

Birches Head Academy

Address: Birches Head Road, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST2 8DD

Unique reference number (URN): 148220

Inspection report: 23 June 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' achievement in public examinations has been very low. Many pupils did not achieve the qualifications needed for their next steps in education, employment or training. Outcomes in 2025 showed some areas of improvement, but this was not the case for some disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The changes made to the curriculum have made a difference to how much current pupils know and remember. While there is variation in the quality of pupils' work in books and how well they can talk about their learning, leaders know this and are actively addressing these issues. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND usually learn well. Pupils new to speaking English as an additional language make rapid progress from their starting points.

The school's strategy to securing pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills is clear but some of it has only recently been introduced. It is already making a real difference to those pupils who need support in becoming confident, fluent readers.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

There has been a sustained focus on improving attendance, with steady progress being made year on year. Overall attendance is closer to the national average but needs to improve further. Persistent absence is reducing but still high, especially for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are taking a thoughtful approach to working with families and pupils to improve the attendance of pupils with SEND. Leaders and staff know their pupils well. They monitor attendance and behaviour rigorously, identifying patterns and putting support in place to remove barriers that pupils may face.

Behaviour at the school has improved significantly over the last 2 years. The number of suspensions and repeat suspensions is falling but needs to further decrease.

The school is a calm and orderly environment. Leaders have introduced clear systems that are usually implemented consistently by staff. Work to address the bullying concerns identified in the previous graded inspection has been successful. Pupils talk about how bullying has reduced and, if it does happen, is dealt with appropriately. However, there are some pupils who do not meet the school's expectations of speaking to each other with kindness and respect. They make inappropriate comments to fellow pupils and appear to be unaware of the impact on their peers of what they say and do. Leaders are in the early days of addressing this issue but understand how important it is that all pupils feel valued and respected.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders have a clear vision for what teaching and learning should look like. They have made changes to the curriculum to make sure that learning can build over time.

To improve lessons, leaders rightly started by improving pupils' behaviour in the classroom. They have then identified the strategies staff should use to deliver the curriculum. This includes modelling thinking and writing, checking how much pupils have understood, asking effective questions and developing pupils' oracy skills. Staff have received training on these strategies. However, much of this work has only started in the last year and so these approaches are not yet embedded. They are not used to a consistent standard between and within subjects. Some staff are more confident in how to use and adapt them as a lesson progresses. Sometimes, misconceptions or gaps in pupils' knowledge are missed. Some activities do not help pupils to deepen their learning or apply their thinking more independently. Not all staff have the expertise to adapt learning effectively for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They do not always apply these strategies in a way that helps these pupils achieve success in their learning.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of what needs to improve in classroom practice across the school.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders across the school place a high emphasis on inclusion. They ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils, those known or previously known to social care, those who join the school at different times and pupils who are new to the country are thought about in all decision-making. There is growing evidence that additional funding is improving attendance and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, but more improvement is needed.

There are effective systems in place to identify pupils' needs, including for those who start during the school year or need support learning English. There have been some useful changes made to how staff know what pupils' needs are and how they should adapt learning to help these pupils be successful. As this work is still in the early stages of implementation and monitoring, there is some variation in how well these strategies are used by staff.

Leaders ensure that pupils known to social care receive the support they need through working proactively with the local authority. They make appropriate use of alternative provision and have systems in place to check that this provision is working in the best interests of the pupils concerned.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

There have been key changes in both school leadership and governance since the previous graded inspection, including a new principal and vice principal, who started 2 years ago. Leaders at all levels work with pupils' best interests at heart. Trust and local governance are robust and support school improvement well. All are committed to making Birches Head Academy the best school it can be and one where pupils flourish.

Leaders have developed a more accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that still need improvement. As a result, their actions and improvement priorities are increasingly more refined and precise. Leaders' ongoing school improvement work has resulted in positive changes in many areas over the last 2 years. They have strengthened how they monitor the impact of their actions to ensure that things are working as intended.

However, leaders know that more time is needed before they can be confident that the impact of their work will sustain in the longer term.

Staff feel well supported by leaders. They know that their wellbeing and workload are taken into account. Through the school and trust, staff at all stages of their careers benefit from a well-designed professional development programme.

Leaders are committed to strengthening relationships with parents and carers, the community and partners such as the local authority. Parents comment on how much the school has improved and the strength of school leaders. The school is much more proactive in its work with the local authority as leaders know the positive benefits this brings for pupils, especially those who are vulnerable.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Leaders have put together the 'be more' programme, which supports pupils' wider personal, social and cultural development. The range of extra-curricular activities has been expanded to meet the needs and interests of more pupils. There are more opportunities for pupils to take on leadership responsibilities within the school, for example as 'be kind' and 'be more' pupil leaders, sports leaders and library ambassadors. This has contributed to a greater sense of belonging for pupils. Through careful monitoring, leaders make sure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included and represented.

