

James Brindley School

Bell Barn Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, West Midlands B15 2AF

Inspection dates

17–18 January 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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Over the last two years, leaders, staff and governors have worked together very effectively to improve all aspects of James Brindley School. Pupils now receive a good quality of education, whichever part of the school they attend or for how long.
- Teaching for the pupils who are in hospital and those at the specialist centres is skilfully adapted to their complex needs. This allows them to retain a sense of normality and make good progress even when they are very ill.
- At the three main teaching centres, much of the teaching is good. It is largely well planned and suitably challenging. The best is highly analytical about the gaps in pupils' learning and this information is used well to plan the next steps. However, this effective analytical approach is not yet consistent in all subjects.
- Many pupils at the teaching centres make good progress over time across the curriculum. However, they do not always achieve as well as predicted in their GCSE examinations, partly because they are not given enough experience of examination conditions.
- For a few pupils in key stage 4, the curriculum and accreditation does not fully meet their needs as it is not practical enough.
- Pupils who are taught at home are enabled and encouraged to reintegrate into school as soon as they are able to do so.
- When pupils fall behind, they often attend intervention classes. While these are sometimes useful, they are not always sharply focused enough on what pupils need to learn.
- Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress with their social and emotional skills, confidence or their behaviour, depending on their needs.
- Leaders have built good relationships with parents, and keep parents well informed about their children's progress.
- Leaders set high expectations for pupils' attendance and tackle non-attendance strongly. Attendance in each part of the school has improved considerably. However, some pupils still do not attend as well as they should and this has an adverse effect on their achievement.
- Sometimes pupils in the teaching centres spend time out of classes through their own choice, thereby missing learning time.
- Safeguarding is strong. Leaders, staff and governors are well trained and vigilant. There are good systems for monitoring pupils' welfare.
- The governing body is well led and effective. Governors have a good knowledge of the teaching centres, the specialist sector and the hospitals. They use this knowledge effectively to challenge leaders as well as to support them.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress that pupils make, particularly in the teaching centres, by:
 - using close analysis of gaps in pupils' learning to ensure that both day-to-day teaching and intervention sessions teach the skills and knowledge that pupils need in order to progress and to succeed in examinations where appropriate
 - putting in place further strategies to allow Year 11 pupils to practise sitting examinations in a formal setting, using specialist (access) arrangements to help them where appropriate
 - extending the range of courses and accreditation to ensure that all pupils' needs are met and that they are able to demonstrate their achievements
 - minimising the time that pupils spend out of lessons through their own choice.
- Improve the attendance of individuals who continue to be persistently absent from school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The interim principal has skilfully and determinedly led this complex school through a period of significant improvement. He has systematically focused on what needed to improve in each aspect of the school's work, while also building on the strengths.
- The senior leadership team has been a key part of the school's improvement. Leaders know both their sectors and their areas of responsibility well. They are skilled and flexible, quickly taking on different responsibilities where needed for the smooth running of the school.
- Staff have responded well to the new demands that have been placed upon them, and in many cases to new roles and responsibilities. Subject leaders, who in the past had little opportunity to lead, have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their subject across the sectors, and support teachers well.
- The school has detailed assessment and tracking systems which allow teachers, pupils and parents to see how well pupils are doing. Leaders use assessment information well to challenge and support teachers if pupils are not making enough progress.
- Leaders have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work. They carefully monitor the quality of teaching and learning through visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of assessment information. They look closely at the effectiveness of safeguarding and the management of behaviour. Leaders use their evaluations to plan the next steps for staff training or whole-school changes. This systematic approach has been a key factor in driving up standards across the school over the last two years.
- Leaders' analyse patterns of behaviour carefully. This enables them to track improvements and consider specific aspects of behaviour which may require further intervention as well as identify areas for staff's professional development.
- The interim principal has sought appropriate support to help the school to improve. Good links have been built with local mainstream schools to support the development of the curriculum and to provide professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Leaders have put a great deal of thought into improving the curriculum in various ways over the last two years. The curriculum at Northfield and Parkway now suits the majority of pupils' academic and social needs. Pupils are motivated by the new cross-curricular work at key stage 3, as well as by starting some GCSE work where appropriate. A few key stage 4 pupils at Parkway and Dovedale need some more practical courses to engage them and a wider range of accreditation to be able to demonstrate their achievement.
- Various creative works have taken place at the different centres to enhance the curriculum. Ardenleigh staff have, for instance, created a bicycle workshop where pupils repair staff's bicycles and renovate old bicycles to sell. This is proving very motivational to the pupils. The recently established forest school provision at Northfield is of a very high quality and has enriched the curriculum. Extra-curricular provision after school is often not practical because pupils travel long distances or have to rest or receive medical treatment, so enrichment activities such as sport, art or music take

