

# Alston Primary School

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

## Inspection dates

26–27 June 2019

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders have ensured that teaching has improved since the previous inspection.
- Senior and middle leaders are ambitious for pupils and the Alston community.
- Leadership of early years is highly effective. The early years leader typifies the passion and commitment of all leaders.
- Senior leaders know what needs to be done to secure consistently strong teaching across the school. There is further scope for leaders at all levels to support high-quality teaching.
- The curriculum enables pupils to secure skills and knowledge in a range of subjects. Pupils learn well across a wide range of topics.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. This helps pupils understand the importance of tolerance and respect in today's society.
- This year, most pupils are making strong gains in their learning, most notably in reading.
- The teaching of early reading is particularly strong. Leaders and staff understand the importance of pupils securing phonic skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress this year when compared with previous years.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not work on activities on their own frequently enough.
- The most able pupils do not write with the flair they are capable of. In mathematics, they are not given harder tasks quickly enough in lessons.
- Governance is a strength of the school.
- Pupils receive excellent pastoral support. This results in them being able to reflect on and protect their mental health and well-being.
- A vigilant safeguarding culture ensures that pupils are kept safe.
- Pupils show good conduct around the school and during lessons.
- Pupils attend well. Few are persistently absent.
- Children receive an excellent quality of education in early years.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that teachers:
  - provide pupils with SEND with tasks that enable them to practise recently taught skills on their own
  - expect the most able pupils to be flexible and creative in their writing across the curriculum
  - move the most able pupils on to harder mathematical tasks more quickly in lessons.
- Further improve leadership and management, by leaders at all levels checking that support for teaching leads to strong practice in all year groups.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- School leaders are passionate about delivering a high standard of education at Alston. Senior leaders have ensured that middle leaders are provided with the resources and time to drive improvements in their own areas. This means that there is strong capacity for further improvement in the school.
- There are many aspects of very effective leadership. Excellent leadership in early years, for example, ensures that children get an excellent start to their education. Senior leaders know the current issues to address across the school.
- Leaders and governors understand how the school can best support the pupils when out in the local community. They ensure that pupils explore and learn about a wide range of relevant experiences. The curriculum is designed to help pupils reflect on such experiences in their day-to-day learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well thought through. Leaders have created a sequence of learning through each year group. This enables pupils to build on previously acquired knowledge. As a result, pupils have a secure understanding of what it is like to live in a multicultural society.
- Equality is promoted well. Leaders understand the changing nature of the school community well. For example, they are aware of an increasing proportion of new arrivals to the school who speak very little or no English. Leaders ensure that there is suitable provision to enable such pupils to engage well in the curriculum.
- Leaders have carefully selected training designed to improve aspects of teaching. For example, staff have been well supported in their understanding of how to teach early reading and have developed effective teaching skills. This has led to pupils being able to read well early in their education.
- Middle leaders evaluate their areas of responsibility well. They work collegiately, which ensures that they convey consistent messages to staff. For example, there is a common understanding about how pupils should acquire and consolidate key skills and knowledge in each subject. This helps leaders check that the curriculum is fit for purpose.
- Senior leaders have supported teachers to improve their practice well since the previous inspection. Some inconsistencies in teaching remain. Senior leaders know where this variability occurs and are tenacious in striving for further improvement.
- Leaders make very good use of their primary school physical education (PE) and sport funding. An audit of staff confidence and competence in their teaching of PE enabled leaders to facilitate appropriate training. This has led to more effective teaching of different physical activities, such as gymnastics. A range of extra-curricular sporting activities helps pupils adopt healthy lifestyles.
- Staff recognise how leaders have improved the school's performance over the past few years. They acknowledge and appreciate leaders' focus on promoting a healthy work-life balance and well-being for all. Alston is a harmonious learning community.
- Parents and carers engage with the school well. This is because leaders prioritise the

partnership between the school and home. Leaders provide effective support for parents that helps them engage with their children’s learning at home. This is illustrated well in motivating pupils to read frequently and through homework activities.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance is effective.
- The structure of governance enables trustees to stringently hold school leaders to account. This is because there is a healthy balance between support and challenge to the school by the local governing board and the trustees.
- Trust members carry out scheduled visits to the school. Members and school leaders understand the purpose of each visit. This enables an informed dialogue to take place. For example, leaders share with members their view on the quality of teaching. Members then check that leaders’ evidence for their views is robust.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently. For example, governors frequently check that safeguarding arrangements are implemented appropriately. External consultants, with safeguarding expertise, provide additional monitoring. This helps satisfy governors that children are kept safe at Alston.
- Where weak teaching has been identified, governors ensure that leaders design and implement effective support plans.
- Additional funding is used well. This is because governors ensure that leaders use the funding to address the identified aims. Barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils are clarified before pupil premium funding is allocated. This helps governors evaluate the effectiveness of the spending.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A vigilant culture ensures that pupils are kept safe throughout the school day. All staff receive timely training. This helps them look out for signs that may indicate that a child is anxious or at risk. Clear processes are in place that enable staff to deal with any concerns.
- Trustees ensure that all governors have relevant and up-to-date knowledge about safeguarding. They are aware of potential risks and mitigate these appropriately. For example, they ensure that suitably trained governors attend all staff recruitment activities.
- Very effective strategies are in place to support pupils, staff and parents in developing and maintaining positive mental health and well-being.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teaching in early years and in Years 5 and 6 is particularly strong. This is because teachers know what can be expected of pupils with different abilities. Teachers know how to teach different subjects well. They plan and deliver activities that challenge

most pupils effectively.

