

Park Hall Academy

Water Orton Road, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, West Midlands B36 9HF

Inspection dates

16–17 November 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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires Improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, has transformed the school in recent years. Pupils, parents and staff value his strong leadership.
- Leaders and governors know the school very well. They address weaknesses quickly and effectively. Consequently, teaching, outcomes, behaviour and attendance have all improved considerably in recent years.
- Subject leaders form a highly effective team. They are leading the improvement of teaching in their subjects very well. They are a key reason that the school continues to improve.
- Governors are very committed to the school. They provide highly effective support and strong challenge to school leaders in all key areas of school life.
- The key stage 3 curriculum has a strong and appropriate focus on improving pupils' basic skills. However, insufficient time is given for pupils to study music, and some do not have the opportunity to study a foreign language.
- Outcomes at the end of Year 11 have improved rapidly in recent years. Pupils make good progress in almost all subjects. Pupils' progress in mathematics has been slower, but current pupils are now doing well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to plan lessons that are well matched to pupils' abilities. Occasionally, activities do not stretch the most able pupils as much as they might.
- Teachers use assessment well. Consequently, pupils improve their work using their teachers' advice. Leaders use assessment information well to help pupils who begin to fall behind.
- Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan are well supported and make good progress. Support for other pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is of a more variable quality.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and at social times. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day. Pupils are typically polite and courteous.
- Pupils enjoy school and appreciate the care and support they receive from teachers and other adults. They feel safe in school. They take pride in their work and are keen to do well.
- Very effective leadership has seen the sixth form improve strongly since the previous inspection. Students' progress is good in most subjects and especially so on vocational courses.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the progress of the most able pupils by ensuring that teachers plan activities that encourage them to deepen their understanding as much as possible.
- Raise standards in mathematics by the end of Year 11 by ensuring that all teaching matches the high standard already evident in much of the department.
- Improve the impact of leadership by ensuring that:
 - provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, but do not have a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan, is of a high quality
 - all pupils in key stage 3 are able to study a foreign language and spend sufficient time studying music.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has improved rapidly in recent years because of the headteacher's strong and principled leadership. Senior leaders, members of the local governing body and the trust board have supported him very effectively. When the school was previously inspected, less than 60% of parents who responded to Parent View said that they would recommend the school to another parent. At this inspection, this figure exceeded 90%. A growing number of parents are choosing to send their children to the school and the school is now oversubscribed with parents naming it as their first choice.
- Senior leaders and governors know the school very well. They identify and address weaknesses swiftly and effectively. Consequently, teaching, outcomes, behaviour and attendance have all improved rapidly in recent years. Plans to address the school's few remaining weaknesses are clear, detailed and well focused. For example, plans to improve outcomes in mathematics, which remains a weaker area, are having considerable impact. Leadership, teaching and, consequently, current pupils' progress are now improving strongly in this subject.
- Heads of department provide consistently strong leadership of their subjects. Senior leaders have trained them well and now trust them to lead the improvement of teaching in their areas. Subject leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching. They provide subject-specific training for their teams and extra support for any members of staff who need it. Effective subject leadership is a key reason for the rapid improvement seen in many subjects.
- Senior and middle leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching across the school because they check on it regularly. Any weaknesses are addressed quickly through training and extra support. Teachers are set clear targets that focus well on improving teaching and pupils' progress. Teachers collaborate well with each other. They reflect on their practice and are keen to improve it. For example, to support pupils' mathematical development, teachers shared ideas on the use of Venn diagrams in several subjects, agreeing a common approach to developing this concept. Almost all staff who responded to their inspection questionnaire said that leaders use professional development well to encourage, challenge and support their improvement.
- Senior and middle leaders make good use of teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment. They regularly analyse assessment information to identify issues such as pupils or groups of pupils who are falling behind with their work. They then ensure that extra support is put in place that helps these pupils to catch up.
- Leaders make effective use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. These pupils benefit from good teaching and extra support when they need it. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils now make similar progress to other pupils in most subjects. In the few subjects where their progress is slower, it is improving quickly. Leaders also use pupil premium funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils can participate in all aspects of school life. For example, disadvantaged pupils who wish to learn a musical instrument do so at no cost.
- Leaders make good use of the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium. They

provide extra help for pupils who join the school with weak basic skills. Combined with the key stage 3 curriculum's strong focus on developing literacy and numeracy, this ensures that these pupils catch up quickly with their peers.

