

Inspection of St Birinus School

Mereland Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 8AZ

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 February 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is William Manning. This school is part of the Ridgeway Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rachael Warwick, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ruth Elliot.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has successfully established a strong culture of 'care, courtesy and commitment' alongside high expectations. These are lived out by staff and pupils alike. For example, there is a friendly and welcoming atmosphere around the site. Pupils are respectful and courteous to others and well behaved in lessons and in social times. Sixth-form students are positive role models for younger pupils, who look up to them as a result.

The curriculum is broad and ambitious in all year groups. Pupils share the school's high aspirations for them. They are proud to show off their work, especially where they have had to grapple with more challenging problems or concepts. Consequently, all pupils achieve well in external examinations. Where the school has adapted the curriculum for individuals, including where it uses external providers, this is done very successfully.

Pupils enjoy school and participate widely in the rich extra-curricular and leadership opportunities on offer. They are proud of how kind and accepting of difference that the school is. Pupils trust staff to help them if necessary. They appreciate that staff know them well, are happy to see them every day and care for them.

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

In recent years, the school and the trust have successfully raised expectations for what every pupil can achieve both academically and personally. They are not complacent and are aiming even higher. Effective communication ensures that pupils, parents and carers and staff understand and share in this vision. The school's clear systems and well-designed training have empowered staff and equipped them in their work. Consequently, the design and the delivery of the curriculum are strong, and there are marked improvements in attendance and behaviour.

Each subject has logically ordered its curriculum to ensure that essential knowledge and skills build up securely across all key stages. Most teachers adapt the school's shared routines and teaching principles very effectively. They introduce new content clearly. They use skilful questioning to check pupils' understanding and address misconceptions before moving on. Consequently, from Year 7 onwards, most pupils apply their learning to increasingly complex tasks confidently and act on the helpful feedback they receive. Many disadvantaged pupils' written work typically shows that depth and accuracy are developing steadily over time. Furthermore, it is increasingly commonplace for all pupils to respond with more developed answers and reasoning. However, in some areas, the teaching principles are not yet fully embedded.

The school places a high priority on improving the achievement of all disadvantaged pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. Staff receive clear information and training on how to help these pupils. Consequently, pupils with SEND receive support that is well matched to their needs. They achieve well across the curriculum which is increasingly reflected in public examinations.

The school's thoughtfully designed reading strategy promotes reading for pleasure and ensures that pupils explore demanding texts across the curriculum. Staff successfully support pupils who are not yet fluent readers to catch up with their peers. Staff identify gaps in pupils' knowledge precisely and put in place targeted support to help pupils.

Pupils benefit from high-quality pastoral care based on staff's sophisticated understanding of their needs. Staff provide thoughtful support for pupils who find meeting the school's high expectations challenging. There is also sensitive and effective support for pupils' emotional resilience. The school draws on expertise from external agencies where appropriate. This work has tangible impact, including for disadvantaged pupils. For example, the rates of suspension are falling and a recent dip in attendance has been reversed. Pupils and parents value this care highly and work positively with the school.

Pupils are very well prepared for the future and life in modern Britain. The school's personal development programme is carefully designed. It is adapted for individuals where necessary. Pupils talk confidently and maturely about how to keep themselves safe, including online and in relationships, and the importance of respecting other people. Students in the sixth form routinely receive age-appropriate presentations on relevant themes. Opportunities to explore and discuss these in more depth can vary. The strong careers programme benefits from contributions from a wide range of partners from education and apprenticeships providers, and employers.

The trust provides the school with robust challenge and support, not least linked to safeguarding. Staff are very proud to work at the school. They feel valued and recognise that the school is doing what it can to help manage staff's workload. Parents are hugely supportive of the school. Many refer to their sons 'flourishing' and becoming 'the best man they can be'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is a small amount of variation in how effectively the school's teaching principles are implemented. This means that sometimes pupils do not systematically gain the depth of understanding and subject fluency they could, relative to their age and stage. The school should continue to embed its teaching principles, so that all pupils across the curriculum are routinely required to think deeply, explain their thinking and then apply it to increasingly complex tasks.

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

Unique reference number	138762
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10362400
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1059
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	153
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ruth Elliot
CEO of the trust	Rachael Warwick
Headteacher	William Manning
Website	www.st-birinus-school.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Ridgeway Education Trust.
- The school uses two registered and six unregistered alternative provisions.
- 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.
- The school shares its sixth form, known as Didcot Sixth Form, with the nearby Didcot Girls' School. Both schools are part of the Ridgeway Education Trust. In this inspection, inspectors took account only of the provision for the boys in the sixth form.

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 and other senior staff.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from board of trustees, the trust executive team and the local governing body.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in English, geography, mathematics, science and languages. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with several groups of pupils and also considered pupils' opinions expressed through the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes.
- 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' interest first.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and also considered the opinions expressed through Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views expressed through Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mary Davies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Nick Simmonds	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Serridge	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Fry	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Brake	Ofsted Inspector

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