

Woodcroft First School

Wallbridge Drive, Leek, Staffordshire ST13 8JG

Inspection dates

12–13 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The head of school and executive principal provide strong leadership. They have reversed the previous decline in pupils' achievement and in the quality of teaching.
- The St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust, its leaders, governors and staff have transformed the school since the two previous inspections. There is good capacity now to sustain improvement.
- Governance has improved since the previous inspection. Governors are increasingly influencing school improvement but could still be making more strategic decisions to hold leaders to account.
- Pupils are proud of their school and feel safe, valued and supported. They are extremely well behaved, polite and courteous.
- Leaders and staff make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspections.
- Staff and governors have fostered a supportive school community. Most parents and carers are pleased with the changes made since the previous inspections and pay tribute to the efforts of a skilled and dedicated staff team.
- Good teaching in all classes includes some outstanding practice. Pupils achieve well as a result. However, teachers could do more to assess how well pupils are learning and to identify gaps or misunderstandings and address these during lessons.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment is rising by the end of key stage 1 and compares very well with the national average. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 also achieve well because the teaching builds on the good start made in key stage 1.
- Although pupils achieve well, there is scope to offer the most able pupils more challenge in lessons.
- The school's curriculum is having a positive effect on pupils' personal and academic development. Sport and the performing and creative arts are good features. However, pupils do not always study all subjects or topics in enough depth to build on what they have already learned. Nor do pupils have sufficient opportunities to apply basic skills in other subjects.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. The teaching of reading and phonics in the early years and key stage 1 is very effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the good practice that exists so that teachers and support staff ensure that pupils fully understand what they are learning in lessons by:
 - adapting tasks and activities for the most able pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding
 - assessing how well pupils learn and then identifying gaps or misunderstandings that can be addressed
 - supporting more directly and intervening when pupils are working independently and they do not quite understand or grasp new learning.
- Sustain improvements to the school's wider curriculum by:
 - ensuring that pupils are able to build on previous knowledge and understanding in all subjects, learn in greater depth and avoid going over too much old ground
 - adapting the topics and projects planned for pupils so that they have more opportunities to apply their reading, writing, mathematics and science skills in other subjects.
- Maintain current improvements to governance by:
 - using the evidence governors gather first-hand from visits to lessons with leaders to ask more strategic questions about teaching and learning, rather than just focusing on the operational features of the school's work
 - building on the improvements made to governors' roles and responsibilities in preparation for the new scheme of delegation for governors when the school becomes an academy in July 2019.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The previous full inspection in July 2016 and subsequent monitoring inspection in October 2017 found weaknesses in leadership, management and governance. Previous leaders and governors were not robust or systematic enough to form an accurate view of the most important priorities for improvement.
- Leaders, governors and staff are now steering the school on a sustained course of improvement. The executive principal and head of school have been instrumental in leading this recovery and have laid strong foundations during restructuring to reduce inconsistent practice and to raise standards.
- The combined efforts of the trust, senior leaders, governors and staff over the last 12 months have resulted in sustained and significant improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement across the school. The head of school is a very skilled teacher who leads by example. This has inspired other staff, particularly less-experienced teachers, who have seen and shared good practice to improve their own skills.
- Most parents responding to online survey agree that the leaders and staff are making a real difference. Staff morale is very high. Nearly all staff responded very well to the new demands placed on them by leaders. The most significant improvement noted by both teaching and support staff is the high-quality training and professional development they receive.
- Senior leaders provide clear direction and oversight of the school and work closely with governors. Leaders provide highly effective support and challenge. They carry out accurate evaluations of the quality of teaching and systematic assessments of pupils' learning. Senior leaders regularly monitor lessons and provide the right guidance for staff to improve performance. This is a significant improvement since the previous two inspections.
- Leaders and governors determine the right priorities for improvement in their action plans. There are now well-targeted priorities identified thanks to accurate evaluations of teaching and learning. Senior and middle leaders carry out regular peer-to-peer reviews, risk assessments and audits, as well as moderated assessments of pupils' work and progress. By comparing pupils' performance and assessments with other schools, leaders are now best placed to accurately assess how well pupils and staff are doing.
- Leaders use funding to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well to plan interventions and deploy resources to most effect for these pupils.
- The pupil premium is used well to make sure that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is accurately evaluated, and that appropriate interventions, teaching and support are provided. As a result of improved teaching and assessments, disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils nationally.
- Sport and physical education (PE) are good features of the school's planned curriculum. The school makes very effective use of the primary PE and sport grant. For example, leaders appoint specialist coaches to work with pupils to improve their health and

