. Students do not always know what they need to do to improve their work and are not challenged to do so. Minor misconceptions sometimes go unchecked, for example in science, slowing progress. A few students leave work unfinished and this is accepted too readily when work is marked.
- Teachers' questioning skills have improved. Typically, they question students carefully to check on their progress during lessons. They challenge them to think more deeply about their learning as a result. Some teachers also use questions effectively in their marking of students' work and to ensure that students respond to the questions posed. However, this is not the consistently the case.
- Senior leaders and governors have already taken steps to improve the teaching of mathematics. Some new teaching staff are now in place. Assessments of students' attainment and progress have been strengthened and this is now used increasingly well to plan learning that meets students' needs. More opportunities are now provided for students to use and apply their numeracy skills when students complete work in other curriculum subjects. Achievement in mathematics is starting to improve. Opportunities to share the best teaching practices however, such as in the teaching of English, are sometimes overlooked.
- Teachers establish strong working relationships with their students. Students acknowledge that the quality of teaching has improved. They say they are now much more interested in learning and are given more encouragement to do their best. As a result students now behave well and learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. They say that they now receive homework more often and are more eager to complete it.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are taught well. Students receive effective support from teachers and other adults in the classroom. Teaching ensures that those students with more-complex needs, achieve well from their particular starting points.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Between Years 7 and 11, over time, too few students make good progress from their previous starting points. Attainment by the end of Year 11, although improving, particularly in English, is below average overall. Although achievement in mathematics is now starting to improve, it requires further improvement.
- In Year 11 in 2014, the proportion of students who gained five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was much lower than average. Although this overall represented expected progress from their low starting points in Year 7, a below-average proportion of students made the expected rate of progress in mathematics
- School data and inspection evidence shows that currently in Year 11, students are working at levels that are at the national average in English. This is a significant improvement on 2014 results. Effective teaching

in English and support given to promoting literacy across the various curriculum subjects reflects in students' much-improved rate of progress in this subject. Although standards in mathematics are beginning to improve, they still lag behind those in English across the school.

- The achievement of disadvantaged students is improving at a good rate in English. However, overall, it requires improvement because too few disadvantaged students do well in mathematics. This reflects in the differences in the gaps in attainment evident in Year 11 in 2014 between these subjects. In English, disadvantaged students attained standards that were about half of a grade lower than other students in the school and other students nationally. In mathematics however, they attained about a one full grade and a half lower than others in the school and nationally. School data and inspection evidence suggests that in English, currently in Year 11, this gap has narrowed still further and has almost closed. Disadvantaged students are making good progress in English. However, although some improvements are evident in the achievement of disadvantaged students in mathematics, gaps in the attainment and progress are still too wide.
- Students who receive extra support through the additional Year 7 catch-up funding make good progress in reading and in literacy. They are well taught and supported, their confidence increases and their improvement is seen across all subjects. Some students' reading ages improved by up to 20 months in just six months.
- The achievement of the most able students is also improving. This is particularly the case in English, where expectations of what students can achieve are usually high. In English language, for example, the most able students reach higher standards than their peers nationally. However, overall, the achievement of the most able requires further improvement because in some subjects, especially in mathematics, science and geography, work still sometimes lacks challenge to enable students to reach their full potential.
- The quality of support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is effective and, as a result, they make good progress.
- The few students who attend alternative off-site provision make the same rates of progress as their classmates in school. Their behaviour, attendance and their literacy skills are all improving at a good rate.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136411
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	462295

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	584
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Rigby
Headteacher	Geraint Parry
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2013
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