

# Bristol Free School

Concorde Drive, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS10 6NJ

## Inspection dates

15–16 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in most subjects has been significantly below that of other pupils nationally for two years. Disadvantaged pupils, in particular, have made progress that is significantly below that made by other pupils nationally. Until recently, leaders have not taken action quickly enough to address this.
- The quality of teaching in the school is not consistently good. Leaders' strategies to improve teaching are not fully implemented by all teachers. As a result, teachers' impact is limited in raising pupils' outcomes.
- Across many subjects, teachers do not consistently help pupils develop literacy skills, or help them to develop the skills of extended writing appropriate to their subject.
- Teachers do not consistently identify the needs of lower- and middle-ability pupils. Teachers' expectations are too low. This means they often fail to plan learning that is matched well enough to pupils' needs and so these pupils do not make enough progress.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils know how to improve their work. As a result, some pupils do not benefit from the same help and guidance given to others and do not make as much progress as they could.
- The well-planned actions of leaders have improved attendance across most groups in the school. However, there remains a minority of disadvantaged pupils with persistent absence significantly above the national level. This holds back their progress.

### The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed acting headteacher, supported by the trust, is taking effective action to address the underlying causes of underachievement.
- Leaders have created a culture characterised by good behaviour and respect and consideration for each other. Staff at all levels give strong support to pupils' safety and well-being.
- The sixth form is led well. Leaders know its strengths and weaknesses accurately. They promote high aspiration and have a clear vision for how they want the sixth form to develop. Self-evaluation is both objective and accurate.
- Teaching challenges the most able pupils well.

## Full report

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

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - recently introduced strategies to improve learning and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are consistently adopted by all staff
  - all staff share leaders' common purpose and high aspirations for all pupils
  - staff training is consistently implemented and effective in raising the standard of education
  - effective monitoring and evaluation identifies and shares strengths, and challenges and eliminates inconsistencies.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment and raise achievement by ensuring that teachers:
  - become more skilful and consistent in helping pupils know how to improve their work
  - have higher expectations of pupils with low and middle prior attainment, and plan work that meets their needs, so these pupils make the progress of which they are capable
  - develop pupils' literacy across the curriculum so that they develop accurate and fluent reading and writing skills appropriate to all subjects.
- Build on recent improvements in attendance so that attendance also improves for the small minority of persistently absent disadvantaged pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Leaders have not taken action quickly enough to address two years of underachievement. The recently appointed acting headteacher, supported by the trust, is now starting to tackle the causes of this underachievement. Much of this work has only recently started and it is too early to see real impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders set challenging targets for pupils in the school. While the most able pupils are supported well to achieve these, leaders have not ensured that teachers consistently plan for the needs of lower-ability and many middle-ability pupils to help them achieve their potential. As a result, pupils' progress stalls.
- While leaders have accurately identified the underachievement of some key groups of pupils as a priority, they have been reluctant to make the link between this underachievement and the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their self-evaluation of the quality of teaching is overly generous as a result, focusing on snapshots of teaching rather than the impact of teaching over time on outcomes for all pupils.
- Leaders have set out what they expect teachers to do to improve pupils' learning. However, they have not ensured that all teachers understand why they should take these actions. As a result, some teachers are not following leaders' guidance and the quality of support pupils receive is inconsistent across the school.
- Leaders, supported by the trust, provide a wide range of training and development for teachers. Some of this has had a positive impact, such as improving the accuracy of assessment in English. However, leaders have not ensured that all teachers understand or share their expectations of what the training and development is intended to achieve.
- Among the lower- and middle-ability pupils who have underachieved have been many of the school's disadvantaged pupils. In the past, the school's analysis of how it spends the pupil premium funding has lacked clear identification of the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. Leaders' evaluation of the use of this funding was not sharp enough. As a result, the pupil premium has not been consistently targeted at the areas where it can have most impact. The school's current development plan contains much clearer identification of barriers to learning and now more clearly links spending to these barriers.
- Leaders' use of additional funding to support pupils' literacy and numeracy development is improving pupils' progress in these areas. However, leaders have not evaluated what worked or did not work last year to inform their plans for the current year. Sharper evaluation of the impact of this funding is now in place for current pupils so that provision can be adapted.
- Leaders have made changes to the curriculum so that it provides different pathways in key stage 4 to better match the needs of pupils. There is now a more appropriate choice of vocational courses, for example. The curriculum is now broad and balanced for all pupils.

- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities for pupils, including strong provision in music and sport. The school has very high participation rates in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. Leaders monitor the uptake of extra-curricular activities by disadvantaged pupils and support participation of this group effectively.
- Leaders ensure that pupils receive good-quality careers advice and guidance at key points. Pupils report that they have had good help and advice when choosing their options for key stage 4. They have been given good access to information about different local providers open to them at the end of key stage 4. Students on 16 to 19 study programmes are similarly positive about the support that they have received in making choices about their next steps. Consequently, students are well placed to make informed decisions about future study, training or employment.
- Leaders have created a culture which stimulates strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils work well together in formal and less formal settings. They are trusted by staff and respond by behaving responsibly and supporting each other, including their peers who have different needs. Pupils take part in a range of fund-raising activities that have local, national and international dimensions. For example, pupils have raised money for Operation Christmas Child and a project in Nepal. Assemblies challenge pupils to think about important moral and social issues. Pupils develop leadership skills through the school council and serve as 'well-being ambassadors'.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors know many aspects of the school's work well. They hold leaders to account through themed visits and analysis and interrogation of school data and reports. However, they have lacked persistence in pursuing the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. They have accepted the view of leaders and the trust that their poor progress was an inevitable outcome of their late arrival into the school rather than insisting that leaders sharply focus resources on identifying their individual needs and providing appropriate interventions.
- Governors are proud to be associated with the school. Many are parents of pupils and are part of the group of parents who founded the school. However, governors recognise they need to be more proactive in gathering the views of other parents and carers now that the school is bigger. They have started this with a current consultation on homework.
- The school receives strong support from its trust. The chief executive of the trust is regularly present in school, and trustees have provided leadership capacity through a trust adviser. In addition, the trust provides a network of subject specialists who coordinate aspects of professional development across its five schools.
- The trust has helped leaders to formulate appropriate improvement strategies. However, it and the school's leaders have not ensured that all staff implement these strategies and share their common purpose.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The acting headteacher has led safeguarding in the school for a number of years. He and his team have built a strong culture of safeguarding that is well understood and supported by all staff and pupils. Recruitment procedures are robust, ensuring that only those suitable to work with children are employed.
- Pupils report that they feel safe, and this is echoed in the views of parents. Pupils know how to stay safe, including while online. The school operates highly effective internet filtering and network monitoring to protect pupils and identify potential risks.
- Leaders have taken effective action to raise awareness of the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Pupils discuss these issues and develop their views in a number of areas of the curriculum.
- Staff at all levels receive appropriate training in all aspects of safeguarding. They speak positively about the recently introduced electronic referral system, which acknowledges their referrals and makes it easier for them to follow up concerns.

### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

### Requires improvement

- Teachers do not consistently identify the needs of lower- and middle-ability pupils and therefore fail to plan learning that is well-matched to their needs. Where teachers are less adept at recognising the needs of pupils, work lacks challenge and their rates of progress are slower. This is particularly true in geography.
- Where teaching is stronger, teachers know the starting points and needs of their pupils. They plan effectively for those needs and pupils make good progress. Such strong practice was seen in history, English and business studies, and although strong in mathematics, this was not consistent. It is most prevalent in teaching for the most able.
- Teachers do not consistently follow the school's policy for helping pupils to improve their work. Pupils talk positively about the guidance they receive and value the time they are given to improve, correct or extend their work. However, in a number of lessons, across a range of subjects, year groups and teachers, this practice is not evident. Even within the same group with the same teacher, inconsistent practice can be seen, and typically it is the lower-ability pupils who are not routinely benefiting from high-quality feedback.
- Teaching is not taking sufficient account of the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Teachers do not consistently apply the strategies set out by leaders as a minimum expectation. For example, teachers do not follow up the absence of disadvantaged pupils as leaders would wish. As a result, these pupils have gaps in their learning.
- Across many subjects, teaching does not develop pupils' literacy effectively. In some subjects, such as English and history, teachers ensure that pupils develop extended writing skills. However, in other subjects, middle- and lower-ability pupils are not routinely challenged to develop extended writing skills appropriate to the subject or essential for success in the next stage of their education, training or employment.

- Leaders have set out minimum expectations about how and when homework should be set. However, teachers do not set homework consistently. Pupils report that it depends on the teacher they have. The governing body is aware of this issue and is in the middle of a consultation process with parents on the use of homework.
- There is evidence of good teaching practice in the school. The most able pupils are well served. Where teachers' good subject knowledge and pupils' positive attitudes coincide, teachers provoke deep thinking and rapid progress.
- Where teaching is strongest, teachers ask probing questions and set demanding tasks, such as inspectors saw in history, English and business studies.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The vast majority of pupils demonstrate self-confidence in their interactions with adults. Pupils value the guidance they receive from teachers and know how to respond to it to improve their learning when it is provided.
- Staff know their pupils well and demonstrate a strong collective imperative to keep them safe. Staff have high regard for pupils' well-being. As a result, there is a strong culture of safety and well-being, and pupils feel well looked after.
- Pupils show pride in their appearance and in their environment. They present themselves well. They look after their school; there is no damage and very little litter. Almost all pupils demonstrate pride in their work, though this is less evident in the books of some pupils with lower and middle prior attainment.
- Pupils have respect for the views and opinions of others. They show a good understanding of differences and are tolerant and supportive of those who are different. For example, pupils took part in a school-wide LGBT week, where they worked well with guest speakers and designed and delivered their own assemblies.
- Instances of derogatory language are very rare; inspectors did not witness any during the inspection and pupils report that it is very unusual to hear any.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and to develop healthy life styles. The vast majority report that the school encourages them to look after their emotional and mental health. The school's website provides many useful resources for pupils and parents to support well-being and staff know how to direct pupils to support where they need it.
- Pupils report that bullying is rare. They say that if it does occur, teachers are good at dealing with it. Responses from parents in the parent survey confirm this view.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- Pupils are polite and courteous as they move around the school. They understand and accept the new behaviour system introduced by the acting headteacher, which has further contributed to the calm and orderly atmosphere in the school.
- Pupils behave well in almost all lessons. They respond well to questions and willingly make contributions. Minor disruption is rare and is usually a result of teaching that is less engaging or less well matched to the needs of pupils.
- Leaders have taken effective action to reverse the decline in attendance over the previous three years. Attendance for most pupils is now in line with that of all pupils nationally. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has improved. Leaders have made tackling the attendance of disadvantaged pupils a priority. This has had a positive impact on those pupils who have been persistently absent. There remains, however, a stubborn minority of disadvantaged pupils with high levels of persistent absence.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because the progress being made by current pupils is too inconsistent. For many lower- and middle-ability pupils, including many disadvantaged pupils, it is not rapid enough. Across a range of subjects and years, there are gaps in the work of many of these pupils. They are not consistently challenged to complete work and where they are, not all teachers are persistent in ensuring that they do so.
- Many lower- and middle-ability pupils do not demonstrate sufficient depth of learning in their verbal responses or in their written work. The most able pupils are well motivated and their contributions in lessons show they are intellectually curious.
- The overall progress made by pupils has declined in the two years for which the school has had key stage 4 results. Pupils' progress was significantly below the progress made by pupils nationally in both years.
- The overall progress made by pupils with middle prior attainment was significantly below that made by similar pupils nationally and was in the bottom 10% of all schools nationally.
- For the same two years, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils has been significantly below that of other pupils nationally in every area except English and languages.
- Pupils who joined the school with higher prior attainment have achieved in line with similar pupils nationally. A significantly greater proportion of this group achieved the English Baccalaureate than for similar pupils nationally. This group of pupils continues to make strong progress, especially in English, history, languages and business studies.
- The learning of disadvantaged pupils seen in lessons and books shows a strong sense of momentum in the improvement actions taken by leaders. However, these actions are not fully embedded and there are too many inconsistencies in practice and expectations.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making improved progress. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who was recently appointed, knows the pupils

