

# Alston Primary School

Alston Road, Bordesley Green East, Birmingham, West Midlands B9 5UN

## Inspection dates

22–23 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. However, leaders have taken strong action to improve teaching since the school became an academy.
- Pupils' progress requires improvement in key stage 2 because some teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are not high enough.
- The proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics is not as high as it should be by the end of key stage 1.
- Some teachers' subject knowledge lacks consistency and accuracy when teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Teachers do not set work or pose questions that offer a consistently high level of challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Teaching does not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- While leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in school, some plans for improvement do not clearly identify how monitoring will be used to evaluate the impact of actions taken.
- Leaders do not provide teachers with consistently clear information on how teaching should be improved.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher leads with clarity and purpose. Her tenacious drive to improve all aspects of the school's work is ably supported by other leaders in school.
- Governors and the multi-academy trust are ambitious for the school; they provide strong support and challenge to school leaders.
- Pupils in the early years make good progress from their starting points because of good teaching and strong leadership.
- The teaching of phonics is a strong feature within the early years and in key stage 1.
- Staff, pupils and parents work together harmoniously, which creates an ethos in which pupils feel safe and happy.
- Pupils behave well and demonstrate a deep understanding of values; they appreciate diversity and show tolerance of others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely well catered for.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in key stages 1 and 2, by making sure that teachers:
  - have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve by setting appropriately challenging work, particularly for the most able pupils
  - pose searching questions that enable children to think for themselves
  - receive relevant support so that they can apply consistently accurate subject knowledge when teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling
  - provide opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical understanding in reasoning.
- Further improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that improvement plans have clear timescales and monitoring actions, in order to bring about sharper evaluation and improvements to weaker teaching
  - ensuring that all leaders provide consistently precise feedback to teachers, so that they know exactly how they can improve their teaching.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher is unwavering in her pursuit of improving all aspects of the school. She is well supported by other leaders, including governors, in addressing any weak teaching. Leaders are a cohesive team; they know the school well and demonstrate a strong capacity for further improvement.
- Since opening as a new school, leaders have had a clear impact on improving teaching. The headteacher has high expectations and a clear vision for classroom practice, but the pursuit of this has not been without challenge. On converting to become an academy, there were significant staff changes and recently there has been a further challenge of not being able to recruit good-quality teachers to classroom positions. Leaders are not evading this challenge. They are focused on improving the remaining weaker teaching in the school.
- Leaders involve the whole school community when developing their self-evaluation and school improvement plan, which means that they capture the relevant priorities. However, not all improvement plans identify the specific timescales of actions or the exact monitoring activities that will enable leaders to evaluate the impact of their work.
- Senior and middle leaders demonstrate a clear focus on improving teaching through robust performance management procedures and an effective cycle of checking classroom practice. Leaders hold teachers to account through these processes, but equally, they support teachers to improve.
- Leaders' lesson feedback to teachers is not always as consistently precise as it should be, which means that occasionally some weaker teaching is not improved as rapidly as it could be.
- There is clear evidence of relevant training for teachers and growing collaboration to share the best practice, both within school and among other staff in the multi-academy trust. Leaders put in place more intensive and individualised professional development when it is required, which is an approach that has helped some teachers to make positive improvements over time.
- Middle leaders are having an effective impact in their subject areas. The English and mathematics leaders have a good grasp of the key priorities for improvement. For example, the English lead has put in place a new approach to reading in key stage 2, which is showing early signs of improved comprehension skills in some classes.
- The inclusion leader ensures that funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and pupils who speak English as an additional language, is very well planned and meets pupils' needs. Pupils are making effective progress in interventions, which is helping them to access work closer to age expectations.
- Disadvantaged pupils are well catered for because leaders and teachers know them well. The additional funding is used wisely to plan targeted interventions, which are having a positive impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- The sport premium funding is used to good effect. The physical education specialist teaches across the school and also works with staff to improve their own teaching. In

addition to that, participation in extra-curricular sport has risen sharply. Pupils are motivated by some of the alternative activities like zumba and fencing.

