

Inspection of Cherry Oak School

60 Frederick Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, West Midlands B29 6PB

Inspection dates: 11–12 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an exciting time to be at Cherry Oak School. The quality of education for pupils has declined over time, but things are now starting to get better. Pupils love coming to school. One parent told us that their child 'often goes in dancing and jumping around'. Other parents described similar enthusiasm.

Communication and life skills are priorities. Pupils find how to express themselves and overcome barriers to learning quickly. Lessons are getting better at preparing the pupils for the world around them.

Pupils behave nicely and work hard in lessons. This is because staff know the pupils well. Most staff understand communication, sensory and emotional needs fully and put the right plans in place to support pupils to feel safe and behave well. As a result, this is a calm and welcoming environment.

However, too many pupils do not achieve enough. Lessons do not always help them to learn and remember more. The motto 'working together for success' is now driving improvement.

Pupils do not have a clear understanding of what bullying is. However, they know that teachers would act if they felt they had been upset by others. Leaders investigate any reported incidents and act when needed.

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

Building work and staff turbulence led to leaders taking their focus off the quality of education for a while. After a difficult period, revitalised leadership is starting to turn things around. Leaders and governors are ambitious for the pupils. They know that some pupils have not always learned the right things to be ready for the next stages in learning. However, leaders have implemented a plan of action that is already making a positive difference.

Children get off to a good start in the early years because teachers work hard to get to know the children and their needs. As a result, they make strong progress. Communication, physical and social skills are prioritised. Caring interactions mean children are safe and feel safe. Children play nicely and start to develop friendships quickly.

In key stages 1 and 2, leaders have ensured that all pupils experience a wide range of subjects. These subjects aim to provide pupils not only with academic skills, but also the life skills they need. Subjects such as personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education have been developed well but other subjects such as history and geography are not as strong. In these subjects it is not always clear what pupils are meant to be learning. Leaders are working hard to correct this, and the early signs are positive.

While lessons are often exciting and engaging, they do not consistently help pupils to learn the skills they need to, because they are not always closely matched to the ability of the pupils. This is because sometimes teachers and other staff do not have a secure understanding of what pupils have learned previously. New assessment systems are not yet fully used by all teachers across the school.

Leaders and staff know that all pupils must learn to communicate clearly. The Cherry Oak picture exchange system and signing are just two ways staff help pupils to find their 'voice'. Caring staff make sure voices are listened to and acted upon. While most staff are experts in developing communication, others are not yet as skilful. This limits how quickly some pupils learn.

Pupils in the early years and key stage 1 have daily phonics sessions to help them to learn the links between letters and sounds and to become confident readers. Teachers read to pupils daily using colourful props and interactive computer stories. When younger pupils fall behind, teachers act quickly to make sure they catch up quickly. In key stage 2 the promotion of reading skills is not as strong as lower down the school. In some cases, older pupils learn to read confidently. However, this is not the case in all classes.

Creative and exciting lessons in subjects such as expressive arts inspire pupils. Music, drama and the arts provide opportunities for pupils to learn about artists and develop new skills. The school has achieved Matilda Champion School status from the Royal Shakespeare Society. Frequently planned trips to places such as Birmingham Hippodrome give pupils opportunities to perform to different audiences.

Leaders and staff work hard to make sure pupils are ready for the world around them. Assemblies inspire pupils to be confident and question more about their communities. Visitors in and trips out of the school provide the answers to their questions. PSHE lessons make sure pupils learn how to be healthy and active. For example, 'adventure time' builds the pupils' confidence to explore the community through trips to places like the supermarket.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a 'never do nothing' culture which means pupils are safe and feel safe. Clear policies and regular training mean all staff know how to act when they are concerned about a pupil. When they are worried about a pupil's welfare they act to raise concerns. Leaders investigate these concerns to make sure the pupil is safe.

From the early years, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. The 'choices' programme encourages pupils to consider what are the right and wrong things to do, so they can be safe outside of school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Developments in early years and key stage 1 have raised the profile of reading, similar developments in key stage 2 are not yet as strong. In some cases, pupils do not have regular enough phonics sessions to help them learn and remember the phonics they will need to decode words. This is slowing the development of pupils' reading skills. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils access frequent opportunities to learn the right phonics and to practise their reading.
- Not all members of staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to make sure learning is always successful. While some staff are highly skilled and use this expertise to develop highly effective sequences of learning, other teaching staff are not as skilful. This is most apparent for some members of support staff. This means planned lessons do not always have the impact they should. Leaders need to monitor regularly the impact of staff training to make sure that all staff develop and use the new skills that are being taught.
- The recently implemented curriculum is not yet securely embedded across the whole school. Some of the foundation subjects are underdeveloped. This means it is not always clear what aspects of these subjects the thematic topics cover. This means pupils cannot easily access more challenging learning, because they have not learned the right things in the past. Leaders need to ensure they continue to embed this curriculum, so all pupils learn a range of skills in all the different subjects.
- Recently reviewed and enhanced assessment systems are not secure for all subjects. This means that learning opportunities in all subjects do not always match what pupils have learned in the past. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Leaders need to continue to develop and embed assessment systems to make sure that all learning effectively builds on prior learning, so there are no gaps in pupils' learning.

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	103626
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10122489
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	112
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Clare Mills
Headteacher	Julie Fardell (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.cherryoak.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been no significant changes in the school since the last inspection.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- During the inspection, we focused on the following subjects: reading, communication and language, PSHE and the creative curriculum. In these subjects, we visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, examined teachers' plans and talked with pupils and staff about the way these subjects were taught. We also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- We examined external performance data about the school and looked at school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- We asked staff, leaders and governors about safeguarding arrangements. We examined the record of employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records. We also found out about safety procedures and routines.

- We observed informal times of the day, to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, we had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, governors, teachers and pupils. We also talked informally with parents, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.

Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Heather Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

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