and their needs well and ensures that individual tailored support is in place. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making faster progress in mathematics than in English.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- The sixth form is well led. Leaders have a comprehensive understanding of its strengths and priorities for improvement, promote high aspiration and have a clear vision for how they want the sixth form to develop. Self-evaluation is both objective and accurate.
- Students make good progress in most subjects. This is because they benefit from teaching that meets their different needs and stimulates their interest. Leaders monitor students' progress and provide timely support should they fall behind.
- Positive relationships between teachers and students assist their learning and progress. Students who spoke with an inspector reported that these relationships made it 'much easier to get help if you are stuck'.
- Students value the support they receive from staff for their academic and pastoral needs. Teachers and tutors know them well. Students feel comfortable approaching staff should they have concerns and they feel well looked after in school.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well developed. Activities in tutor time and assemblies, alongside visiting speakers and extra-curricular visits, help students to deepen their understanding of different issues. These include healthy eating, diversity and money management.
- A comprehensive induction programme, which begins in Year 11, helps students to establish themselves in the sixth form. This means that they make a positive and secure start when they join.
- A wide range of largely academic courses was made available to current students. They have, in the main, been able to study their subjects of choice. However, the proportion of pupils completing the courses they started is currently lower than average because not all choices have proven to be suitable and an insufficient range of vocational subjects were on offer. Leaders have taken steps to ensure that the curriculum is more suitable for prospective students.
- The sixth form is only in its second year of operation, so no students have yet left to continue on to their next stages of education, training or employment. However, leaders have a detailed knowledge of every student's intended destination. The majority of students have applied for university or employment. Several students applied to 'Oxbridge' institutions; this reflects the high aspirations of staff.
- The achievement of students who have retaken GCSE English in the sixth form is higher than the national average. The achievement of students who have retaken GCSE mathematics is lower than the national average.
- Students in Year 13 report that there were not enough extra-curricular activities when the sixth form first opened. Year 12 students say that they have a better range of activities.



## School details

Unique reference number	136822
Local authority	City of Bristol
Inspection number	10049026

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	939
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	100
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Philip Ward
Acting Headteacher	Ben Sillince
Telephone number	01179 597200
Website	<a href="http://www.bristolfreeschool.org.uk">www.bristolfreeschool.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@bristolfreeschool.org.uk">admin@bristolfreeschool.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	19–20 February 2013

## Information about this school

- The school currently has an acting headteacher. The recruitment process for a new substantive headteacher is due to take place the week following the inspection.
- The school is an average-sized school.
- The proportion of girls is lower than average and significantly so in the current Year 11.
- The proportion of pupils supported through pupil premium funding is in line with the average for all secondary schools.
- Three quarters of pupils in the school are of white British heritage.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than average and the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan is well above average.
- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 attend a local college two days a week as part of their vocational pathway.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the school's strategy in respect of the pupil premium allocation for the current academic year and the school's use of the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium for the current year.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups, some of which were conducted jointly with senior leaders, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour information, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, governors, the chief executive of the trust, senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers, groups of pupils in key stages 3 and 4, and students on 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Inspectors took account of the 202 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, the 67 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 70 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Jeremy Law, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Shanks	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Rodin	Ofsted Inspector

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