fitness. This includes special circuit training sessions that focus on reducing child obesity and improving mental health and attitudes to school and learning.

- The head of school is passionate about providing a stimulating curriculum. Leaders and staff are currently refining and planning the broader curriculum, recognising that pupils do not learn skills and acquire knowledge in all subjects in enough depth. The head of school has devised what she terms 'phase two' of school improvement planning, having worked hard with staff to address weaknesses and improve pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The staff plan an extensive programme of visits, topics, special projects and events that include the creative and performing arts. Theatre trips, school performances such as 'The Lion King' and opportunities for the school choir to perform for older people in a local nursing home help pupils to improve their self-esteem and confidence, as well as their social and cultural development.
- The staff are increasingly providing opportunities for pupils to apply their English and mathematics skills and knowledge in all subjects of the national curriculum. However, leaders recognise, rightly, that lessons do not always challenge, extend or deepen pupils' learning and understanding enough in subjects such as geography, history and science. There are variations and differing expectations across classes, including the mixed-age classes, so that some pupils learn less than others in the same year groups because the work does not build sufficiently on what pupils already know and understand.
- Leaders and staff promote values that are integral to the British way of life so that pupils learn to respect and understand all major faiths, beliefs and cultures. Staff plan activities, including educational visits, for example to the pupil parliament, and provide opportunities for pupils to care for the local and wider community as 'eco warriors'. These, together with an extensive range of other planned events and activities, make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The local authority, the trust and school leaders have worked effectively to address many of the weaknesses that existed previously. As a result, there have been two years of sustained improvements to pupils' attainment at key stage 1 when compared to national figures, as well as much-improved teaching in key stage 2.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is now effective in holding leaders and staff to account. Changes to governors' roles and responsibilities, particularly since the current chair and vice-chair took over, have resulted in much more robust and coordinated oversight of the school's work.
- The support provided by the local authority and the current head of school, who is also a specialist leader of education, as well as the involvement of The St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust since January 2018, has resulted in significant improvements to governance since the previous inspections.
- Governors have acted on the recommendations of external reviews since the previous monitoring inspection in October 2017.
- Governors are now linked to all aspects of the school's work and make regular visits to

lessons with school leaders to gather first-hand evidence. The governing body is now better informed because of these links and is in a stronger position to hold leaders and staff to account. However, some of the questions posed and queries raised during governor meetings or in reviews following governor visits are not challenging enough. Although much improved, there is still scope to ask more strategic questions of leaders, rather than focusing too much on operational matters and the day-to-day running of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective, robust and fit for purpose. There is a vigilant culture of safeguarding. Making sure that pupils are happy and safe in school is regarded by all leaders, staff and governors as a high priority.
- Teachers, support staff and governors are well trained and keep up to date with policies and practices relating to safeguarding and child protection. The staff are well trained and aware of the risks facing communities regarding child exploitation and radicalisation. There are regular updates and training, for example on the 'Prevent' duty.
- Administrative staff diligently check and verify the identity of visitors, including inspectors, when they arrive at school. Pupils feel safe and secure because everyone visiting or working in the school has been identified and checked.
- The safety and well-being of children in the early years settings (the Nursery and Reception classes) are well managed. The early years welfare requirements are fully met.
- Parents believe that their children are safe in school. Pupils say that the staff and other pupils make them feel very safe, valued and secure. The formal registration arrangements for volunteers, supply staff and site maintenance workers are robust and secure. Risk assessments of all indoor and outdoor activities are systematic and inform staff about the necessary precautions to take, including supervision and transport arrangements when off site.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils' work in books, observations of lessons and assessment information show that teaching across the school is effective. Pupils make good progress and teachers have consistently high expectations for the way they expect pupils to work and behave in lessons.
- The quality of teaching is also reflected in the positive outcomes seen in the results of national tests in key stage 1 and the progress pupils make in Years 3 and 4. There is some strong practice, which is influencing the teaching of less-experienced staff and which is sustaining a consistent rise in pupils' outcomes in all classes.
- Teachers and support staff encourage pupils to check and improve their work so that pupils become confident learners. Teachers and support staff use a range of teaching strategies, such as whole-class instruction, group work and direct intervention. However, there are occasions during lessons when pupils' learning slows because they