- Effective teaching of phonics enables pupils to secure early reading skills. In early years, children develop a love of reading. This is developed through the other year groups. Pupils acquire a wide vocabulary through reading class novels together with their peers. They are enabled to develop a secure understanding of what they read. For example, Year 3 pupils were asked to think about a recent science event which helped them understand what the author was trying to convey in 'Charlotte's Web'.
- In most classes, there are strong, trusting partnerships between teachers and teaching assistants (TAs). TAs understand the purpose of the teaching in different lessons. They use this knowledge to demonstrate to pupils how to tackle problems or to explore new ideas.
- Teachers and TAs often question pupils effectively. Staff listen carefully to initial answers given by pupils and then ask subsequent questions that require pupils to think more deeply. Owing to attentive listening, other pupils benefit from the dialogue as they are able to reflect on their own ideas.
- The teaching of pupils who speak English as an additional language is effective. These pupils quickly gain key reading skills, which enable them to learn well across a range of different subjects. Parents are keen to acknowledge this strength in provision.
- In mathematics, most groups of pupils are taught well. Activities require pupils to reflect on their previous learning and use this information when tackling new problems. This helps pupils secure key skills and knowledge as well as develop confidence when faced with new challenges. However, the most able pupils do not work on harder questions quickly enough in lessons. As a result, these pupils spend too much time on work that does not challenge them sufficiently well.
- Pupils are expected to use their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills accurately when they write in different subjects. They apply these skills well, which helps them convey their ideas clearly to the reader.
- Teachers understand the importance of teaching disadvantaged pupils well. Teachers keep an eye on how well these pupils grasp concepts during lessons. In writing, for example, disadvantaged pupils are able to write for different purposes. Those who are most able, however, could be expected to produce work of higher quality.
- Pupils and their families engage well with homework activities. They choose from a range of suggested activities that teachers link to the current topics being studied. The creative products seen around the school include artistic and innovative ideas.
- Pupils with SEND are not required to work independently frequently enough. This means that it is difficult for staff to check how well they are using their skills and knowledge in their learning. Teachers and TAs do not provide this group of pupils with tasks that are well matched to their needs in order to work on their own.
- The most able writers are not expected to develop flair and flexibility in their writing. This is because they are asked to write against specific criteria, which restricts their writing development. They are capable of producing writing of a very high quality. Little guidance is provided to support pupils when writing beyond straightforward genres.

**Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils secure effective learning habits which help them engage well in lessons. This is evident by their attentive listening in classrooms. Pupils become very confident learners as they progress through the year groups.
- The broad curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stages of their education, both between different year groups and when they leave Alston at the end of Year 6. Pupils learn about a wide range of topics, which helps them reflect on their own opinions and those of others.
- Pupils' physical and emotional well-being is very well supported. PE and sport funding has been used to help pupils develop positive attitudes towards healthy eating and exercise. Recent work relating to mental health and well-being has resulted in pupils and the wider community gaining a better understanding of how to stay mentally well.
- So far this year, there have been no reported incidents of bullying. This is not surprising given the very effective pastoral support for pupils throughout the school day. Pupils say that they learn and play in a community where everyone is welcome and respected.
- Pupils are taught well about how to keep themselves safe as well as looking out for others. When learning and playing online, for example, pupils understand potential dangers and know what to do if they become concerned.
- A vigilant safeguarding culture is evident. Pupils, parents and staff express very positive views about pupils being kept safe well.

**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school. They are encouraged by their peers, including those who are play leaders, to behave well at breaktimes. When learning in classrooms, pupils' conduct is invariably strong.
- Pupils are punctual to their lessons and other activities. Pupils attending the breakfast club behave well and are well supervised. Staff ensure that pupils are ready for their learning at the start of the day.
- Pupils, parents and staff express positive comments about pupils' behaviour and how it is managed by school staff.
- Leaders have designed and implemented effective strategies that have led to a reduction in persistent absence. Overall attendance remains similar to the national average.
- When pupils are not well challenged, their attitudes to learning become more variable. This is most noticeable when pupils with SEND and those who are particularly able are not challenged as well as they could be.

