

Inspection of Firs Primary School

Dreghorn Road, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, West Midlands B36 8LL

Inspection dates: 1–2 October 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early Years

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a multicultural school. Pupils from all backgrounds work and play together happily. All pupils are treated equally and included in school life. Pupils told us, 'You have to be respectful here.'

Expectations are not high enough in all year groups. This leads to gaps in pupils' learning. Children have a poor start in the early years. They do not achieve well.

Leaders have made some improvements to the school building. However, some areas are shabby and need redecorating.

Pupils generally behave well. Occasionally, some pupils get restless when their work is not engaging. This can disrupt learning for other pupils. All age groups understand and follow the 'Going for Gold' policy. Staff regularly praise pupils and focus on positive behaviour. Pupils enjoy 'Hot Chocolate Fridays' with the headteacher if they reach gold level. Pupils are clear that bullying is rare. They say that leaders deal with it quickly if it happens.

Pupils feel safe in school and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They know how to block someone, as part of their online safety training. Visits from the police and NSPCC reinforce important safety messages. Pupils are confident to talk to staff if they have a problem.

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

The headteacher and his new leadership team know that the quality of education in the school needs improving. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should in different subjects. However, leaders' actions are moving the school forwards. Training and new resources are helping teachers to plan lessons more effectively. Clear structures and plans are in place for almost all subjects. However, the delivery of these subjects, especially writing and mathematics, varies. It is stronger in Years 2, 5 and 6 than other year groups. Gaps exist in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar knowledge. This affects the accuracy of pupils' writing. In mathematics, some teachers have weak subject knowledge or do not set work at the right level for pupils of different abilities. This reduces pupils' progress.

Pupils have a good knowledge of world religions. This is because religious education (R.E) is well planned and effectively delivered. Sports coaches and after-school clubs help pupils do well in physical education. Other subjects are taught through topic work. Leaders have checked that plans build up pupils' skills and knowledge gradually and in the right order. However, it is too early to see if this is working well in subjects such as computing and design technology. Pupils in key stage 2 do not learn a modern foreign language. The school does not, therefore, fulfil its requirement to teach this subject.

Children in the early years settle well. They build positive relationships with adults. However, the early years curriculum is not well designed. Plans for what children need to learn do not ensure that they acquire the skills needed by the end of Reception Year. In 2019, just over half of children reached the level expected. Daily activities are disjointed and not sequenced well. Plans do not take account of what children can or cannot do. Some tasks are too hard, others too easy and some do not focus on learning. All of this means that children do not achieve as well as they should.

Phonics is not taught well enough. Children in the early years spend too long on the same sounds and do not move on. Pupils in Year 1 struggle to blend sounds and develop their fluency. Over time, too few pupils reach the levels expected in phonics. Staff do not listen to pupils read often enough, especially lower-ability pupils. This term, leaders have invested in new books to help develop pupils' reading. The books pupils take home are now better matched to their reading ability. Teachers use good-quality texts in daily reading lessons. Pupils enjoy the stories and poems that adults read to them.

Values, such as tolerance and respect, underpin pupils' personal development. Pupils appreciate and celebrate the diversity of pupils within their school. Pupils readily take on roles such as librarian, school councillor or assembly monitor. They enjoy the events, clubs and trips offered.

Staff identify and cater for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Adults give pupils who struggle extra support. Individual plans are created which focus on areas that pupils need to practise. The new SEND leader sets aside time each week to meet parents to discuss any concerns.

Leaders have worked hard to improve attendance. They have been successful. They now support other schools in the trust. Leaders follow up pupils' absences well. They go the extra mile to support families in difficult circumstances. This includes collecting pupils and bringing them to school.