place during the day or at lunchtimes.

- The hospitals and some of the specialist sectors sometimes have post-16 pupils. When they do, they provide courses at the appropriate level, which can range from A level to basic skills work.
- Leaders have rightly identified that some pupils' low attendance is not directly related to their medical needs. They strongly challenge parents about this issue, even writing to medical professionals at times to gain confirmation that there is no medical reason why a pupil cannot attend school. This tenacity is beginning to show in the improvements in attendance for some individuals. In addition, attendance at lessons in the specialist centres has improved because leaders' and staff's expectations are higher. Some pupils do still absent themselves from lessons, thereby missing learning time, and leaders do not have as much information about this aspect of pupils' behaviour as they might.
- Senior leaders promote fundamental British values well across the school. Tolerance and respect for individual differences are at the heart of the school's work. Pupils show understanding for each other's often complex needs. Pupils learn about the British justice system and human rights through the personal, social and health education curriculum. Such concepts are often reinforced through other lessons, such as history. Visits to places of worship take place for those who are able to participate, and all have discussions about religion in lessons. Pupils put their understanding of democracy into action through their participation in the centre-based pupil councils, which feed into a whole-school pupil parliament.
- Leaders and staff have received appropriate training about radicalisation and extremism. They have a good awareness of how to keep pupils safe from these threats and know what action to take if they are concerned.
- Good relationships with the police have helped to reinforce British values and also help pupils to understand radicalisation and extremism. For example, at Dovedale, the police community support officer helped pupils with autistic spectrum disorder to understand how throwaway or joking comments might be misunderstood in the wider community.
- Leaders, including governors, think carefully about the allocation of pupil premium funding across the teaching centres. The funding is spent appropriately and there are no significant gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers. The sports funding enables the key stage 2 pupils at Dovedale to participate in a range of sporting activities at lunchtimes in addition to their usual physical education (PE) lessons. The very small number of pupils who are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding benefit from the additional support they are given.
- Over the last two years, leaders have greatly improved the school's relationship with parents. Parents receive regular information about how their children are getting on at school. Meetings where parents can discuss their children's progress with subject teachers are held in the teaching centres. The school has also begun to hold meetings with parents in local supermarket coffee shops, to encourage parents who do not feel able to come into school. These are proving very successful.
- Pupils, including post-16 students, receive good independent careers advice and support for the next steps. One former pupil of one of the hospitals, for example, wrote

