

Birklands Primary School

Appleton Street, Warsop, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG20 0QF

Inspection dates

28 February–1 March 2017

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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Effective intervention by the Nova Education Trust has reversed the fortunes and reputation of the school. The school has undergone rapid improvement over the last two years.
- The head of school has a good understanding of effective teaching and learning and this is fuelling her ambitions for the school, its pupils and the wider community.
- The school's leaders have a realistic picture of its strengths and have accurately identified what the school needs to do to improve further.
- In their haste to improve, leaders have not always prioritised their actions as well as they might to maximise the impact of these actions on improving the school.
- The pupils have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They take their lead from the adults in school, who are very good role models.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have high aspirations for every pupil. However, their expectations for the most able pupils could be even higher.
- Pupils' outcomes in key stages 1 and 2 improved in 2016. Current assessment information shows a picture of improving outcomes in most year groups.
- Nevertheless, the most able pupils could achieve even more if the tasks set for them were consistently well matched to their abilities.
- Pupils conduct themselves with restraint and respect for each other at different times of the school day. They value the good behaviour of their fellow pupils and know that it is helping their learning in lessons.
- Respect for self and for others, regardless of background, is sewn through the fabric of the school. This equips pupils very well for their citizenship in modern Britain.
- Children make a super start to their education in the early years. The safe, bright environment and well-planned activities engage and enthuse the children.
- Parents are welcomed and encouraged to play their part in their children's development and learning, particularly, but not exclusively, in the early years.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine senior and subject leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance to pinpoint, prioritise and assess the impact of the key areas for improvement more precisely.
- Ensure that teachers match work to pupils' abilities more accurately to embed and deepen pupils' learning, thereby maximising rates of progress and attainment for all, but particularly for the most able.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The decisive actions of the Nova Education Trust, particularly since September 2015, have enabled the school to shake off the shackles of underperformance that had hindered its performance in the past. Trust officers have provided very effective support for school leaders, while holding them closely to account for the performance of each pupil. Parents, pupils and staff show great pride in the school and share the view that it has improved significantly over the past 18 months.
- The senior leaders have an accurate picture of the school's performance. They use their increasingly strong links with schools from within the trust and wider afield to secure their judgements. Their plans for the further improvement of the school are closely linked to this evaluation, as are the targets set for the management of the performance of teachers. This is ensuring that teachers are held closely to account not only for pupils' outcomes but also for the roles they play in the wider success of the school.
- The head of school has secured the trust and respect of parents and staff. She is ambitious for the personal and academic achievement of each pupil, with a very clear vision of what the school needs to do to improve further. She and her staff act as impressive role models for pupils and this has played a major part in securing the culture of calmness, care and personal challenge that is ever-present throughout the school.
- Leaders have invested heavily in the training and professional development of teachers and teaching assistants. This has ensured that staff apply policies and practices consistently. It has played an important role in securing improved pupils' behaviour and raising standards in all year groups.
- Subject leaders, including the special needs coordinator, are an emerging strength of the school. The head of school is increasingly delegating roles and responsibilities to other school leaders and these leaders are rising to the challenges they are set. They know the strengths and areas in need of improvement in their subjects, contributing to the wider actions needed to improve the school's performance over time.
- The school's curriculum offers a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn and develop new skills, although leaders are acting to improve this further. The curriculum is particularly effective at securing good levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge and understanding. Consequently, pupils are increasingly well prepared to take their place in modern Britain.
- Leaders use the additional funds provided through the physical education (PE) and sports development grant effectively. In addition to providing training to improve teachers' skills in delivering high-quality PE lessons, pupils have increased access to extra-curricular sporting activities. Pupils in Year 6 are particularly aware of the impact of improved playground facilities on the quality of their playtimes and the improved behaviour of pupils at break and lunchtimes.
- Leaders prioritise the progress of disadvantaged pupils, using the pupil premium to support this group increasingly effectively.