- Leaders have designed a new curriculum, which is offering a broad and balanced experience for pupils. Pupils are excited by it, with some explaining, 'It's fun but educational', and 'We work with different children and do exciting skills'. Subjects are brought together through interesting topics, which is helping pupils to make links between subjects and deepen their understanding. For example, Year 6 learned about the heart in science, including dissecting a lamb's heart; they wrote heart poems in English, as well as learning about heart rate in physical education.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely well catered for. Pupils respect other faiths and cultures and they discuss ethical issues. They are taught values in a meaningful way through the curriculum and in assemblies. A visitor came into an assembly during the inspection and talked about their visit to Gambia. Pupils were engrossed in the content and could talk compassionately about the importance of helping others, but particularly helping those who are less fortunate. Pupils also visit places to enrich their cultural development and their understanding of modern Britain. For example, the children's parliament visited the Birmingham Council House and other pupils visited the theatre in Stratford.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors are very effective. They know the school well and offer a range of skills and expertise. Several of the board members from the Leigh Trust sit on the school's governing body, which ensures a fluid link with the trust. This includes the chief executive officer of the trust, who is a national leader of education, and the chair of governors, who is a national leader of governance. Their expertise helps to ensure a high level of support and guidance for the school.
- The governing body has developed good systems to understand the school and provide challenge. The headteacher's reports are relevant and informative. Governors have assessment information presented to them in a meaningful way, which means they understand any weaknesses in pupils' progress. Sometimes, the challenging questions that governors ask could be even more probing in holding leaders to account.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties rigorously, including those in relation to safeguarding. Governors are involved in the headteacher's performance management and they have a good understanding of their role in pay progression. They are good at monitoring the use of extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils and there is clear impact on the effective use of the funding. For example, the home link worker runs successful parent workshops for reading, writing and mathematics for disadvantaged pupils.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders place pupils' safety and well-being at the heart of the school's work. They ensure that there are robust systems in place that are understood and followed by all staff. Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding and are vigilant in looking out

for any signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm or abuse. There are well thought out systems for recording any concerns relating to safeguarding. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are tenacious in following up these concerns.

- Leaders ensure that staff, pupils and their families are well supported in developing their understanding of how they can combat extremism and the risk of radicalisation. Leaders have run workshops in school for parents to provide them with an accurate understanding of how this relates to them and their children.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistent across the school.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what children can do. This is more prominent for the most able pupils, who are capable of carrying out more challenging work or starting harder work more promptly.
- Teachers' use of questioning varies in quality between classes. Where teaching has the strongest impact, questions are posed that enable pupils to think deeply in order to build on their understanding. Where questioning is weaker, it is often closed and it does not encourage pupils to think for themselves.
- Some teachers' subject knowledge lacks consistency and accuracy when teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling, which means that some pupils do not have a clear idea of how to write accurately and successfully.
- The teaching of mathematics is enabling pupils to develop improved fluency in their basic skills, including calculation. However, pupils are not being given sufficient opportunities to apply their understanding by developing their reasoning skills.
- Teaching in Year 3 requires particular attention because it is weaker than in other year groups.
- Teachers in key stage 2 have started teaching reading comprehension in a more focused way, which is beginning to help pupils to learn specific skills. In a Year 6 class, pupils were successfully answering challenging inference questions after watching a stimulating video clip. One pupil commented, 'Inference means that the author is inferring something and we have to look for clues about what they mean.'
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and support pupils to move on in their learning. They work with a range of pupils and help them to make effective progress.
- Teachers are secure in their phonics teaching in key stage 1, which is helping pupils to grasp sounds quickly and improve their reading.
- Staff are skilled at supporting children's language acquisition, particularly for the high proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language. Staff model language precisely and use resources to help pupils improve their understanding, which in turn ensures they can access the learning in classrooms.
- Teachers' accuracy and understanding of assessment has improved. They check pupils' progress regularly and plan interventions for any pupils that require more support.
- The use of specialist teachers, in subjects like music and physical education, is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.

## Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff, pupils and parents maintain excellent relationships, rooted in respect and care for one another. Pupils feel safe, have positive attitudes to learning and are proud of their school. As one pupil explained, 'We are a very lucky to be a diverse school.'
- Pupils are exceptionally well cared for because the school teaches values in a unique and interesting way. This leads to pupils having attitudes that are considerate and tolerant of others. Through assemblies, classroom teaching and the day-to-day ethos of the school, pupils are taught about prejudice, equality and being inclusive of others, regardless of their background. Pupils have a deep understanding of important values, which is preparing them well for their next journey in school and in life.
- The school does not avoid talking to pupils about important issues, which means that pupils are able to talk maturely and openly about their views. Older pupils know what homophobic language is and why it is inappropriate to use. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what constitutes bullying and what to do if they have any concerns. Furthermore, pupils have been well taught about e-safety and are well aware of the dangers associated with social media.
- Pupils are encouraged to be leaders by taking on responsibility. They have a voice in the development of the school. The head boy and head girl are confident and articulate. The school council are voted in by pupils and they are proactive. For example, they organised the purchase of a new bike shed. The voting system has led to pupils being able to explain what a 'democracy' is both within school and in the context of the wider world. Pupils carry out other whole-school roles including being play leaders and subject ambassadors. Pupils are developed as leaders, which is having a significant impact on their personal development.
- The school has a breakfast club for pupils which is well attended. Pupils enjoy the activities and feel safe, which ensures a positive start to the day.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils work hard in lessons and concentrate well. Leaders have ensured that pupils' behaviour has improved over time and teachers are quick to make sure that any disruption is smoothly dealt with, in line with the school's behaviour policy.
- The vast majority of pupils move around school sensibly and conduct themselves well. Very occasionally, a small minority of pupils do not show as much consideration to others when they move around the school building.
- Pupils' behaviour at playtime and lunchtime is good. The use of pupil play leaders outside, as well as using lunchtime assistants to support play, ensures that pupils have purposeful activities that encourage them to be active and get on with other pupils.

- The leadership of behaviour is strong because of detailed analysis of records, leading to sharp identification of weaknesses and in improvements over time.
- Leaders are diligent with school attendance procedures and have raised the profile of attendance in the school. The system for analysing pupils' attendance is very effective. This has led to attendance improving to just above the national average so far this academic year. This is showing an improvement on previous years, as attendance has historically been just below the national average.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The progress that pupils make varies across subjects and classes. This is especially the case in parts of key stage 2, where some pupils are not making enough progress because of the poorer teaching that they receive. Where teaching is stronger, progress is quicker and pupils make up for the slower progress they have made elsewhere. This inconsistent picture is not securing good progress over time, which is evident in books and in the school's assessment information.
- Current progress in Year 3 is particularly slow and is not building on the better progress they made when they were in Year 2.
- In 2016, pupils that left the school at the end of Year 6 made progress that was below that of all pupils nationally in English. In mathematics, their progress was slightly better than that of all pupils nationally. Leaders recognise that progress and attainment is not good in English at the end of key stage 2. Work in the current Year 6 books shows that pupils are making better progress and that attainment in English is rising.
- Across the school, most pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics is better than in English. A higher proportion of pupils, in most year groups, are attaining age-related expectations in mathematics compared to reading and writing. The school's assessment information and pupils' books show that not enough pupils are achieving the age-related expectations for writing and reading.
- In several year groups, the most able pupils do not make as much progress from their starting points as they should.
- In Year 2 in 2016, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard was similar to that of all pupils nationally. This showed an improvement on previous years, when attainment has been further away from the national average in Year 2. However, the proportion of Year 2 higher-ability pupils achieving the standard higher than is expected was low, when compared to the national average.
- The proportion of pupils meeting the phonics screening check at Year 1 is increasing and in 2016 was above the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in 2016 made less progress than other pupils nationally. However, this is not the case in some of the other year groups in school. For example, in Year 2 in 2016, disadvantaged pupils made better progress across key stage 1 than others pupils nationally in reading, writing and maths. In other year groups, the school's assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with and sometimes better than other pupils in school.