Leaders have reviewed the personal, social, health and education (PSHE) curriculum and its delivery as they identified that pupils were not developing the depth of knowledge they need around important topics. Pupils appreciate the changes, including more opportunities for discussion, and feel that lessons have more value than before. However, more time is needed before pupils have a secure understanding of the PSHE curriculum, including what it means to be a positive member of modern British society. The school uses some of the 'academic review' sessions to respond to any current issues within the community but does not always pick up on the concerns or topics that pupils feel are most pressing for them.

Leaders acknowledge that there is more to be done to improve careers education. The programme encourages pupils to have high aspirations for the future, but many pupils are not clear on the choices they need to make in order to realise their ambitions.

The school's pastoral system is a strength. Pastoral, safeguarding and inclusion staff work together well, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of pupils' needs and possible barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. When there are any safeguarding concerns around a pupil, the team acts swiftly to ensure that pupils receive the support they need.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils, staff, parents and carers talk about how much the school has improved over the last couple of years. They can see that leaders' actions are making day-to-day life in school

better. Pupils feel safe and cared for. There is a confidence that if any bullying happens, it will be dealt with effectively.

Pupils understand what is expected of their behaviour. They appreciate the clear systems, such as the morning 'line up', that help them to meet these expectations. Most lessons are disruption-free. Social times are calm. Pupils value the rewards they achieve for making the right choices. However, there are some pupils who have not fully bought into the school's 'be kind' culture. Their attitudes towards some of their peers are disrespectful. The comments they make mean that some pupils do not feel valued by everyone in school.

Pupils who arrive during the year, including those new to the country, are welcomed and settle in well. Support is given to all pupils who face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. This has begun to make a difference to how well these pupils attend and behave in school.

Most pupils want to be successful learners. When teaching is effective and builds carefully on what pupils have learned before, they achieve well. However, the curriculum is not always delivered in a way that helps pupils to engage with their learning or close knowledge gaps they may have. Consequently, pupils' achievement varies between subjects and lessons. More pupils are gaining the qualifications needed for their next steps in education, employment or training than in previous years.

The school's 'be more' curriculum helps pupils develop the skills and personal qualities that will help them to lead a 'choice-filled life'. Pupils talk positively about how the range of extra-curricular activities has increased and the different leadership roles they can take on within the school. They like being able to discuss real-life scenarios in their personal, social and health education lessons.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that their existing priorities and actions become embedded and continue to show improvement in raising examination outcomes, reducing the number of suspensions and reducing persistent absence for pupils who face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.
- Leaders should ensure that all staff develop the expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively so that pupils secure the key learning and depth of knowledge they need for future success. This includes staff making appropriate adaptations to learning during lessons.
- Leaders should ensure that all pupils understand the importance of treating each other with respect and the impact of their language and attitudes on each other.

About this inspection

This school is part of Frank Field Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer

(CEO), Tom Quinn, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Wooff.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the principal, the vice principals, other leaders and staff at the school. Inspectors also met with trust leaders and those responsible for governance, including the CEO and the deputy CEO, and the chair of the trust board and local governing committee.

Inspectors visited lessons. They looked at pupils' work. They spoke with pupils at different times across the school day and observed behaviour in lessons and around the school site.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The principal and one vice principal took up their roles in 2024. The chair of the trust board has changed since the previous graded inspection.

The school currently uses 6 registered providers of alternative provision.

Principal: Paul Masher

Lead inspector:

Nicola Beech, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Martin Spoor, Ofsted Inspector

Peter Bassett, Ofsted Inspector

Clare Turner, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.



This data is from 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

953

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,040

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

47.22%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

1.57%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

13.75%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	17.1%	45.4%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	15.7%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	14.5%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	31.3	46.1	Below
2023/24 (final)	30.2	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	30.8	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.95	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.87	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	11.6%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	9.8%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	5.8%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	25.2	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	25.0	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	27.2	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.04	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.06	-0.57	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	11.6%	53.1%	-41.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	9.8%	53.1%	-43.4 pp
2022/23 (final)	5.8%	52.4%	-46.6 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	25.2	50.4	-25.2
2023/24 (final)	25.0	50.0	-25.0
2022/23 (final)	27.2	50.3	-23.1

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.04	0.16	-1.21
2022/23 (final)	-1.06	0.17	-1.23

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (revised)	79%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	87%	93%	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	11.9%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	15.2%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	14.1%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	36.2%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	43.3%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	44.4%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard ●

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard ●

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



© Crown copyright