Leaders track the emotional and academic progress of particularly vulnerable pupils, such as those who are looked after, in great detail and act quickly to minimise disruptions to their learning. As a result, the difference in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils compared to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally is diminishing.

- Leaders monitor the school's performance regularly and in depth. However, their evaluations of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further are not as sharp as they need to be. This results in too many initiatives taking place at the same time without a clear understanding of which are working well and which can be replaced or dropped altogether.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school has seen considerable change since the conversion to an academy. The trust's introduction of an interim executive board brought increased rigour, challenge and accountability to the school's leaders. It also provided a strong training ground for the school's recently appointed governing body.
- The governors are clear about their roles and the responsibilities that go with them. Their knowledge and understanding of the school is increasing rapidly. They take nothing for granted and make regular checks to ensure that the information they receive from the school's leaders is accurate.
- The governors are diligent in their monitoring of the use of additional funds such as the pupil premium. They play an active part in ensuring that pay progression is linked to teachers' performance in the classroom and their contribution to the wider school community. The governors' role as both critic and friend to the school's leaders is ensuring that the school continues to improve quickly.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and leaders ensure that statutory requirements are met. Staff and governors receive regular training and this extends to those who staff the school's breakfast club. However, the culture of care and protection extends far beyond that of fulfilling statutory requirements, with pupils and adults showing a high level of respect and thoughtfulness towards each other.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe online from the early years, as leaders have recognised that even the school's youngest children are often using the internet at home. By Year 6, pupils are able to talk knowledgeably about how the school keeps them safe and the strategies they can use to keep themselves safe. Pupils trust adults in the school to deal with any concerns quickly and effectively.
- Parents and pupils agree that incidents of bullying are rare and that the school is a safe place to learn. Pupils' tolerance for each other, regardless of background, is apparent at all times. This was in evidence in the breakfast club where pupils of all ages played, talked and ate together before starting the school day in a calm and respectful manner.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The teachers and teaching assistants share the leaders' high aspirations for every pupil. Relationships with pupils are very strong and the staff's desire for each pupil to succeed is tangible. The majority of pupils achieve well as a result.
- The teachers follow school policies and leaders' directives fully. This results in consistency in most aspects of teaching and learning, such as the clarification of key learning points for pupils during each lesson. This is helping the majority of pupils to understand what they are doing and why. For example, Year 6 pupils can explain the relevance of their recent learning about the ancient Mayans' civilisation, while in Year 1 pupils knew that writing is an important skill for people who help us, such as police officers.
- The teachers and teaching assistants manage the behaviour of pupils very well and this helps to create the positive climate for learning that is seen in all classes. The pupils are eager and enthusiastic participants in lessons, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. The pupils' attitudes to their learning rarely slip even when the work set for them is not as challenging as it could be.
- The teachers and teaching assistants are effective in developing pupils' phonic skills. Following poor phonics outcomes in 2015, leaders have successfully addressed the early reading skills of pupils in key stage 1 through professional development opportunities for staff and regular monitoring by leaders. Consequently, pupils' phonic skills are now well embedded by the time they leave key stage 1.
- The leaders and teachers have fostered a culture of reading through which many pupils are now highly motivated to read for pleasure. The pupils repeatedly told inspectors that they strive for the platinum reading award because they love to celebrate their reading achievements while having a hot chocolate with senior leaders. When reading to inspectors, pupils of different ages and abilities often read with fluency and expression, using their phonic skills well to attempt tricky or unfamiliar words.
- The teachers plan writing lessons that place a heavy focus on the development of grammar skills in response to gaps that have been identified in pupils' prior learning. The adaptations that leaders have made to the writing curriculum, in an attempt to engage boys more effectively, are having a positive effect. Boys are now more willing writers who are better equipped to write accurately and for longer periods, when the opportunities arise.
- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics have improved substantially over the past two years as a result of improved teaching and learning. The teachers plan lessons that are well structured and that build on pupils' prior learning. Pupils regularly practise and apply their learning, with increasing opportunities to use reasoning to explain what they have done and why.
- The teachers plan lessons that identify the different abilities and backgrounds of pupils. They generally deploy teaching assistants and additional adults well, particularly to support the learning of the less able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Adults' questions are usually well thought through to engage pupils and to extend their learning.

