

The Pines Special School

Marsh Hill, Birmingham, West Midlands B23 7EY

Inspection dates

9–10 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- In recent years, the school has experienced several significant changes. These include moving to a new site, a new leadership team, a large increase in pupil and staff numbers, and several new governors.
- Leaders, staff and governors have worked very hard to create an effective school community that aims to 'nurture and maximise the potential of every individual and celebrate their achievements'.
- Governors know the school well, including its strengths and the areas for further improvement. Along with school leaders, governors are focused on providing the best possible education for all pupils.
- The curriculum ensures that all pupils access a broad range of subjects and experiences. Leaders do not yet have a clear picture of how pupils' skills and knowledge develop in different subjects over time.
- Opportunities to develop pupils' independence, social and communication skills are plentiful and effective. However, leaders do not fully track the steps pupils make in their personal development to help maximise their progress.
- Key stage 2 pupils really enjoy weekly lunchtime clubs. However, overall, pupils have access to a limited range of resources to play with during unstructured times.
- Most pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points. Pupils who are disadvantaged or who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to that of their peers.
- Keeping pupils safe is central to the work of the school. There are effective systems to support pupils and their families. Pupils know that they can trust adults to keep them safe.
- The great majority of parents and carers are very positive about, and appreciative of, all aspects of the school's work.
- The youngest children make a very positive start to their school life: many make rapid progress. While leaders constantly seek to improve the provision further, it is too soon to see the impact of some recent developments.
- Staff build strong relationships with pupils and know their individual needs extremely well. They focus on reinforcing pupils' positive behaviour and are consistent in their approach.
- Most teaching is well planned to meet pupils' individual needs. Routines are well established, and staff are generally effective in using strategies to engage pupils' attention and encourage active participation. Occasionally, teaching does not meet leaders' high expectations and pupils' learning may be slowed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve leadership and management, by:
 - strengthening the school’s systems for tracking the progress pupils make in their personal, social and emotional development
 - developing the curriculum so that teachers are clear about the knowledge and skills to be taught in each subject and each year group to strengthen pupils’ progress.
- Further improve the quality of teaching so that teaching consistently meets leaders’ high expectations, for example by ensuring that the great majority of tasks move pupils forward with their learning.
- Embed developments in early years to further strengthen pupils’ progress, for example through the use of learning journals and outdoor classroom space.
- Improve the range of activities available to pupils at less formal times, particularly lunchtimes, to maximise pupils’ engagement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Over the last three years, the headteacher, ably supported by governors and other leaders, has successfully led the school through a period of significant change. The school has moved to a new site and almost doubled in size, extending its age range to provide secondary education. There has also been a large increase in the number of staff and several new governors have joined the governing body. Through all of this change, the headteacher has ensured that the focus on providing a high-quality education that protects, inspires and nurtures pupils has not wavered. However, leaders are aware that there are areas that require further development for the school to provide an outstanding level of education.
- Leaders at all levels have high expectations. They are clear about what is going well and where improvements are needed. Leaders are very knowledgeable about the needs and abilities of the individual pupils in their care. Leaders ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have the specialist skills that they need to meet the needs of pupils across the school.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is generally secure. Leaders ensure that teachers new to teaching in key stage 3 receive training in subjects that they are not familiar with, for example aspects of design technology or science. Support for new or less experienced members of staff helps them to establish themselves quickly and successfully.
- Staff morale is high. All staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey are proud to be members of staff and enjoy working in the school.
- Pupils in all key stages experience a broad and balanced curriculum that is linked to the national curriculum. Many subjects are taught through a topic or theme and relevant cross-curricular links are made. However, schemes of work do not clearly indicate the skills and knowledge pupils should be taught within each topic. As a result, knowledge is not built up systematically enough over time.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of enriching opportunities, including extra-curricular activities, trips and visitors. For example, during the inspection, some classes visited the National Sea Life Centre to support their class topic. Other activities are focused on developing pupils' independence and life skills, for instance visiting a local café or working on the school's allotment. Developing pupils' social and personal skills is a key aim of the school. However, pupils' progress in these aspects is not well tracked currently and learning opportunities may be missed. To address this, leaders intend to extend an effective system used in early years across the school, but this has not yet started.
- Leaders and staff make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example through involvement in UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools programme. Pupils are generally tolerant and respectful of each other, and the school actively celebrates its multi-faith and multi-racial community. Leaders encourage pupils to take an active role in school life. For example, pupils are democratically elected to the pupils' parliament by their peers. Through the pupils' parliament, pupils

influence decision making, such as on the recruitment of new staff, and raise money for charities.

