

Inspection of a good school: The Bridge School

Coppice View Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, West Midlands B73 6UE

Inspection dates: 14–15 January 2020

Outcome

The Bridge School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school which has a real feeling of community. Staff go out of their way to make sure that pupils are well cared for and kept safe. The trusting, positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils are a pleasure to see. At the same time, there are high expectations for learning. The headteacher crystallised the school's purpose when she said, 'Care is a given. We are also educators.'

Pupils usually behave well in lessons and around the school. Bullying is not an issue because staff keep a close eye on pupils. Clear routines help pupils to know what is expected of them. A few pupils need extra help to manage their behaviour. Staff receive additional guidance from other professionals to ensure that pupils get the right support to improve their behaviour.

Leaders know that families sometimes find it difficult to access activities in the local community. This may be because of transport issues, or a lack of suitable activities in families' local communities. Leaders make sure that pupils get the chance to take part in exciting events such as singing at Birmingham's Symphony Hall or taking part in a football tournament at Aston Villa.

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

Leaders have high expectations for pupils. They want them to achieve their very best, regardless of their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Because of this, leaders have been thinking long and hard about what pupils need to learn, and when. They have worked in partnership with other schools in the trust to develop a curriculum model, based on the national curriculum, that suits pupils' varying needs and abilities. This includes 'progression ladders' for each subject. This new curriculum is now being put into practice.

The teaching of reading is well planned and sequenced. Younger children and those with more complex needs experience fun activities based around sensory stories, songs and

rhymes. These help to develop children's early phonic skills. Older pupils practise their phonics skills every day. Pupils are reading books that are well matched to their phonics knowledge. As a result, they read simple texts with increasing fluency.

Leaders know that a love of reading is very important. Pupils also get to know a range of high-quality books, known as 'The Bridge Classics', during their time at school. This enables pupils to develop a real love of specific books, such as 'Each Peach, Pear, Plum', and 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'.

Teachers plan activities that support the development of pupils' basic skills. Pupils enjoy a range of engaging sensory activities throughout the day. Some activities such as drawing in sand and foam improve pupils' hand control. This prepares pupils for formal writing. However, the most able pupils do not get enough practice to improve their writing. Sometimes, they make errors which are not addressed by teachers. Pupils then repeat these errors in their writing.

The teaching of mathematics is well planned and sequenced. Pupils use practical apparatus to support their understanding of mathematical concepts. But the most able pupils are not recording their work consistently in mathematics and other subjects. Pupils' books show that while staff are describing pupils' achievements in detail, they do not include first-hand evidence of pupils' work frequently enough.

Staff support pupils' communication and language development effectively. Staff work with therapists to develop passports and plans. These support pupils' communication development. Pupils communicate in school using their preferred approach. These include picture exchanges, communication boards, switches and sign language.

Pupils' personal development is further enhanced, beyond well-planned curriculum activities. Pupils enjoy visits from musicians. They experience different music genres, including jazz and bhangra. Pupils gain confidence when performing in front of an audience. Older pupils can apply to become play leaders. They support younger pupils to play at lunchtimes. Currently, there are limited opportunities for pupils to participate in lunchtime clubs at school. The school council has carried out a survey to find out what kind of activities pupils would like to participate in. Because of this work, a school choir is about to start.

The trust and local academy council members know the school well. They provide good support and professional development opportunities for staff. Capable school leaders are focused on improving the school further, while at the same time taking account of staff workload. Staff spoke positively about the support they receive from the 'approachable' leaders. They talked enthusiastically about the mindfulness sessions they take part in. They have used these strategies to create calm classroom environments.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding leads take their responsibilities seriously. They follow up any concerns about

pupils quickly. These can include non-attendance or concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work closely with other agencies. They secure the right help that pupils and their families may need. Staff are well trained in all safeguarding matters. They are knowledgeable about their responsibilities. They know pupils well and are alert to other clues about pupils' mood and behaviour. Staff recognise that these are also a form of communication. They know that this information plays an important part in the bigger picture of keeping vulnerable pupils safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are in the process of implementing their new curriculum. While it is appropriately planned and sequenced it has not yet been fully implemented. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken that they are in the process of bringing this about. Leaders should continue their work to ensure that the curriculum is fully implemented.
- The most able pupils do not have frequent opportunities to write. They sometimes make basic errors which are not corrected by staff and so repeat these errors. Leaders should ensure that teachers provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to write in different subjects. They should check that teachers are helping pupils to improve their writing by addressing any errors or misconceptions.
- Work in pupils' books shows an over-reliance on staff annotation. Staff tend to write at length about what a pupil has learned, rather than including first-hand evidence of learning, such as a description of the shapes a pupil drew rather than the drawing itself. Sometimes, pupils do not have enough opportunities to record their own work. Leaders should ensure that work in pupils' books captures first-hand evidence of pupils' work, where appropriate. They should ensure that pupils record their own work when they are able to.
- Currently, pupils have limited opportunities to participate in lunchtime clubs. Leaders should ensure that the recent work by the school council to introduce a variety of lunchtime clubs for pupils is put into practice.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, The Bridge School to be good on 21–22 November 2013.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144043
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10122531
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	84
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Lane
Headteacher	Sarah Kelly
Website	www.bridge.fet.ac
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection of the predecessor school, the school has located onto a single site, based in Sutton Coldfield. The residential provision at the Sutton Coldfield site has closed.
- The school caters for pupils with SEND, including severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is a member of the Forward Education Trust.

Information about this inspection

- We met with senior and subject leaders to discuss the work of the school and looked at a range of documentation to support this work.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and the chief executive officer of the Forward Education Trust, and the chair of the local academy council of The Bridge School.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and one of her deputies. She looked at safeguarding evidence and case studies, and behaviour and attendance information. The lead inspector looked at the pre-employment checks leaders make on

new staff.

- The lead inspector met with a small group of staff to discuss their experience of the school. She also attended a school council meeting and spoke with the pupils.
- We focused on reading, mathematics, communication and language, and personal, social and health education. We met with senior and subject leaders to discuss how the curriculum is planned and sequenced, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke to teachers from the lessons visited. The lead inspector listened to a small number of pupils read.
- There were no responses to the parent, staff and pupil surveys so the lead inspector considered the school's own recent survey results.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Amanda Clugston

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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