

Inspection of a good school: Rivers Primary Academy

Mersey Road, Blakenall, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1NP

Inspection dates:

3–4 December 2019

Outcome

Rivers Primary Academy continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe. They told me that staff are supportive and watch everyone carefully to make sure they are OK. In pupils' own words, 'The staff here are just brilliant.' Pupils feel that if there is any bullying, staff will sort it out. Pupils are treated equally and all are included in school life.

Behaviour around the school is generally good. However, some parents and pupils said that there are a small number of individuals with challenging behaviour. Leaders have put systems in place to manage difficult behaviour. Nevertheless, the number of pupils excluded rose last year. Exclusions have been above average for the last few years.

Pupils enjoy books and listening to their teachers read stories. However, not all pupils learn to read successfully. Pupils who struggle with reading are not given enough help to catch up. Too many older pupils find mental arithmetic difficult. Some are not secure enough in knowing their times tables.

Pupils enjoy taking on extra responsibilities. A range of clubs, visits and visitors add to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils are keen to achieve the trust pledge of '11 before 11'. This sets out things pupils should experience by the time they leave the school, such as visiting London.

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

Trust and school leaders have recently refined the curriculum. Most subjects have been mapped out and planned in line with national curriculum subjects. History and English are planned and delivered well. However, other subjects are less well developed, such as art and music. These are planned for the spring term. Even so, pupils do not always have secure prior knowledge on which to build. Older pupils have gaps in their knowledge. For example, some pupils are not familiar with famous artists, cannot play a musical

instrument and are unable to hold a simple conversation in French. These are expectations in the national curriculum.

There are overview sheets for each theme taught in each year group to help pupils. These set out what pupils will learn and important subject vocabulary. They are used successfully and act as helpful prompts for pupils. For example, in Religious Education (RE), pupils learn about the five pillars of Islam. They can refer to their sheets to remind them what these are. Pupils build up their knowledge of different world religions as they move through the school.

Leaders want children to read fluently and confidently. Reading books have words in them that closely match the sounds that pupils learn. Many pupils can read them. However, too many pupils are still struggling. This is because phonics is not taught well in all classes in the early years and Year 1. Too many pupils in Year 2 are on the early-stage reading books and not on those they should be for their age. Staff do not hear lower-ability pupils read often enough. Sometimes, these pupils' books are not changed for several weeks. As a result, pupils do not catch up quickly enough. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress has declined from 2017 to 2019.

Leaders are working to improve the teaching of mathematics. Recent improvements mean that pupils now have more opportunities to solve problems and explain their answers. Teachers are being supported by the mathematics leader to help them ensure that pupils' work is well sequenced. However, pupils need to be more skilled in their use of mental arithmetic and times tables. Planning also needs to be more ambitious to challenge pupils so that more achieve the higher standards. Last year's Year 6 pupils made less progress in mathematics than previous pupils did.

Children settle quickly in the early years. They develop good relationships with the caring staff. They respond well to routines and expectations. The early years curriculum is well designed. A strong emphasis is placed on developing children's literacy and mathematical skills from the outset. Phonics and early number are taught in the Nursery. Stories, such as 'Stick Man', capture children's imaginations. Different activities are linked to the story. Adults encourage children to explore and to be independent.

Leaders make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. They access support from specialist professionals for individual pupils. Teachers provide extra help in lessons as needed.

Too many pupils do not attend school often enough. This is having a negative impact on their ability to learn and develop skills. Pupils' behaviour is mostly good and pupils have positive attitudes to their work. This means that lessons are seldom disrupted. Nevertheless, the number of exclusions increased last year and repeat exclusions are too high. This remains an area for improvement.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They appreciate leaders' efforts to improve their work-life balance and reduce workload.

Trust leaders have not held school leaders to account well enough to ensure that areas identified in the previous inspection have been addressed. These include improving pupils' attendance and increasing the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in mathematics.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that all staff are well trained and understand their role in keeping children safe. Staff report and record any concerns quickly to safeguarding leaders. Leaders seek the right support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders carry out appropriate safeguarding checks before appointing staff. However, trust checks are not always as robust as they should be. Some staff are not recorded on the central register. Pupils are taught how to recognise potential dangers and seek help. Parents are confident that their children are safe and well looked after.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The quality of phonic teaching is not good enough to ensure that all pupils become confident and fluent readers. Lower-ability pupils do not receive effective support in early reading to help them catch up quickly. Some are not heard read regularly enough in school. Others remain on the same book for several weeks or do not have books that are matched to their ability. This means that they do not make the progress they should. Leaders should ensure that pupils who are struggling to read are monitored regularly and receive extra support so that they develop greater confidence and fluency in reading by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils lack agility and speed in using mental arithmetic and their knowledge of multiplication tables is not well developed. On occasion, there is a lack of challenge in mathematics in some classes. This is as a result of less effective implementation of a challenging curriculum. Sometimes pupils are moved on before they are secure with some concepts, for example, the 24-hour clock. Leaders should ensure that there is a greater level of challenge for all pupils so that a higher proportion reach the higher standard, and also that teachers revisit areas of weakness so that pupils do not have gaps in their knowledge.
- In the foundation subjects, leaders' plans are in the early stages of implementation in some subject areas, especially art, music and French. Not enough pupils in upper key stage 2 have an age-appropriate understanding of a range of subjects across the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that gaps in pupils' learning are identified and built into current plans so that pupils reach the standards expected by the end of key stage 2 in all subjects.
- Overall attendance for pupils has remained below national average for the last three years. This has not improved sufficiently since the previous inspection. Leaders should

take further steps to work with parents to instil the importance of regular school attendance.

- The number of fixed-period exclusions has been in the highest 20% of schools in the last two years. Repeat exclusions also continue to be too high. Leaders should ensure that actions taken and strategies used are effective in order to reduce the number of exclusions and behaviour incidents recorded.
- Checks of the school's single central register carried out by the trust are not robust enough. The trust should ensure that all staff working in school are shown on the single central register so that it is fully compliant.

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 Rivers Primary Academy to be good on 18–19 June 2015.

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 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	140196
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10088576
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	358
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andrew Middleton
Headteacher	Lucy Wright
Website	www.riversprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 June 2015

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in September 2018.
- A new school building is currently being built on the school site. Pupils and staff are due to move into the new building in Spring 2020.
- The numbers on roll have increased since the previous inspection due to the school becoming two form entry. There are currently two classes in each year group up to Year 4. There are only single classes in Years 5 and 6.

Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, SENCo, key stage 2 leader and early years leader.
- I met with the deputy chief executive officer and the primary director of the trust. I also met with two members of the joint local advisory board.
- The subjects considered as part of this inspection were reading, mathematics and religious education. I did deep dives in these subjects alongside either the headteacher or deputy headteacher. These entailed meeting with senior leaders and teachers,

looking at curriculum plans, visiting lessons, speaking to pupils about their learning and scrutinising pupils' work. I observed the headteacher hearing pupils read.

- The arrangements for safeguarding were checked. This included checks on the single central record, staff training and safeguarding records.
- I discussed behaviour with leaders and checked records. Records of attendance were also checked.
- I analysed the school's self-evaluation document and plans for improvement and looked at curriculum planning.
- I talked with pupils in lessons and during meetings about their work.
- I gathered parent views as they collected their children at the end of the school day. I also took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View and three parent text responses. The school's own parent survey was also considered.
- I met with a number of staff and considered the 26 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.

Inspection team

Heather Simpson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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