to the school to say, 'I've never forgotten the help and support you gave me which enabled me to complete my GCSEs and go on to sixth form.' Even after having serious operations, older pupils are helped to write their curriculum vitae and college or university applications as appropriate. The greater focus that the teaching centres are now placing on developing skills such as independent travel are also helping to prepare pupils well for life after school.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school is effective.
- The chair of the governing body has worked determinedly and effectively over the last two years to build up the governing body and to support the school to improve. She has not held back in tackling underperformance where needed. She has been well supported throughout by the vice-chair.
- The governing body has expanded over the last two years, both in numbers and expertise. Governors have a wide range of skills and use these well to support and challenge the school.
- The committees attached to each of the different sectors work well because the governors on each committee have developed a detailed knowledge of the hospitals, the specialist centres or the teaching centres to which they are assigned. They use this knowledge well to ask questions, for example what the impact of a proposed change would be on the sector. Senior leaders share information about patterns of behaviour at these committee meetings on a half-termly basis, which enables governors to have a better understanding of patterns and types of behaviours across every site. At the same time, all governors have a good overview of the whole school.
- Governors pay constant and careful attention to safeguarding. Meetings frequently focus on safeguarding, including on aspects such as attendance. Governors request full reviews of any safeguarding incidents that happen in school so that learning points can be identified.
- Governors are appropriately involved in the performance management of staff and the allocation of financial resources.
- Governors have not ensured that the website is fully compliant with requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, including governors, have created a culture across all parts of the school in which safeguarding is top priority. Over the last two years, all aspects of the school's approach to safeguarding have been systematically reviewed and revised.
- Each of the different centres has a fully trained designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Staff know who their DSL is and who to talk to if that person is not present when an issue arises. The lead governor for safeguarding has also attended the DSL training in order to make himself well informed so he can ask suitable questions of leaders.
- Staff receive continual training in and information about safeguarding, including keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism, female genital mutilation and

child sexual exploitation. Staff are vigilant and well informed.

- The school has made clear to all staff the crucial links between attendance and safeguarding. Pupils' attendance at school and lessons is carefully logged and any absence is swiftly followed up. If a home-teaching session is cancelled by a parent, the teacher attends the home to check on the pupil's welfare.
- There are careful and appropriate risk assessments in place for pupils who may harm themselves.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- At the specialist and the hospital centres, teachers are highly skilled at adapting teaching to the pupils' circumstances so that they can still achieve. Aspirations are high and teachers continually try to instil a sense of normality for pupils who are experiencing huge personal challenges. Teaching takes place at the bedside where needed, and in isolation rooms in the secure centres if that is where the pupil is. For example, one pupil was making cookies on the ward while lying in bed, and the teacher was helping develop her understanding of 'more' and 'less' by adding chocolate chips to the cookies. This highly personalised approach enables pupils to make demonstrable progress while undergoing serious operations or treatment for serious illnesses such as cancer.
- Assessment at the hospitals is particularly skilled. Often, teachers have information from schools, but where this is not the case they quickly work out pupils' starting points so that the work is at the right level. Detailed week-by-week assessment indicates the progress that pupils are making. This information is then given back to schools, assisting a smooth transition. A similar approach is used at the specialist sectors. At Newbridge, for example, six-weekly reports give parents and schools good information about what pupils have achieved while receiving their treatment.
- Teachers at the hospital and specialist centres have good subject knowledge and put this to good use to enable pupils of all ages and of different abilities to make progress.
- The hospital sector has begun to receive more pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties than in the past. Leaders have identified that it is a priority to develop more strategies to teach this group well. Specialist training for staff in this area is already proving successful.
- At the three main teaching centres, teaching is well planned and usually meets pupils' needs well. Staff know the pupils well and make sure that lessons are accessible to them, taking into account their barriers for learning. In a geography lesson about the impact of earthquakes, for example, a teacher was sensitive to individual pupils' learning styles and enabled them to work in a way most suited to their needs.
- In mathematics, assessment at the teaching centres has begun to be highly analytical. The subject leader is helping teachers to use this analysis well to identify exactly where the gaps are in pupils' learning, whether the gaps are from a pupil's absence last week or from time that they missed during key stage 2 or 3. Teachers then teach the missing skills and knowledge. This approach is really helping pupils to make better progress. In other subject areas and in some intervention sessions, while there is careful assessment of pupils' learning, there is less concentration on finding out the areas of

weakness, and so pupils' progress is sometimes slower.