are not being challenged enough or they are completing work they already know and understand. This is more common in subjects other than English and mathematics.

- Teachers make good use of their assessments to plan work that provides the right level of challenge for pupils. However, teachers and support staff do not always extend learning for the most able pupils. Teachers ask questions and often respond to pupils' answers very well during class discussions. The most effective practice ensures that both teachers and support staff are on hand to check that the most able pupils are offered the right level of challenge. In a key stage 1 mathematics lesson for example, the teacher made sure that pupils had plenty of opportunities to explain why it is important to see fractions as equal parts. The teacher asked some challenging questions and planned some demanding tasks that extended learning further.
- Teaching is successful at developing pupils' literacy and mathematics skills. Teachers and support staff are good at posing questions during class discussions to encourage pupils to answer and share ideas with their classmates. There are occasions, however, when teachers do not probe further to extend pupils' understanding or do not adapt tasks enough to ensure that pupils learn in greater depth. Pupils listen attentively when pupils read aloud to others or recite extracts from their work to the rest of the class. There are good opportunities for pupils to discuss and share ideas about books and stories. The teaching of early reading and phonics is highly effective. Teachers in key stage 1 build on the good start made in the early years as pupils recognise what are termed 'high frequency words' in texts. Pupils throughout the school can break down composite letter sounds to read unfamiliar or more complex words independently.
- Pupils are taught consistent methods that enable them to write legibly and independently with accurate form and structure. Work in pupils' books shows that they write extensively. For example, in key stage 2, pupils write stories, poems and factual accounts in science and humanities topics. Pupils' handwriting is fluent and well formed and, as pupils mature and move up the school, the quality of their writing develops and continues to improve. However, work in topic books and in subjects other than English and mathematics shows that pupils do not study some subjects in enough depth. The head of school is, rightly, focusing on this aspect of teaching and the curriculum as part of phase two of the school's improvement plans.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- 'Teachers help us to behave well and treat each other with respect' and 'We are taught to treat others the way we expect to be treated ourselves' were just some of the many positive comments made by pupils during the inspection. There are positive and supportive relationships between pupils and staff.
- Pupils have very good opportunities to participate in and contribute to their school community. This is having a positive impact on their personal, social and moral development. Pupils learn to adopt and apply British values such as democracy when influencing the work of the school as elected ambassadors. Play leaders help to look after other pupils, including helping younger children at breaktimes.