- The key stage 4 curriculum provides a good range of subjects that interest and enthuse pupils. Consequently, pupils achieve particularly well in option subjects. Vocational subjects are popular and many pupils choose to continue to study these areas when they move into the sixth form. The key stage 3 curriculum provides a strong focus on developing literacy and numeracy alongside a broadly appropriate range of other subjects. However, the key stage 3 curriculum has weaknesses. Although most pupils study a foreign language, too many do not. Leaders are currently planning to address this issue. Additionally, a limited amount of curriculum time is devoted to drama, dance and music. As a result of staff expertise, pupils spend much of this time studying drama and dance and too little time studying music.
- The school offers a variety of extra-curricular activities and uptake is strong. Several of these activities are in the area of performing arts and cater particularly well for pupils with an interest in the arts. A choir and the opportunity to learn a musical instrument also help to provide musical development for some pupils.
- Provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving, but still contains some inconsistencies. Plans and strategies to support pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan are appropriate and are shared with teachers who use them when planning lessons. These pupils are also well supported in class and at other times by teaching assistants. However, detail about the needs of other pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not always shared with teachers. Consequently, although teachers know who these pupils are, they do not always take their needs into account when planning activities. The great majority of such pupils still make good progress because they are taught well. However, a small number make slower progress than they could.

Governance of the school

- Members of the local governing body (LGB) have considerable expertise in several areas, including education and safeguarding. They understand published assessment data and they use this understanding very well when questioning leaders. All members are linked to aspects of school life and they visit the school regularly to find out first-hand how their linked areas are progressing. Additionally, leaders provide regular, high-quality reports about teaching, pupils' attainment, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Consequently, members of the LGB know the school well and hold leaders to account for the school's performance very effectively.
- The Arden Multi-Academy Trust (AMAT) board of directors scrutinises the work of the LGB and holds it to account. Additionally, it ensures that arrangements for managing leaders' and teachers' performance are well focused on improving teaching and raising standards of achievement. Financial management is strong, with regular checks that additional funding, including the pupil premium and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium, is having the desired impact.
- Together, AMAT and the LGB ensure that governance arrangements are highly effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A strong culture of safeguarding exists in the school. Members of staff have been well trained and so are alert to the signs that pupils might need help. They understand the school's systems well and readily pass on any concerns they might have. Leaders deal with concerns swiftly, involving outside agencies when appropriate. Child protection records are detailed, well organised and stored securely. Leaders and governors understand procedures to recruit staff safely. They use these well.
- Pupils appreciate the care and support they receive from adults in the school. They feel safe. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View and staff who responded to their inspection questionnaire said that pupils are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is now effective in all subjects. Teachers have strong subject knowledge which they use well when planning lessons and explaining concepts to pupils. Expectations are high and teachers ensure that time is used well. Pupils usually work hard and are keen to do well. Work in books is typically neat and well organised. Teachers use homework effectively to consolidate pupils' learning.
- Teachers use questions well to encourage pupils to think about their work and so deepen their understanding. Relationships are strong. Pupils trust their teachers and, consequently, they are happy to answer questions and to refine their responses when their teacher asks them to.
- Teachers' use of assessment is a strength of the school. They apply the school's feedback policy consistently and pupils value their teachers' advice because it helps them to improve their work. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are accurate, so they can tell when pupils are beginning to fall behind. They then provide extra support to help them catch up.
- Teachers' promotion of literacy and numeracy in many subjects is very effective. It has contributed strongly to rapidly improving outcomes. For example, pupils read regularly, and any who need extra help are provided with small-group support. Teachers insist that pupils give detailed responses to questions in class and have a common approach to encouraging accurate spelling and grammar. Similarly, teachers in several subjects use agreed methods when teaching mathematical concepts. Weekly 'numeracy ninja' lessons in Years 7 and 8 help to develop pupils' fluency in calculation skills.
- Teachers plan activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities. Lower-attaining pupils understand what they have to do and are able to attempt tasks with confidence. The most able pupils are usually challenged well and they make good progress as a result. Occasionally, activities do not challenge the most able pupils to think as deeply as they might. Consequently, although making good progress, some of these pupils progress a little more slowly than they could.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved recently and continues to do so. Historic weaknesses in teaching and leadership have been eliminated. The department is now