- Pupils present their work well. They use neat handwriting and lay out their mathematical calculations accurately.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Good

- Since the previous inspection, pupils' progress rates at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have been variable. In writing, for example, high-prior-attaining pupils have made weak progress, whereas in mathematics, the same pupils made much better progress.
- This year, pupils with different prior attainment are typically making better progress than previously. However, the most able pupils are capable of attaining higher standards in writing and mathematics. Pupils' books show that there could be greater challenge for this group.
- Leaders have a good knowledge of how well pupils are progressing in different year groups. This helps them understand where variability occurs. Plans are in place to address the reasons preventing some pupils from achieving the standards of which they are capable.
- Leaders make effective use of pupil premium funding. They ensure that disadvantaged pupils are taught well. As a result, this group of pupils are making similar progress to their peers this year.
- Pupils apply their reading, writing and mathematical skills well in other subjects. This helps pupils secure a range of other skills and knowledge across the curriculum. For example, pupils demonstrate geographical and historical knowledge that is appropriate for their age well through their topic work. Pupils are well prepared for their learning in key stage 3.
- Last year, a very large majority of pupils achieved the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. This year, the proportion of pupils meeting the standard has increased. These proportions are above the national average. This year, children in early years demonstrate very secure word decoding skills.
- Owing to the high standards pupils achieve in relation to phonics, reading standards through key stages 1 and 2 continue to improve. The curriculum in each year group enables pupils to read challenging books often. This supports pupils well in developing a wide vocabulary.
- The majority of pupils are making good progress in mathematics this year. Pupils secure important number and calculation knowledge and apply this in tasks that require them to reason.
- Pupils in each year group have a good understanding of how to use grammar and punctuation skills in their writing. Across a range of different subjects, pupils apply these skills accurately.
- Children make strong progress across all areas of learning in early years. Children are confident, and very competent, readers. This means that they are able to learn well across a range of different topics.
- Pupils with SEND do not frequently demonstrate that they have secured key knowledge and skills. This is because they are not expected to work on their own often enough. As

a result, it is difficult to evaluate whether individual pupils are making the gains of which they are capable.

## Early years provision

## Outstanding

- Leadership of early years is very effective. The early years leader is clear in her vision and is ambitious for all children in both Nursery and Reception. Together with her staff team, she has created indoor and outdoor environments that enable children to feel safe in exploring their curiosity.
- The leader has a very secure knowledge of early child development. She has used this knowledge to develop staff competence and confidence in teaching young children. The early years staff team has designed a curriculum that enables children to secure key skills as they progress towards Year 1.
- Staff have attended a range of carefully selected training. Through staff embedding agreed teaching strategies, children of all abilities are taught consistently well throughout the day.
- Children receive excellent teaching throughout early years. Teachers and TAs are skilled in responding to children’s interests. They take advantage of different opportunities as they arise during the day. As a result, children make strong progress as they develop a secure understanding of different areas of learning.
- The teaching of phonics is a significant strength. Staff are consistent in their teaching, which means that children in all groups rehearse and consolidate the same skills when decoding words. During sessions where children can choose to learn in different areas with different resources, staff skilfully weave in opportunities for children to rehearse sounds and blends.
- Children make strong progress from typically low starting points through early years. Disadvantaged children make similar rates of progress to their peers. As a result of effective teaching, notably in relation to early reading, children leave Reception well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Parents recognise the excellent provision that their children enjoy. Staff provide a range of sessions that encourage parents to engage with the school. At the start of the day, for example, parents come into school with their children and enjoy learning together. A range of parent workshops helps equip parents to support their children’s learning and play at home.
- Staff communicate with a range of different external services when they identify needs to address. These services include medical and communication services. They listen carefully to the advice they receive and adapt the provision for individual children accordingly. Staff ensure that children progress very well in their personal and social development.

## School details

Unique reference number

140656



Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10088505

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	662
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Gaynor Moore
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	22–23 March 2017

### Information about this school

- Alston is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is above average.
- Almost all pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most pupils are from a Pakistani background.
- Three quarters of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast club for its pupils.
- The early years is made up of a part-time Nursery provision and three Reception classes. There are three classes for each year group in Years 1 to 6.
- 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.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in every year group. They visited 23 lessons, the majority of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, the chair of the local governing board and other governors and trustees.
- Inspectors met frequently with senior leaders. They also met with a range of other staff with leadership responsibility.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their reading. They listened to pupils of different abilities read.
- Inspectors examined work in pupils' books from a range of subjects.
- The school's child protection and safeguarding procedures were scrutinised.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation written to support school improvement. This included minutes of governors' meetings, and pupils' attendance and behaviour information.
- Inspectors took account of 246 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They spoke with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors also looked at a staff survey which was conducted during the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's website.

## Inspection team

Jeremy Bird, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Clair McNeill	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Stone	Ofsted Inspector
Collette Higgins	Ofsted Inspector

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