

Birches Head Academy

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

Unique reference number (URN): 148220

Monitoring inspection report:

24 and 25 February 2026

At the most recent graded inspection, the following areas were identified as needing to improve:

- Some pupils regularly experience unacceptable discrimination or bullying from others. They do not have confidence in leaders' ability to address this, so they do not report it. Leaders need to ensure that all discrimination or bullying issues are challenged and resolved consistently and effectively when they occur.
- The school's work to improve pupils' behaviour has not had sufficient impact. A significant number of pupils misbehave and experience consequences too often, including being removed from lessons or suspended. These pupils miss out on valuable curriculum time. In addition, some parents are unclear about the school's expectations. Leaders should review their approach to behaviour management so that it leads to improvements in pupils' behaviour, ensuring that parents are clear about how they can support the school too.
- Leaders have not addressed the high rates of pupil absence well enough, especially for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. A significant number of pupils regularly miss too much school, which adversely affects their education. Leaders should take all possible steps to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.
- In some subjects, teachers do not use assessment well enough to check that pupils have understood what has been taught. When this happens, teachers do not adapt their teaching to take account of what pupils can do. Leaders need to ensure that all teachers use assessment consistently well to check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching and curriculum planning where necessary.
- Trustees and governors do not have a sufficiently accurate view of the school's effectiveness. This means they are not precise enough in their support and challenge for leaders, especially around the quality of education, and attendance and behaviour. Those responsible for governance need to ensure that they offer more precise challenge so they can hold leaders to account and address areas for improvement effectively.

Leaders and trustees are taking effective action to improve the school, but continued work is needed to remove the requires significant improvement designation.

During the monitoring inspection, the inspector focused on the following evaluation areas:

- Leadership and governance
- Attendance and behaviour

Leadership and governance

Leadership has been stable since the previous monitoring inspection. Leaders have continued to focus appropriately on improving attendance, developing the positive behaviour culture, ensuring that the curriculum is implemented effectively and supporting new middle and senior leaders. Those responsible for governance carry out their responsibilities with rigour and pragmatism, especially through the 'challenge board'.

Clear progress has been made in responding to the weaknesses identified in the school's last graded inspection. However, leaders know that there is still a way to go on the school's improvement journey. For example, leaders' work to improve how well teachers check pupils' understanding is still in the early stages of implementation. Leaders know the areas that need to improve further and have appropriate plans in place to address these weaknesses.

Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness has included periodic monitoring and external evaluation. Leaders have an increasingly accurate understanding of what they need to continue to prioritise as the school moves forward, including the short-term next steps needed to build continued improvement.

Safeguarding

At the previous graded and monitoring inspections, safeguarding was evaluated as being effective.

Attendance and behaviour

Pupils' attendance has continued to rise. It is moving closer to the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND has improved significantly. The school has increased capacity in the attendance team, for example through the appointment of a school-based education welfare officer. As a result, the work to improve pupils' attendance has become more focused on removing the specific barriers to attendance that individual pupils may face.

The school's behaviour culture has continued to improve since the previous monitoring inspection. Most pupils get on well with each other and with staff. Lessons are typically calm, enabling pupils to focus on their learning. Incidences of bullying or discrimination

have reduced significantly, and pupils are confident that such issues would be dealt with effectively by most staff.

In the previous monitoring inspections, the very high levels of suspensions remained a concern. There has been a reduction in the number of suspensions so far this academic year, but it remains much higher than the national average. There are many layers of internal support on offer to those pupils who make the wrong behaviour choices. However, these are not making a difference to a small group of pupils who are resistant to the changes to the school's behaviour culture. Leaders have not ensured these pupils improve their behaviour, resulting in repeated suspensions and missed learning. Leaders are now reviewing how they could better use external support to make a difference to the behaviour of these pupils.

Leaders and trustees should continue to work to address the priorities for improvement identified in the last graded inspection report.

About this inspection

The inspector carried out this monitoring inspection under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005, and it was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require significant improvement following the graded inspection that took place in October 2023.

The school's previous inspection and the first and second monitoring inspections were carried out under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) at that time. The renewed EIF took effect from 10 November 2025. The areas for improvement identified at the school's graded inspection and subsequent monitoring inspections have been cross-referenced to the relevant evaluation areas in the inspection toolkit for consideration on this monitoring inspection.

The purpose of this monitoring inspection was not to determine grades for any of the evaluation areas set out in the school inspection toolkit. The purpose was to identify and report on the school's progress in addressing priorities for improvement since the school's previous inspection.

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of the trust, other trust leaders, trustees and a governor to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection.

Lead inspector

Nicola Beech

His Majesty's Inspector

About this school

School capacity	1040
Number of pupils on roll	922

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
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