- Most pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress across the school. Carefully matched interventions are helping pupils to access work that is closer to or at age-related expectations.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- Children in the early years get off to a good start in the school because they are taught well and they enjoy excellent relationships with other children and staff. Children have a strong bond with their teachers and other adults, which leads to them being happy, well behaved and settled.
- The early years leader demonstrates good leadership and is knowledgeable. She leads the staff effectively and nurtures them to improve their teaching.
- Staff know the children very well because they assess them regularly and accurately. They use this assessment information to plan interesting learning activities that challenge children and ensure that they develop a range of knowledge and skills.
- The percentage of pupils who reach a good level of development at the end of Reception is improving each year and in 2016 it was just below the national average. Children make good progress over time, as is shown in their books and in the school's assessment information. A high proportion of children enter Reception at a level below what is typical for their age, which is due partly to the fact that many have a limited or emerging grasp of English. Children are very well supported to acquire language, so that they can access the breadth of the early years curriculum.
- Children read well in the early years because of the quality of phonics teaching. They also get regular opportunities to write in their books and within motivating and stimulating activities in the provision. Staff are not as consistent as they should be when showing children how to write with grammatical accuracy.
- Staff support children well during activities, which leads to good progress. However, some pupils, especially the most able, are not asked consistently challenging questions that enable them to think deeply about their learning.
- The partnership with parents is a strength of the setting. Parents feel that the staff communicate with them very well, which has a positive impact on children's development. A high proportion of parents attend regular workshops so that they can support their child with learning. A recent mathematics workshop showed the impact of this work when parents wrote the following comments in their children's books: 'I really enjoyed working with my child in school', and 'It is nice to know how much he has learnt and how I can help him.'
- The school meets all of the statutory welfare and safety requirements for the early years.

## School details

Unique reference number	140656
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10032557

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

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	685
Appropriate authority	Leigh Trust
Chair	David Griffiths
Headteacher	Charlotte Nott
Telephone number	0121 464 1569
Website	<a href="http://www.alston.bham.sch.uk">www.alston.bham.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:enquiry@alston.bham.sch.uk">enquiry@alston.bham.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than the average primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is above average.
- Almost all pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, with a high proportion from Asian or Asian British Pakistani background.
- Just over three-quarters of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics for pupils by the end of Year 6.
- The school runs a breakfast club for its pupils.
- The school is part of the Leigh Multi-Academy Trust, which has legal and strategic responsibilities for all of the schools in the Leigh Trust. The local governing body monitors the school's work and provides a link with the local community. The school opened as an academy in June 2014. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted, in May 2013, it was judged to be inadequate.
- The headteacher took up her post in September 2015.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 36 lessons or parts of lessons. A number of these observations were undertaken with senior leaders.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read. They met with a group of pupils to gain their views of the school. The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and at the end of the school day, as well as in lessons and in assembly.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, four senior leaders and two middle leaders. The lead inspector met with five members of the governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector met with three trust members from the Leigh Trust.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including assessments and records of pupils' progress, the school's checks and records relating to safeguarding, child protection and attendance, records of how teaching is managed and the school's improvement plans.
- There were 380 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for the inspectors to consider. Inspectors considered the seven free-text responses from parents. They also talked to parents at the start and end of the school day. The inspectors spoke to parents who made contact by telephone during the inspection. They also considered the 30 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Matt Meckin, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Adam Hewett	Her Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Allen	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Lowry	Ofsted Inspector

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