well led and fully staffed. Much strong teaching is now evident and pupils' progress is improving rapidly as a result. However, some variability remains in the quality of teaching and not all is of the same consistently high standard.

- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities benefit from the good teaching now evident across the school and most make good progress as a result. Teachers plan well for the needs of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan, who also receive effective support from teaching assistants. Teachers' planning for other pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not always of the same high quality.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are typically polite and courteous to each other and to adults. Most have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well. They are increasingly confident and articulate as they benefit from good teaching and a wide range of extra-curricular and leadership opportunities in school.
- Pupils value the many opportunities they have to share their views about the school. They believe that leaders are interested in their views and are prepared to act upon them. Pupils elect the members of the 'student leadership team' who then bring pupils' views to senior leaders each week. This team has led several projects in school about issues such as bullying and mental-health well-being. They have also taken assemblies in local primary schools and, in doing so, have successfully represented the school within the local community.
- Pupils feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed that this is the case. They told inspectors that bullying is very rare in school and that staff deal well with any that does occur. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online because they have been taught about the potential dangers that can arise when using the internet. They also understand the risks arising from people who hold extreme views. Through assemblies led by leaders and the police, they know how to protect themselves from such risks.
- An effective careers education programme that operates in all years helps pupils to make well-informed decisions about choices of subjects as they move into key stage 4 and the sixth form. It also prepares them well to make decisions about where to move on to when they leave the school at the end of either Year 11 or Year 13. In 2017, all pupils who left Year 11 and all students who left Year 13 moved on to education, employment or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils usually behave well in lessons. They listen attentively to their teachers and each other. They are keen to do well and they work hard. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour has improved and that inappropriate behaviour is now rare in lessons.

Inspectors' observations confirmed this to be the case.

- The school is calm and orderly throughout the school day. Pupils behave sensibly at breaktime and lunchtime. They move quickly from one lesson to the next with a minimum of encouragement from teachers.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is exemplary. Students dress smartly and have excellent attitudes to learning. They provide strong role models for younger pupils.
- Attendance has improved over recent years and is now similar to the national average for secondary schools. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains lower than that of others. However, leaders' efforts to encourage regular attendance are proving successful and this group's attendance is improving.
- The school's use of fixed-term exclusion, which has been higher than average, has fallen rapidly as behaviour has improved. Few pupils are now excluded more than once because they learn their lesson and do not repeat inappropriate behaviour. Leaders use permanent exclusion appropriately as a sanction of last resort. Improved behaviour means that they now use it rarely.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes at the end of Year 11 have improved considerably since the previous inspection. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2017 show that pupils made good progress in most subjects, including English, science, history, geography, business studies, drama and vocational options. Pupils' attainment has also improved, with more than half achieving grade 4 or higher in both English and mathematics.
- Current pupils are making good progress in almost all subjects, including English and mathematics, in both key stage 3 and key stage 4. This is the case for lower-attaining and higher-attaining pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved more quickly than that of other pupils. They now make very similar progress to other pupils across all subjects and years. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2017 show that these pupils are making better progress than other pupils nationally in many subjects, including English and vocational options.
- Most pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make similarly good progress as other pupils. Those who have a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan make strong progress. Other pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities benefit from good teaching and, therefore, most make good progress. Occasionally, the progress of some of these pupils is slower because teachers have not been fully aware of their needs.
- Pupils who join the school with weak basic skills catch up quickly. A whole-school focus on improving literacy is proving very effective. Improving literacy has contributed strongly to the rapidly improving outcomes in English. The school's strategy to improve pupils' numeracy started a little later than that for literacy, but is now proving highly effective. Although it has yet to show impact on GCSE outcomes, it is contributing strongly to current pupils' good progress in mathematics.
- Outcomes in mathematics have been weak in recent years, although 2017 saw a modest improvement. Strong leadership and better teaching have seen current pupils' progress improve rapidly in all years. For example, the school's assessment information

indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are already achieving higher standards than the previous cohort of pupils. Inspection evidence confirmed the rapidly improving standards in mathematics.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led. It has continued to improve strongly since the previous inspection as leaders have eliminated its previous weaknesses in retention, attendance and outcomes in a few subjects. Teachers' checks on teaching and attainment are regular and accurate. Teachers and leaders use this information well to support students who begin to fall behind with their studies. All requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes are fully in place.
- Students make good progress on almost all courses. Their progress in vocational subjects is particularly strong and better than that seen nationally. Outcomes in academic subjects have improved in the last two years and progress is now in line with, and sometimes a little better than, that seen nationally. The school meets the government's minimum standard thresholds.
- Teaching in the sixth form shares the strengths seen in the main school. Staff use their expert subject knowledge well to plan lessons that engage students and help them to develop a good understanding of the material they are studying. Occasionally, in common with the main school, activities do not allow the most able students to make as rapid progress as they might.
- The sixth form provides a very wide range of non-qualification activities that help to develop students' personal and employability skills. All students undertake work experience and several told inspectors how useful their placement had been in helping them plan for the future. Other opportunities include sporting clubs and performing arts productions. Several students mentor younger pupils and support those who need to improve their reading. All students are involved in charity fundraising activities. Leaders carefully track students' involvement in these activities so that they can encourage individuals to become involved if they have not done so.
- Students are well supported in planning for destinations when they leave the sixth form. Visits to universities and careers fairs, individual interviews and visiting speakers mean that students are well informed about their options, including higher education, apprenticeships and employment. Consequently, the proportion of students moving to education, employment or training when they leave the sixth form is higher than seen nationally. In 2017, all students who left the sixth form proceeded to one of these destinations.
- Safeguarding is effective in the sixth form. A well-planned and comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and economic education is taught through lessons, assemblies, form time and dedicated one-off sessions. Topics covered include sexual health and consent, alcohol and drugs and mental health. Consequently, students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Students enjoy being in the sixth form and it is growing in size. Attendance has improved to be similar to the main school and retention on courses is improving rapidly. Approximately one quarter of students who joined the sixth form in September

2015 did not complete their courses in June 2017. However, several of these left to commence apprenticeships that had not been available when joining the sixth form. For students currently in Year 13, the proportion failing to complete their courses is likely to fall considerably to around 10%.

- All students who join the sixth form without having secured GCSEs in English and mathematics at grade 4 or C or higher study these subjects and take GCSE examinations. Success rates are high in English. Success rates in mathematics, although higher than nationally, should be even higher. Students told inspectors that some teaching was not well planned last year. However, they said that teaching this year is much better and inspection evidence confirmed this to be the case.

School details

Unique reference number	135971
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10037165

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,212
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	166
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Celia O'Donovan
Headteacher	Damian Burgess
Telephone number	0121 748 0400
Website	www.parkhallschool.org.uk/
Email address	post@parkhall.org
Date of previous inspection	22–23 September 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than average.

- AMAT sponsors the school. Responsibility for most functions of governance, including

scrutiny of teaching, outcomes, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, is delegated to the school's LGB. The AMAT board of directors retains some responsibilities, including finance and personnel issues.

- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a small number from a range of other cultures. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The school has an average proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- A very small number of pupils study away from the school at EBN Castle Vale or Riverside Academy. No mention is made of these pupils in the main body of the report because to do so would risk identifying them.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with six groups of pupils and talked to many others about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors visited afternoon form times.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including information relating to governance, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and the school improvement partner.
- The lead inspector met with a group comprising directors of AMAT and members of the LGB, including its chair. He met separately with the chief executive officer of AMAT.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views by considering 47 responses to Parent View, including 32 free-text comments. The lead inspector spoke to one parent over the telephone.
- Inspectors took account of 58 responses received on Ofsted's staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Natasha Lloyd	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Godden	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Steed	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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