- Leaders work closely with therapists and external agencies to provide a range of specialist interventions to address pupils' needs effectively. Leaders have thought carefully about how to make best use of the school's new accommodation, which includes sports and performance halls and a range of specialist rooms such as those for art, science and sensory therapy.
- Careful consideration is given to how pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is used to help eligible pupils overcome barriers to learning. Disadvantaged pupils are supported effectively so that they have opportunities to take part in all that the school has to offer. They are making similar progress to other pupils in school. The impact of the pupil premium funding is evaluated by leaders and plans are adapted to maximise its effectiveness. Year 7 catch-up funding is used to support the development of pupils' reading comprehension skills. It is too soon to know the impact of this approach.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium funding is used to employ health mentors who support pupils socially, physically and emotionally through a range of fitness and well-being activities. Although no formal analysis has been done, leaders are positive about the programme's impact. They are extending the programme to enable more pupils to benefit from it.
- Almost all parents and carers spoken to during the inspection, or who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are extremely positive about the work of the school. Parents' views can best be summed up by these representative comments: 'My son is doing so well and most of all is now a happy, confident child who engages and is learning,' and 'I couldn't ask for a more caring environment for my daughter, or staff that keep her so safe.'

Governance of the school

- Governors are fulfilling their statutory roles effectively.
- The governing body, ably led by the chair of governors, has a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for further development. Governors are well informed about the school's current position through termly updates from the headteacher. Governors also take steps to check the accuracy of the information that leaders provide. They are increasingly effective at holding leaders to account for improvements.
- Recently, the governing body has recruited several new members who bring a breadth of relevant skills, experience and knowledge. As a result, governors are well placed to challenge leaders to raise standards further. Governors access appropriate training to support them in their roles, including safeguarding and preventing radicalisation.
- The school recently joined a cooperative trust with a view to collaborating and sharing good practice. A new instrument of governance was drawn up in November 2018. This clearly sets out the responsibilities of the governing body.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Ensuring that children are safe is central to the work of the school. As a result, the school is a safe environment for pupils and they are always well cared for.
- All staff have regular and appropriate training to understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. They are vigilant in looking out for indicators of risk or harm. This includes pupils who may be susceptible to radicalisation or extremism.
- The safeguarding team maintains thorough, confidential records relating to any safeguarding concerns. When appropriate, the team shares information with external agencies and they follow up concerns as necessary.
- Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on all adults appointed to work at the school.
- Leaders are very aware that pupils' needs may make them particularly vulnerable. As a result, the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum specifically addresses relevant concerns. For example, pupils learn about road safety, how to stay safe when online and how to react in different situations when they are out and about. The school also provides regular information and workshops for parents to help keep pupils safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is carefully focused on developing the skills that pupils need the most, especially those linked to communication and personal, social and emotional development. Staff know pupils' needs extremely well and they are skilled at adapting approaches to enable pupils to successfully access the curriculum.
- Teaching is planned effectively to include opportunities for pupils to apply their learning in school to real-life situations, for when visiting local shops to buy ingredients that are then used in a cookery lesson back in school. Topics and themes are chosen to engage pupils' interest and broaden their experiences. For example, an enterprise week enabled pupils to apply their knowledge to create and run a business. During 'one world' week, each class learned about a different country before sharing this information with the rest of the school.
- Staff cater for pupils' individual needs extremely well. Specialist staff, such as occupational and speech therapists, advise staff on how best to support pupils. Specialist resources, such as sensory circuits, are used to aid learning.
- Where appropriate, staff use signing systems alongside spoken language to support the ongoing development of pupils' communication skills. Staff use symbol systems to support pupils to make their needs and feelings known. Alongside clear routines, these help pupils to understand their day. This, in turn, leads to pupils being calm and more ready to learn.
- Teachers use different approaches according to individual pupils' needs. These help to ensure that, while all pupils are learning about a similar topic, each individual is being challenged appropriately.