- The best teaching at the three centres encourages pupils to take risks in their learning, thereby building their confidence and resilience. In an English lesson, for example, pupils had written their analysis of two poems on to huge sheets of paper, which the teacher then held up close to each individual for them to read from while shielded from the gaze of others. This helped them to feel safe enough to look up and articulate well, and to have confidence in sharing their work with their peers. The risk-taking aspect of the school's work has improved greatly over the last two years. Occasionally, pupils are still given too much support or not allowed to take a reasonable risk.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- In each part of the school, there is a strong focus on pupils' mental well-being. Extensive multi-disciplinary work helps school staff to be well informed about the complex medical and mental health aspects of pupils' needs and to meet these needs accordingly.
- The curriculum in each of the sectors provides many opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. There is a staff member at each centre who acts as an e-safety 'champion'. Internet use is monitored regularly by leaders, using a commercial software package.
- All pupils at the three teaching centres are participating in physical education activities to some extent, something which did not happen in the recent past. Pupils are often reluctant to take part in physical activity and the school has thought carefully about how best to engage pupils to improve their physical and mental well-being. For example, a well-planned weekly karate session at the Northfield centre means that some pupils, who were previously reluctant to take part in physical education, are becoming more active and confident. They are seeing the benefits to their health. One pupil commented: 'PE is much better here... I didn't do it at all at my last school.' This view was echoed by others.
- Some good work has begun around how to help pupils to become more resilient, and this is starting to be effective.
- The recently established forest school at Northfield provides opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence, self-esteem, motivation and independence. The leader of this provision is passionate about the benefits for the pupils and in a short space of time has worked hard to make sure it has had a significant impact on pupils' personal development. Pupils from Willows made the furniture for the forest school's 'classroom', a significant positive contribution of which they are rightly proud.
- The residential visit for pupils at the Northfield forest school, which took place last September, provided good opportunities for team building as well as developing their independence. Pupils, some of whom had never been away from home before, spoke positively about the experience and how they would like to repeat it in the next academic year.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff in all parts of the school make sure that pupils understand the expectations of their setting. The school's behaviour policy sets out these expectations clearly. Teachers quickly and appropriately challenge any incidents of aggressive or derogatory language and stereotyping.
- The school's recording system for behaviour and welfare ensures that incidents and concerns are recorded in a timely way, enabling swift support and intervention where necessary.
- If bullying takes place, staff and other adults are quick to deal with this as they have a good understanding of the impact on pupils' well-being. The school uses restorative meetings after any incidents of aggression or exclusions, which enable all parties, including the victim, to address issues and move forward in a positive way.
- Staff are sensitive to the varying needs and behavioural difficulties of some pupils and handling plans are regularly reviewed and shared with parents.
- Attendance across the setting is showing marked improvement. There are, however, still some pupils whose attendance is very low for reasons not directly linked to their health.
- Transition arrangements for pupils who are attending teaching centres following home-teaching provision are well matched to the pupils' needs and, as a result, this is having a positive impact on the attendance of this group.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall, when pupils are well enough to attend school in whichever sector, they make good progress. In all sectors and among all groups of pupils, the majority of pupils are making good progress in most of their subjects. There are no significant differences in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and that made by their peers.
- At Ardenleigh and Larimar, a wide range of accreditation is used to enable pupils to demonstrate their achievements, from entry level certificates to Open University courses. Pupils make good progress across the curriculum when they are well enough. Post-16 pupils who need to re-take GCSE English and mathematics are enabled and supported to do so and there are some notable successes.
- At Newbridge and Willows and in the hospitals, pupils continue to study the subjects that they are already studying at their home school. Specialist subject teaching enables them to make good progress when they are well enough. For some, not falling behind is a key aim, and pupils achieve this through good teaching and their own determination.
- In the specialist centres, some of the most able pupils are also those who are the most unwell. When they can attend lessons, they apply themselves very well and make rapid academic progress. The most able pupils in the hospitals also make good progress when they are well enough, as do many of those at the teaching centres.
- The primary-aged pupils at Dovedale settle quickly into their new school and, once

they have, they make good progress across the curriculum, including in reading, writing and mathematics. Some pupils do not have good phonics skills when they join the school part way through key stage 2, but start to catch up well through the specialist teaching they receive.

