

# Inspection of Birchwood Community High School

Brock Road, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 7PT

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Inspection dates: 10 and 11 December 2024

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The headteacher of this school is Emma Mills. This school is part of One Community 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), Gary Cunningham, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Louisa Reeves.

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

This school has a strong sense of community spirit. Pupils are warmly welcomed into the Birchwood family. This includes the high number of pupils who join at different times during the year. Pupils are confident to display their individuality in a place where difference is celebrated. They are happy and proud to attend this school.

Pupils benefit from strong, caring relationships with staff. The school prioritises pupils' well-being. Pupils learn strategies for keeping themselves healthy. There is a considerable emphasis on the importance of taking time to talk about emotions. This helps pupils to acknowledge how they are feeling and ask for support if it is needed.

The school is ambitious for pupils' achievement. In the main, pupils learn the curriculum successfully.

Pupils are keen to learn. They engage positively in lessons. Behaviour around the school is calm and pupils feel safe.

There is a myriad of opportunities for pupils to develop their interests. For example, pupils appreciate learning new skills such as sign language, debating and engineering. Furthermore, clubs that support pupils' well-being, such as Humankind, mindful maths and nature club are attended well and positively benefit pupils' mental health.

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

In the most challenging and tragic circumstances, the school's vision and strong moral purpose has not wavered. It has navigated a difficult path well. Leaders have been resolute in their mission to develop independent, responsible young adults who are well equipped to access a happy and healthy future. The attention that the school has given to well-being and mindfulness has successfully helped to support pupils suffering with trauma.

Trustees and members of the local governing committee are committed to the school. They have played a supportive role during difficult recent events. That said, they have also brought appropriate challenge, when needed. Staff are supported well by the school. For instance, changes to the way that staff give feedback to pupils has had a positive impact on their workload.

The published key stage 4 outcomes in 2023 and 2024 do not reflect the strengths in the school's curriculum. Nor do they show how well pupils are currently achieving. Nearly a quarter of the pupils who finished Year 11 in 2024 joined the school after Year 7. Many of these pupils started at the school in key stage 4. These pupils did not benefit fully from the school's curriculum offer. Furthermore, pupils in these year groups were particularly affected by the tragedies in the community.

In contrast, pupils currently in the school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are typically learning well. In the main, pupils produce high-

quality work that builds in complexity over time. Pupils can articulate their understanding clearly in different subjects. That said, there are some pupils whose attainment is hampered by poor attendance. The school has put measures in place to raise pupils' attendance rates such as expanding the attendance team, identifying specific barriers to attendance and working more closely with parents and carers. Although there has been some improvement in attendance rates, there is still some way to go, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum. This includes an appropriately adapted curriculum for pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND (specially resourced provision). In most subjects, the school has identified the key knowledge that pupils need to learn. However, in some subjects, where this is not the case, pupils do not build knowledge successfully over time. This limits how well pupils achieve in these subjects.

Teachers implement the school's chosen teaching strategies effectively. They design learning that helps pupils to connect new ideas with prior knowledge. Teachers are particularly adept at supporting pupils with SEND so that they achieve well. This is facilitated by high-quality staff training and early identification of pupils' needs. Assessment strategies are executed well to check for misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning. Despite this, at times, some pupils struggle to recall prior learning because it has not been clearly defined in the curriculum.

Most pupils are able to read well. Those who cannot receive effective support to help them to catch up with their peers.

The school's character development programme teaches pupils how to behave appropriately. In the main, pupils behave very well. Learning is rarely disrupted.

The school's PEAK programme is designed to afford pupils the knowledge and experiences that they need to be successful in modern Britain. For example, pupils learn about human rights and how people should be treated with dignity and respect. The school's comprehensive careers programme helps pupils to make well-informed decisions about their next steps. Vulnerable pupils benefit from additional support to help their post-16 choices.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- In a minority of subjects, the school has not defined clearly what pupils need to know and be able to do. This means that teachers, in these subjects, cannot emphasise this important knowledge in lessons or check sufficiently well that pupils have learned the

curriculum. As a result, some pupils struggle to remember learning over time. The school should ensure that, in all subjects, it identifies the essential knowledge that needs to be taught.

- Some pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, do not attend school frequently enough. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should. The school should strengthen its systems for improving rates of attendance for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

## Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139840
<b>Local authority</b>	Warrington
<b>Inspection number</b>	10294373
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	913
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Louisa Reeves
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Gary Cunningham
<b>Headteacher</b>	Emma Mills
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.birchwoodhigh.org">www.birchwoodhigh.org</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	10 and 11 October 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school joined One Community Trust in September 2023.
- The school opened a specially resourced provision in September 2024 for up to 16 pupils with autism. There are currently six pupils in the provision.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision for a very small number of pupils.
- 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.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and

management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other members of staff.
- An inspector met with the CEO, representatives of the trust and the vice-chair of the local governing committee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses shared through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils and staff.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including minutes from meetings of the local governing committee, the school's self-evaluation and development plan, and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

## Inspection team

Jenny Jones, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Gil Bourgade	Ofsted Inspector
Lynsey Gobin	Ofsted Inspector
David Woodhouse	Ofsted Inspector

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