- While most teaching is strong, some is not of a consistently high standard over time. For example, sometimes the tasks pupils are asked to complete are repetitive and lack progression.
- There is a focus on developing pupils' literacy and mathematical skills and pupils are encouraged to develop a love of reading from an early age. Phonics skills are taught systematically by well-trained teaching assistants. Pupils' reading books provide appropriate challenge and are of interest to them.
- Pupils of all ages have opportunities to write independently and older pupils have regular opportunities to write at length.
- Leaders and teachers have developed their own system for assessing pupils' progress. This is used well to capture and evaluate pupils' learning, especially in English, mathematics and science, and increasingly in other subject areas. Pupils' progress is reviewed regularly and swift actions are taken to provide additional support for pupils who are not making the progress they might. Leaders and teachers, both within school and from other special schools, check the accuracy of this information when they meet to compare samples of pupils' work. Assessment systems to track pupils' personal, social and emotional development are not as well developed.
- Teachers keep parents well informed of pupils' progress through the regular use of home-school books or via an app, termly parents' evenings and detailed annual reports. Parents value this contact as the information the school provides helps them to better support their child at home.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Relationships within the school between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves are very strong. The majority of pupils arrive at school happy and relaxed. All pupils are welcomed by staff with a personal greeting.
- Staff provide pupils with a high level of care and they know the pupils extremely well. They use a range of strategies, often individualised, to engage pupils' interest and motivate them to focus on lessons.
- Displays around school cover a range of subjects and celebrate pupils' successes. Pupils have positive views of school and can list many things that they like, including lessons, trips and extra-curricular activities. A number of pupils spoke to inspectors about the school's allotment. They are proud of the plants each class has grown.
- Extra-curricular clubs focus on sport to increase pupils' levels of physical activity. Additionally, many key stage 2 pupils thoroughly enjoy attending a weekly lunchtime club. During the inspection, pupils could choose from 'chill', yoga, film and building with interlocking construction bricks. These clubs are not currently open to pupils in other key stages. Leaders have improved the school's outdoor play areas, but there are limited resources for pupils to play with, especially at lunchtimes.

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have successfully developed the school's approach to careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) for older pupils. CEIAG now has a higher profile within the key stage 3 curriculum. For instance, pupils have interviewed visitors about their different job roles and these are available for others to listen to via podcasts. Pupils are encouraged to apply for jobs around school.
- The school has particularly strong and effective links with parents. Leaders and staff work closely with parents to help overcome barriers to pupils' learning. For example, the home and family liaison adviser helps parents to meet their children's needs that arise at home.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff promote a calm and positive atmosphere around school. They model the positive behaviours expected of the pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and will turn to staff for help if they need it.
- The school's behaviour policy, which focuses on encouraging positive behaviour, is regularly reviewed and updated. It is clear, straightforward and applied consistently. School behaviour records are regularly analysed to identify trends and patterns in behaviour so that these can be addressed effectively. All incidents involving the use of physical intervention are carefully logged and the details are shared with parents.
- Pupils are very well supervised at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Adults carefully manage movement around the school and pupils follow clear routines, such as when going out at breaktime or in the lunch hall. This helps them to feel secure and confident in different parts of the large school building.
- Incidents of bullying are rare, but when they do occur, they are dealt with appropriately and parents are informed. Staff support the pupils involved to help them understand their actions and reduce the risk of any further incidents.
- No pupils have been excluded from the school in the last three years.
- Securing good attendance has a very high priority across the school and leaders work proactively with parents to secure regular attendance. Leaders track attendance carefully and promptly follow up any absence. They are alert to the possibility of children going missing from education and work with external agencies to minimise any risk. Overall, school attendance is in line with the national average for all schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Across almost all year groups, the great majority of pupils are making strong progress from their individual starting points. Pupils who are disadvantaged or who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers. Boys and girls do equally well.
- Parents' feedback on the progress that their children are making, both academically and socially, is very positive.

- Leaders and teachers carefully record pupils' progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening and mathematics. They closely monitor progress across a range of targets at individual and class level. Staff are highly responsive to pupils' needs and provide additional interventions or adapt lesson plans as required. These help pupils to make small but significant steps in their development.
- The consistent use of communication systems that are well matched to individual pupils' needs helps pupils to express their needs and make requests effectively. A number of pupils who are non-verbal when they join the school are enabled to speak for the first time.
- Leaders have introduced standardised tests to track pupils' reading ages. It is too soon to see the impact of these over time. However, leaders have taken action to support those pupils who may not be making good progress in reading. Teachers also ensure that they provide suitably challenging texts for the most able readers.
- In the majority of classes, pupils' books show clear progression in English, mathematics and science. Where classes appear to have made less progress, there are clear reasons to explain this. Leaders take appropriate actions to prevent pupils from falling behind.
- There has been a strong focus on developing pupils' handwriting. Progress in handwriting skills is evident in books, particularly in key stage 3.