- GCSE examination outcomes from the teaching centres in 2016 were not as good as the school had predicted. While some pupils did well, others underachieved. The school has rightly identified that some pupils were badly affected by being in a formal examination situation for the first time, and others would have benefited from specialist adaptations to examination conditions (access arrangements). Some examination practice has taken place for the current Year 11 but the school knows that more is needed to avoid the same problems occurring again.
- There is some underachievement in the teaching centres but there is no real pattern. Last academic year, some underachievement was related to weaker and non-specialist teaching. Teaching has improved, so this factor has become less prominent. Some pupils achieve little academically for long periods of time because they are too unwell, either physically or mentally. Others have sporadic patterns of attendance which leads to gaps in their learning.

School details

Unique reference number	139526
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10018084

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	All-through special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Claire Marshall
Interim Principal	John Bradshaw
Telephone number	0121 666 6409
Website	www.jamesbrindley.bham.sch.uk
Email address	enquiry@jamesbrindley.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2015

Information about this school

- James Brindley School converted to become an academy in the spring term 2013.
- The school has 11 centres catering for pupils with a wide range of needs, mainly related to medical or mental health conditions. The centres are spread across Birmingham. The school also runs a home-teaching service.
- Around 200 pupils are registered only at James Brindley. They attend one of three teaching centres: Dovedale, Parkway and Northfield. There are few primary-aged pupils and more than half the pupils are in Key Stage 4. Around a third of pupils who are single registered have a statement of special educational needs. Around three quarters are White British, and a quarter are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number are looked after. Not quite half are eligible for the pupil premium.
- Dovedale has pupils from key stages 2 to 4, and caters for pupils with autistic spectrum

disorder. Northfield and Parkway are for pupils with medical needs; Northfield for key stage 3 pupils and Parkway for key stage 4. Until September 2016 Northfield and Parkway each had key stage 3 and 4 pupils.

- Most of the other pupils are dual registered with their main school. These pupils are either in hospital or are resident in a specialist centre for a period of time.
- There are a few post-16 pupils at any one time at the hospitals and some of the specialist centres. Occasionally, very young children, who would be in the early years, will be at one of the hospitals.
- The school has around 200 pupils at any one time at Birmingham Children’s Hospital, smaller numbers at Heartlands Hospital and the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, and sometimes pupils at the Queen Elizabeth, and City Hospitals.
- The residential specialist centres, Larimar, Newbridge, Ardenleigh and Willows, each cater for pupils with a range of mental health needs.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or who are looked after in the hospitals and specialist centres, varies from one week to another.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the allocation and impact of the pupil premium and sports funding, the SEN information report, information about governors, equality objectives and the school’s complaints policy on its website. Some of this information does not comply because it is incomplete, or is out of date.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors spent time at the three main teaching centres, Northfield, Parkway and Dovedale; two of the hospitals, Woodlands and the Children’s Hospital; and three of the specialist centres, Ardenleigh, Newbridge and Larimar. At the different sites, inspectors visited lessons in classrooms and on hospital wards, talked to pupils about their work and experience of James Brindley, and looked at pupils’ work in books and folders. Inspectors looked at evidence about safeguarding and achievement for the sites they did not visit.
- Senior leaders joined inspectors on visits to lessons at each of the sites visited.
- Inspectors evaluated the school’s evidence about safeguarding. They talked to senior leaders and two groups of staff and to many other staff informally.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of written evidence, including policies, records of behaviour and attendance, safeguarding documents and the school’s analysis of achievement.
- Inspectors met with three members of the governing body.

Inspection team

Sue Morris-King, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Deb Jenkins	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Sarah Ashley	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Bray	Ofsted Inspector

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