

# Inspection of Powers Hall Academy

Spa Road, Witham, Essex CM8 1NA

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Inspection dates:

3–4 December 2019

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

In the past, the provision was outstanding. At the moment, behaviour is overly boisterous, and, in too many subjects, the quality of education is not as good as it should be. School leaders and trust leaders know the weaknesses and are in the process of addressing them. At this stage, their work has not had sufficient impact.

Out of lessons, pupils' behaviour is not good enough. Pupils talk of play fights 'going too far' and of graffiti in the toilets. Breaktime and lunchtime can be unruly, and staff do not manage inappropriate behaviour as well as they should. Nonetheless, bullying is rare, and pupils feel safe. Pupils are confident adults would normally deal with incidents of bullying well.

Some teachers have high expectations of pupils; others less so. This inconsistency is reflected in the way pupils work, behave and achieve. Pupils' behaviour and achievements are too variable across the school.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have recently introduced new plans for how pupils should be taught. These are embryonic and have not, at this stage, had the impact leaders intend. Pupils' understanding is not developed in sufficient depth across the curriculum. For example, pupils are taught geographical skills, but not given sufficient opportunities to use them. Consequently, they do not understand or remember enough about what they have been taught. In mathematics, leaders want pupils to really understand how to use mathematical concepts. However, teachers are at varying stages of using the leaders' new approach to achieving this. It is not embedded across the school and so is not working well.

Leaders' focus on writing in recent years has led this to be a strength of the school. Most pupils learn to read effectively. However, those pupils who find reading most difficult are not helped enough. The books they read are not well matched to their interests and abilities, and not enough time is spent helping them learn to read.

Leaders do not know enough about what pupils know and can do when they join the school. They do not know how pupils have been taught phonics before Year 3. Not enough is known about how well all pupils have achieved across the curriculum over time. The lack of information about pupils' starting points means that it is difficult for leaders to decide what would most benefit pupils next.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is developing, and leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the needs of some pupils. The impact of their work to support the pupils is evident. However, they do not make sure that the extra support needed by all pupils with SEND is in place. While they have firm plans to address this weakness, these have not been fully implemented.

Leaders ensure that there is a range of opportunities for pupils to learn about things beyond the academic curriculum. Pupils are taught about nutrition. They hear from visitors about different jobs, such as the emergency services. Some of this is done well. For instance, Year 6 pupils are enthusiastic about their work on plastic pollution. However, overall, the quality of the school's work to promote pupils' personal development is not high. Work to promote pupils' understanding of democracy and their social skills is not well developed.

The trust has now taken action. New leaders have been appointed, and new approaches to curriculum planning, teaching and managing behaviour have been implemented. Pupils, staff, and parents and carers are beginning to see the positive early impact of new leaders' work.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders keep an effective record of pre-employment checks on adults who work in the school. They ensure that staff have up-to-date safeguarding training, so that they understand how to keep pupils safe. Leaders maintain well-kept records of concerns about pupils' welfare. They follow concerns up appropriately, including by working with other agencies.

Pupils feel safe. They know they can pass concerns on to adults in the school, either directly, or through a 'worry box'. They know adults take bullying seriously, and pupils do not consider bullying to be a concern at this school.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply and practise what they have been taught. They do not develop an in-depth understanding of different subjects across the curriculum. Leaders should make sure that pupils apply the knowledge they are taught, so that they understand and remember it well.
- Leaders have too little understanding of what pupils learned prior to attending the school. They do not make sure the work they do builds logically on what pupils already know and can do. In reading, they do not make sure their approach to teaching phonics is well matched to how pupils have been taught phonics before. Leaders need to ensure that transition arrangements enable them to build effectively on pupils' prior learning and educational experiences.
- Leaders do not make sure specific strategies for some pupils with SEND are implemented. This means they do not know if, or how well, these strategies are used and so do not know if pupils are getting the help they need. Leaders should ensure that they have a systematic approach to checking how well teachers and other staff implement strategies to support pupils with SEND.

- Some staff do not manage pupils' behaviour well. Too many pupils behave in inappropriate ways in their free time. This means that behaviour out of lesson time is too often unruly. Leaders need to make sure that pupils know what standards of behaviour are acceptable and train staff how to manage this.
- The opportunities for pupils' personal development are not consistently strong. Some aspects, such as teaching pupils about democracy and about how to develop their social skills, are not of a high quality. Leaders should develop a strategic approach to promote all aspects of pupils' personal development.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139871
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10121497
<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	306
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Rowland Costin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Richard Benstock and Emma Johnstone (joint headteachers)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.powershall.co.uk/">www.powershall.co.uk/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school converted to academy status on 1 July 2013. It is part of the Connected Learning multi-academy trust. When its predecessor school was last inspected on 19–20 June 2012, it was judged to be outstanding. The predecessor school was Powers Hall Junior School.
- The school has enhanced provision for pupils with SEND. A few pupils attend this provision.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils of the school and their siblings aged five to seven years who attend Acorn Academy, an infant school sited next door.
- The school is governed by the board of trustees. The board has a chief executive officer (CEO) and a chief learning officer (CLO).
- The school is jointly run by two newly appointed heads of school.

## Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- We did deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, geography and science. We met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons and reviewed pupils' work in these subjects, as well as speaking with teachers and pupils.
- We spoke with the CEO and CLO of the trust and with trustees. We spoke with the joint headteachers and other leaders.
- We reviewed a range of documentation, including safeguarding records, behaviour records, attendance records and reports from trustees. We spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding arrangements and held a meeting to discuss the leadership of safeguarding.
- We spoke with parents as they arrived at the school in the morning and met with pupils from different year groups to discuss their views of the school. We spoke with staff about different aspects of provision.

### **Inspection team**

Andrew Hemmings, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tessa Holledge	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rachel Welch	Ofsted Inspector

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