Staff morale is positive. Staff feel that leaders are supportive. They appreciate adjustments made to marking pupils' books to reduce their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are highly vigilant and take pupils' safety seriously. The school has an effective pastoral team. They know parents well and have built good relationships. This allows staff to provide help and support to families who are vulnerable when needed. All staff receive regular training so that they know what to do if they have any worries about any pupils. Leaders follow up concerns quickly. They make referrals to the appropriate agencies. This ensures that pupils and their families get the support

needed. Leaders carry out robust safeguarding checks before employing staff in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Plans have been established in almost all subjects. Checks carried out in PE and RE show that these are working well. However, other subjects are less successful as some plans are very new. Leaders should continue to monitor the implementation of plans for all foundation subjects and build in assessment opportunities to determine how well pupils are achieving in these areas.
- Pupils in key stage 2 do not learn a modern foreign language. Trust leaders and governors should ensure that pupils receive this entitlement.
- Phonics is not taught effectively in the early years or key stage 1. There is a three-year declining trend in phonics at the end of Year 1. Not all staff have been suitably trained, including support staff. Leaders should ensure that there is a sharp focus on the systematic teaching of phonics so that pupils become confident and fluent readers. Lower-ability pupils should read regularly with adults so that they catch up quickly with their peers.
- The use of oral strategies to build pupils' confidence in their writing are having a positive impact in most classes. However, this approach is not embedded in Years 3 and 4 and needs monitoring. Further attention also needs to be paid to improving pupils' spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting so that pupils are working at the levels appropriate for their age.
- The introduction of a strategy for teaching mathematics is working well in upper key stage 2. However, teachers' weak subject knowledge and not setting work at the right level are hampering pupils' progress in mathematics in lower key stage 2. Leaders should provide additional training for staff with weak subject knowledge and monitor pupils' progression regularly.
- Leaders and governors focused on early years provision at the start of 2019 and made some changes to the environment and staffing. However, the changes made have not led to sufficient improvement. The early years curriculum is poorly designed and does not meet children's needs. It does not provide the secure foundation children need to build on in their future schooling. Leaders should carry out an urgent review of early years planning and design it to ensure that children reach a good level of development.
- The interior of the school is in poor condition. Trustees, governors and leaders should ensure that classrooms and other areas of school are well presented in order to provide pupils with a welcoming, stimulating and positive learning environment.

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're 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	143089
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10111652
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	379
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Peter Anstey
Headteacher	David Shakeshaft
Website	http://firs.academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Firs Primary School became an academy in December 2016. The school joined Community Education Partnerships Trust. This trust then merged with Washwood Heath Multi-Academy Trust in summer 2018. The predecessor primary school was inspected in June 2018. That inspection judged the school to require improvement.
- There have been many changes to staffing and leadership since the school's previous inspection. The current headteacher joined the school in September 2018. Most subject leaders are new to post.
- The trust closed the school nursery in July 2019. The age range of pupils now in school is 4 to 11 years old.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspectors held meetings with the chair of the board of trustees, the chief and deputy chief executive of the trust, the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and three assistant headteachers. Discussions were also held with two members

of the governing body, including the chair of governors. A meeting was held with the deputy headteacher and pastoral manager in relation to attendance, behaviour and the use of the pupil premium.

- Inspectors checked safeguarding and staff vetting records. They met with two of the school's designated safeguarding leaders to judge the effectiveness of child protection and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors undertook a range of inspection activities to judge the quality of education. Meetings were held with staff responsible for managing English, mathematics, PE, RE, the wider curriculum, SEND provision and the early years. Joint lesson visits with some of these subject leaders were carried out. Discussions were held with staff and pupils from classes visited, and pupils' work was evaluated.
- Inspectors heard individual pupils read and observed staff hearing pupils read. Most were lower-ability pupils who receive extra support to help them catch up.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons and at breaktimes. Behaviour and attendance records were checked.
- Inspectors took account of the three parents' text comments received. There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, to consider. Comments were also sought from parents as they brought their children from school.
- Inspectors considered the 17 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. Inspectors also talked with staff to gauge their views about the support they receive and their workload.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons. They met with small groups to discuss their views about the school, their work, behaviour and safety. Inspectors observed playtimes and lunchtimes.
- School records and documents were checked in relation to leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness, the school's action plans and documents relating to governance, attendance, exclusions and behaviour.

Inspection team

Heather Simpson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dawn White	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Parker	Ofsted Inspector

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