- Too few pupils attain at the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2. This is because, although teachers have high aspirations for all pupils, teachers' expectations of what some pupils can achieve could be even higher. For these pupils, and in particular for the most able pupils, teachers are not sufficiently adept at identifying the next steps in pupils' learning to ensure that they are fully challenged.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners who are eager to share their work with the adults in school and visitors. School staff promote and model essential life skills such as perseverance and determination to good effect. As a result, pupils show increasing levels of resilience in lessons, having the confidence to make mistakes and to learn from them.
- From their entry into the early years, pupils are taught to respect each other and their school environment. By the time they reach Year 6, many pupils are able to express opinions and ideas that extend beyond their learning of facts. Often this includes the capacity to empathise with others from different backgrounds, lifestyles, countries or cultures: 'Everyone is the same, we judge them on the inside not the outside. No, actually we don't judge people at all,' commented a Year 6 pupil, with the full agreement of her classmates.
- Pupils volunteer willingly for the positions of responsibility that are increasingly available as they move through the school. Many of these positions help pupils to understand key British values such as democracy, with elections taking place to fill vacancies. Others, such as dinner helpers, introduce values such as service to others. Along with specific lessons, these roles of responsibility ensure that pupils' personal and social education is well developed.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct around the school and at different times of the day is consistently good. Pupils are courteous and thoughtful towards each other, adults and visitors to the school. Year 6 pupils speak highly of the school's behaviour system and its impact on eliminating disruptive behaviour in lessons, name-calling and other forms of disrespect between pupils or towards adults.
- Pupils follow the positive examples set by the teachers and teaching assistants. They work collaboratively, listening to their classmates and respecting different opinions in a mature manner. Pupils feel safe and this enables them to express their opinions and challenge each other's ideas without fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average, with pupils arriving punctually and ready for the day ahead.
- Pupils take pride in their appearance and display very strong attitudes to their learning, which rarely slip, even when teaching is not well matched to their abilities.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2016, the published outcomes for pupils in key stages 1 and 2 showed an improvement over the previous year. At the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils attaining at the level expected for their age was broadly in line with the national figures for reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of key stage 2, the picture was similar for writing and mathematics, with reading attainment exceeding the national average.
- Pupils leaving key stage 2 made strong progress from their starting points, particularly in mathematics. After a dip in their phonics outcomes in Year 1, pupils left key stage 1 having made up for lost learning and achieved the national averages in reading and phonics. These outcomes reflect the good quality of teaching in Years 2 and 6 during the last academic year.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check improved significantly. This was the result of improved teaching and leaders' determination to develop parents' understanding of their children's use of phonics, while including them in their children's learning.
- Leaders and teachers monitor each pupil's progress every half term to ensure that no pupil falls behind. In-house assessment information shows that pupils in the majority of classes are making progress that often exceeds that expected of them at this point in the year. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils of middle ability are making better progress because teachers often set work that is better suited to their needs.
- The pupil premium is used effectively to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. While their outcomes were below those of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in 2016, internal pupil tracking information suggests that the progress of the majority of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able of them, is currently exceeding that of other pupils in the school. This reflects leaders' increasingly close scrutiny of disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and the rising levels of accountability leaders place on class teachers.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well in relation to their starting points because of the additional support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants. Leaders monitor very closely other groups of pupils who are potentially vulnerable to underperformance, such as children looked after by the local authority. Personal education plans for these pupils show that leaders and external specialists undertake regular reviews to ensure that any barriers to learning are addressed quickly and effectively.
- From their starting points, the most able pupils do not make as much progress over time as they could. In addition, too few of the previously middle-attaining pupils make the accelerated progress necessary to reach the higher levels of attainment.