Early years provision

Good

- Leadership of early years is highly effective. Leaders are knowledgeable and passionate about ensuring that children make a very strong start to their school life. They are constantly seeking ways to further improve the provision to best meet the children's individual needs. Staff are encouraged to share good practice and there are regular staff training opportunities.
- Strong links with parents help children to make a positive start to their school life. These include opportunities for parents to 'stay and play', as well as individualised transition plans to support children and families. Staff comprehensively assess each child's needs within the first few weeks of starting school. This enables staff to effectively address children's needs from a very early stage.
- The early years leader ensures that all members of staff have a strong understanding of the needs of the children. Staff use a range of appropriate strategies to engage children's interests and manage their behaviour effectively. Activities are well matched to the needs of all learners, and children take part in a wide range of activities throughout the day, including regular story-time sessions.
- Across early years, there is a strong focus on children's personal, social and emotional development. In addition to learning to play alongside others, many learn to dress themselves, try new foods and go to the toilet with minimal help.
- Children are supported very effectively to develop communication skills. They respond well to their known adults. All children use communication symbols to communicate and by the end of Reception some can verbalise their needs. The curriculum is based around a range of themes, but is also adapted to meet children's interests.

- The teaching of early reading and numeracy skills in Reception is effective. Regular activities help develop to children's understanding of numbers up to 10 and knowledge of shapes. Children are enthusiastic to share books with adults and some are able to match initial phonic sounds to pictures.
- Strong progress from individual starting points is evident for the great majority of children. Leaders have developed systems to track the smallest steps that children make and to identify their next steps. This information is shared effectively with teachers and teaching assistants. The progress children make is increasingly well documented within learning journals, although the impact of this over time is yet to be analysed.
- Relationships between adults and children are very positive and children are well cared for. Safeguarding procedures are effective and welfare requirements are fully met. Children are carefully supervised, whether indoors or out, and they are supported to explore and take well-managed risks.
- Outdoor areas have recently been developed and include a broad range of activities to complement those available within the classroom. However, the impact of this enhanced provision on children's development is yet to be assessed.
- Detailed transition plans mean that children are well prepared for moving into Year 1. For example, children have opportunities to get used to the bigger playground and new environment. As in the rest of the school, staff work closely together to ensure that the receiving staff are fully aware of children's needs and abilities. This enables the children to settle quickly into their new classes.

School details

Unique reference number	103622
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10093806

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Natasha Harris
Headteacher	Emma Pearce
Telephone number	0121 464 6136
Website	www.thepinesspecialschool.com
Email address	enquiry@pines.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 January 2019

Information about this school

- The Pines Special School educates boys and girls who have autism spectrum conditions. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. More than three quarters of the pupils are boys.
- Children can start in early years from three years old, although many pupils are older when they first join the school. In addition to primary classes, the school is now offering secondary education. There are currently pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- Pupils are from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Around one third of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher both took up post in September 2016. The assistant headteacher joined the school in April 2018.

- The school moved to its current site in September 2016. Since then, the school has expanded rapidly in size.
- Many pupils do not live in the immediate vicinity of the school. The majority of pupils are transported to and from school by minibus.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school joined the Birmingham Special Schools Cooperative Trust in November 2018. The school continues to be maintained by Birmingham local authority. Strategic leadership is provided by the school's own governing body.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning across a wide range of classes and subjects.
- Inspectors met with pupils, looked at many examples of pupils' work and spoke to pupils formally and informally. One inspector listened to some pupils read. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and around the school, as well as in lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, records relating to safeguarding and attendance, minutes of meetings of the governing body, school progress data, and the school's website.
- Inspectors considered parents' opinions through 46 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 27 free-text responses. An inspector spoke to some parents before school on the first day of the inspection.
- As part of the inspection, 61 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire were considered.

Inspection team

Catherine Crooks, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kim Ellis	Ofsted Inspector
Linda McGill	Ofsted Inspector

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