- Pupils develop excellent social skills and were observed on many occasions working and playing cooperatively. Pupils are very caring and sensitive to the needs of others, including vulnerable pupils and those with SEND. A typical example was observed in a lesson where pupils worked in table groups in key stage 2. Pupils were encouraging everyone in their group to contribute and share ideas. With sensitivity and encouragement from their peers, even the most reluctant pupils were drawn into the group discussion and participated without the need for adult intervention. This and many other examples demonstrate how mature and sensitive pupils are towards each other.
- Pupils are taught how best to deal with bullying, internet safety and the risks of radicalisation and exploitation. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and know how to share any concerns they may have with leaders and staff. Many parents commented in their free-text responses to the online survey that their children settle into school well because the head of school, staff and other pupils are caring and respectful of everyone.
- Pupils and staff embrace religious, ethnic and cultural diversity very well. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils have good opportunities to study and respect other faiths, customs and beliefs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in attendance rates that compare very well with national averages. Pupils are usually punctual and ready for school and learning. There are very good arrangements in place to check if pupils are safe when not in school. Parents are very supportive of the school's efforts to make sure that pupils attend regularly and on time.
- Pupils cooperate extremely well in lessons and at other times. They are kind and helpful to each other and willingly offer praise to other pupils, including those with SEND. These positive characteristics make a strong contribution to pupils' moral and social development.
- Staff value pupils' work and set high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. In turn, pupils listen to each other and to adults with respect and courtesy.
- Pupils are proud of their school and are keen to show visitors around. Those with additional responsibilities, such as play leaders, school parliamentarians and ambassadors, wear their school badges with pride.
- Many of the oldest pupils in Years 3 and 4 show maturity and personal skills that are impressive for their age. These are some of the many comments made by a large group of school ambassadors: 'The work we do and what we learn help us to promote and believe in important things like individual liberty'; 'We respect others and encourage this'; and 'Believing in diversity is really important because we are a world community.' The previous inspections reported that aspects of the school's work, such as the promotion and teaching of British values, were relative weaknesses. There has been a great deal of improvement in this aspect of pupils' behaviour and personal development. This is clearly reflected in the comments made by pupils and the work

they do in school and at home.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The standards pupils reach in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 and by the end of Year 4 in key stage 2 represent good progress in relation to their starting points. This reflects much-improved and good teaching in all classes across the school. Pupils achieve well over time, although there is still scope for the most able pupils to do even better.
- National assessments at key stage 1 from 2017 to 2018 show consistent improvement. Attainment compares very well with national averages and, increasingly, more pupils are reaching and exceeding age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the required standard in the phonic screening check over the last two years compares well with national figures. This reflects consistently good phonics teaching in the early years and key stage 1.
- Pupils' current writing and mathematics work in books, and in-school assessments, show that pupils in Years 1 and 2 continue to make good progress. Reading, writing and mathematics standards are sustaining the last two years' improvements. Most pupils in all key stage 1 classes, including the two mixed-age classes, are reading and writing independently with increasing accuracy and confidence. This is building on the solid foundations from the early years in both the Nursery and Reception classes. Handwriting, spelling and punctuation are well taught, and pupils use efficient and consistent methods of calculation when solving number problems in mathematics.
- In Years 3 and 4 in key stage 2, a similar picture emerges. Work in books and pupils' learning in lessons over time show that pupils build well on the progress made in key stage 1. Assessments are accurate and are reflected well in work in pupils' books and in the progress they make. There has been a steady improvement in the proportion of pupils in all key stage 2 classes reaching or exceeding age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Typically, across the school, pupils achieve well but there are opportunities to build on this further to ensure that all the most able pupils learn in greater depth. Having addressed weaknesses reported at the time of the previous full inspection, leaders and staff are now, rightly, focusing on pupils' achievement in all subjects of the national curriculum.
- Pupils' work in science and topics in humanities that include, for example, geography and history, shows that pupils do not have enough sustained opportunities to apply their literacy and number skills to other subjects. One of the five priorities identified by the head of school in phase two of improvement planning is focusing on pupils' learning in greater depth across all subjects of the national curriculum. This is an appropriate course of action, recognising that this is a relative weakness in pupils' achievements.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children join the Nursery or Reception classes with skills and abilities that are

typically in line with those expected for their age, particularly in communication, language, literacy and numeracy. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is increasing well and is typically above national figures. This represents good progress over time.