- Consequently, the proportions of pupils attaining at the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics combined in key stages 1 and 2 are much lower than those seen nationally.

Early years provision

Good

- The children in the early years make a very good start to their education. Teachers establish routines that enable children to settle quickly into their learning. As a result, children are confident, inquisitive learners who are eager to explore new ideas and challenges.
- The children rapidly become immersed in the culture of the school, showing care, consideration and kindness to each other. Links with parents are very strong and this aids the children's transition into school. The teachers view parents as an essential part of their children's development and parents feel their views and input are valued. The early morning phonics sessions for children and their parents are particularly well attended and clearly enjoyed by all.
- The teachers plan topics and lessons that inspire and engage the children. They are alert to the developing learning needs of the children, often responding quickly to the children's suggestions and emerging interests. During the inspection, children bubbled with excitement when using a telescope to look at planets that were hanging from the ceiling. 'The aliens are on the moon which is in space,' explained one child to an inspector.
- The teachers and teaching assistants are adept at assessing children's learning and this ensures that activities are usually effective in supporting children's next steps. The teachers regularly adapt activities in the areas of learning around the classroom to ensure that pupils can extend their learning without direct adult supervision. Adults' questions are usually well thought out to challenge children's thinking. For example, in response to the question 'how do you know that person is an astronaut?', a child replied, 'Because he is wearing a special suit.'
- The early years is well led. Teachers' professional knowledge is strong and they are encouraged to innovate and apply new ideas that are based on well-founded educational research. This results in a learning environment that is brimming with enthusiasm and staff who are highly motivated to drive further improvement.
- Children enter the Nursery at levels of development that are usually below and often well below that which is typical for children of their age. They make rapid progress and this continues during their time in the Reception class. By the time they leave the early years, an above-average proportion are well equipped for the next stage of their education, having achieved a good level of development. However, the activities do not consistently provide the extra challenge needed by the most able children to maximise their progress.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and all statutory responsibilities are met.

School details

Unique reference number	140659
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	10023081

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	188
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Tim Gibbon
Head of school	Celia Smith
Telephone number	01623 842163
Website	www.birklandsschool.co.uk
Email address	office@birklandsschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Birklands Primary School is smaller than the average primary school. Its predecessor school closed in March 2014 after being placed into special measures in May 2013. The school is now an academy, sponsored by the Torch Academy Gateway Trust (which formally changed its name to Nova Education Trust during the inspection on 28 February 2017). This was the school's first inspection as an academy.
- In 2015, the trust removed the former governing body, replacing it with an interim executive board. A new governing body replaced the interim executive board at the start of February 2017. Since January 2017 the school has been led by a recently appointed head of school who was previously the deputy headteacher.
- Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are taught in single-age classes. Reception-age children attend full time and are taught in the early years classrooms alongside children who attend the school's Nursery for half days.

- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average.
- In 2016 the school met the national floor standards for pupil achievement.
- The school complies with Department of Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all year groups. They observed the teaching of early reading skills and listened to pupils reading. Inspectors talked to pupils about their school and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the head of school, executive headteacher, subject leaders, special needs coordinator, representatives of the governing body and officers from the Torch Academies Gateway Trust (Nova Education Trust).
- Inspectors spoke to parents informally at the start of the school day. They took account of the 15 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including: the school's own self-evaluation of current performance and plans for improvement; the school's most recent information on the achievement and progress of pupils; information relating to the safeguarding of pupils; the school's most recent information relating to the attendance of pupils; and minutes from meetings of the school's former interim executive board and the inaugural governing body meeting.

Inspection team

Stephen McMullan, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kate Nash	Ofsted Inspector
Fiona Rigby	Ofsted Inspector

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