- Children in the Nursery make good progress in their all-round development. There is good teaching and leadership in the early years. Staff are vigilant, caring and effective in making sure that the children play and learn together safely and productively. In the Reception class, teachers and support staff build very well on the start made in the Nursery. Children in both classes are provided with a very good range of stimulating and engaging activities that help them become independent and confident learners.
- Good teaching, combined with strong pastoral welfare for both children and families, is getting the youngest children off to a good start. Staff have built good working relationships with children and their families. School leaders and early years staff have a well-developed knowledge of the early years assessment requirements. The school's assessment system is a very good source of evidence for staff and parents, showing children's work and progress very clearly in all areas of learning across the early years curriculum.
- Adults throughout the early years know and look after the children very well and set them tasks that are usually interesting, varied and stimulating. Children are often fully engaged and interested in their learning, which is often tactile and practical and builds on what they already know and understand. The children in both classes access and use resources very well. Activities include making models using a variety of materials in the Nursery, experimenting with different liquids in the Reception class and, also in the Reception class, writing about a recent visit to a farm to learn about what helps us to grow and be safe.
- Activities inside and outside the classroom are linked to children's own experiences, such as role-play shopping, cooking or gardening to plant seeds and bulbs. Children also engage in calm and effective reading sessions that involve children and adults sharing books and reading aloud in small groups. These are well planned to provide children with good-quality stories and interesting books to handle and share.
- Early years provision is well managed. Nursery and Reception staff use effective assessments, based on direct records and observations of children working, to check on the progress children make. Assessments are accurate so that teachers and support staff have a firm basis for planning children's learning. Children's progress is catalogued electronically for each child and is exceptionally well presented.
- Adults are good role models and sensitive to the needs of children in both settings. There are a few occasions, however, when adults lead children too much so that the children do not have an opportunity to show what they have learned. Sometimes, children are directed too much or are unnecessarily shown the correct answer or response, without having the opportunity to find out for themselves.
- All welfare requirements, including assessments and safeguarding procedures, meet requirements. Staff are well qualified and have the necessary experience and expertise to deliver effective teaching and sustain improved outcomes for children. Children are well prepared for their education in key stage 1.

School details

Unique reference number	124152
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10053169

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rachel Billington
Executive principal	Sean Thomson
Head of school	Helen Hewitt
Telephone number	01538 714 796
Website	www.woodcroftfirstschool.leek-staffs.org.uk
Email address	headteacher@woodcroft.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 July 2016

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than most primary schools.
- Early years provision comprises a Nursery class for three- and four-year-old children and one Reception class for four- and five-year-olds. The Nursery opened in September 2018 and the children attend either part time or full time. This amounts to a full-time equivalent of up to 16 children.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average.
- The executive principal and head of school, who are employees of the St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust, were seconded to the school in April 2018 and replaced the previous headteacher who left. The chair of the governing body has been in post since January 2017. The executive principal oversees the work of this and other schools in the trust.
- The St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust will become the responsible body for managing the

school in July 2019. The trust has been providing support and training for leaders and staff since January 2018 in preparation for the school converting to become one of its academies. Approximately one third of the overall leadership and staff team have been appointed since the previous full inspection in July 2016. The head of school will become the permanent head at the time of academisation.

- Staffordshire local authority has also supported the school since its previous inspection and has worked with the trust during this period of transition to becoming an academy. The school has close links with other schools in the Britannia Teaching School Alliance in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Since the previous inspection in July 2016, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) carried out a monitoring inspection in October 2017 because the school was judged to require improvement. The HMI judged that the senior leaders and governors at that time were not taking effective action to improve the school's effectiveness. Since then, there have been considerable leadership and staff changes, as well as strategic changes to the composition of the governing body.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of lessons in every class. Many visits were made jointly with the head of school or executive principal. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work in books, assessment information and records of previous work, including work displayed on walls in classrooms and corridors.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including: leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness; the school's improvement and action plans; assessment information and tracking data about pupils' achievement; and school documents and data relating to governance, teaching, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons. They met with three groups of pupils to hear them read and to discuss their work, behaviour and safety. Inspectors spoke to pupils during breaks and lunchtimes to ask them for their views about the school.
- Inspectors analysed the 61 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the 59 free-text comments from parents. The lead inspector considered the 16 responses from staff to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. Inspectors also talked to leaders and staff to gauge their views about the support and training they receive.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive principal, the head of school and teachers responsible for managing subjects or phases in the school. Inspectors held a meeting with four governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer of the trust. The lead inspector also spoke with the school's office manager to check safeguarding and staff vetting records.

Inspection team

Charalambos Loizou, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Benedict Cox

Ofsted Inspector

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