

Birkdale High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	137297
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	385674
Inspection dates	12–13 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Sally Kenyon HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	926
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Jones
Headteacher	Gary Loveridge
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 37 lessons, taught by 37 teachers. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and students. Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised safeguarding records and carried out a work analysis. Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires completed by 20 staff, 100 students and 355 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively is the school tackling variations in progress between different groups of students and subjects?
- How effective are systems for behaviour management and what impact do they have on student outcomes?
- How effectively are leaders and managers at all levels demonstrating the capacity to secure improvements?

Information about the school

Birkdale High is of average size for a secondary school. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average, as is the percentage of students from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average and the percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is low. It is a specialist school for history, mathematics and computing. The school became an academy in August 2011. The school has training school status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Progress is inadequate and students do not achieve as well as they should. Students' performance in their best eight subjects at the end of Key Stage 4 has declined over the last three years. In many subjects other than English and mathematics, attainment is too low and progress too slow in relation to students' above average starting points on entry to the school. Teaching and the use of assessment are inadequate in securing consistently satisfactory progress. In the large majority of lessons observed by inspectors work was not pitched appropriately to meet students' different learning needs. The failure of senior leaders to improve teaching quality and tackle inappropriate behaviour has contributed to a far less favourable picture of provision and outcomes than at the time of the previous inspection.

Although there are examples of good practice, these are too infrequent. While opportunities for independent learning were observed in some lessons, they were ineffective in securing progress for all students because some students chose not to participate and set tasks were insufficiently challenging. Some good examples of marking were observed but the use of attainment levels and students' targets to plan learning appropriately are inconsistent.

Behaviour is inadequate. Inspectors observed some lessons where low-level disruption limited students' progress. In these lessons, staff failed to address inappropriate behaviour. Students reported that incidents of poor behaviour are not uncommon and that many lessons are disrupted in this way. Inspectors observed examples of good behaviour around the school, but while considerably less frequent, instances of unacceptable behaviour were also seen.

Senior leaders do not monitor and track the progress of different groups of students effectively enough. Opportunities are missed to decisively tackle underachievement by those at senior leader level. Systems for self-evaluation are ineffective and the school's judgements of its own performance are inaccurate. The governing body is

clearly committed to supporting the school. Since the school became an academy in August 2011, there have been changes in membership to the governing body, including the recruitment of five new members. While there are examples of the governing body challenging the school, governors are not involved sufficiently in self-evaluation and the monitoring of progress against the development plan; they do not effectively hold leaders and managers to account. School leaders have recently provided staff training on assessment, feedback to teachers makes insufficient reference to the impact of teaching on students' progress and does not give staff an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of their practice.

Attendance has improved in the last year and is high; persistent absence has reduced, which reverses a falling pattern of attendance since the previous inspection. Students make a good contribution to the school and wider community through extra-curricular opportunities, such as the jazz club and drama club. A recent Christmas fair was very well supported by over 500 parents and carers and members of the local community and raised over £1,000 for charity. Many students take on the role of prefect or act as mentors for those who are new to the school. Students generally adopt healthy lifestyles well and over 300 of them cycle to school every day, with most taking part in sporting activities during the day and after school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress in learning to that which is good for all groups of students by:
 - ensuring that suitably challenging targets are used consistently to plan learning opportunities
 - creating robust systems for tracking students' progress in order to identify underperformance early and introduce appropriate learning support.
- Improve the quality of teaching and use of assessment information so that they are consistently good by:
 - sharing good practice
 - establishing the effective use of assessment to support learning, including the use of targets and feedback through marking
 - creating more opportunities for effective independent learning
 - ensuring that students of all abilities receive suitable learning support and challenge so that they are able to make at least good progress.
- Plan and implement an effective system of self-evaluation by:
 - creating a cycle of monitoring, evaluation and review
 - ensuring that staff receive accurate and pertinent feedback from lesson observations which will highlight strengths and areas for improvement
 - involving the governing body directly in robust monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement plan.
- Improve behaviour to be at least satisfactory by:
 - ensuring that high expectations are consistently applied in lessons and around the school

- devise, monitor and consistently implement effective behaviour strategies to promote good learning and progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Published data on attainment in previous years appeared strong. However, the current attainment observed by inspectors in lessons, through the scrutiny of students' work and outcomes from GCSE examinations in 2011 shows a decline in attainment to broadly average in many subjects. The subjects where results were significantly above the national average in 2011 were mathematics and statistics.

While achievement in English is broadly as expected in lessons in relation to students' starting points, it is not good enough over time. The most recent GCSE examination results show that the more-able students significantly underachieve in subjects such as English literature, science, history and French. In the large majority of lessons observed by inspectors progress was too variable. The pace of learning was slow and low-level disruption left unchallenged. In some of these lessons, individuals or groups of students did not make satisfactory progress because teaching was not planned appropriately to challenge or support their learning needs. Students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities do not make enough progress due to variability in the quality of teaching and the support they receive.

Where students were observed making good progress this was because teachers used data about students' abilities and knowledge of their prior attainment to provide sufficient challenge and support. In these lessons, students showed an understanding of what they were expected to achieve and were engaged in their learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively in these better lessons, and in some, students were able to peer or self-assess their work. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, students were discovering and applying theorems. In lessons where students made good progress, work was clearly planned, teachers made specific reference to examination grade descriptors, and activities were suitably challenging for the more-able group.

The overwhelming majority of students who responded to the inspection questionnaire say that they feel safe in school, and they adopt healthy lifestyles well. Attendance is high. Effective support ensures that the overwhelming majority of students leave the school and continue into further education, employment or training although not all have developed their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT as well as they should. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students experience educational visits to a variety of places of worship and engage in enrichment days. The school offers many sports teams for all ability levels. In Year 11, students are offered the opportunity to visit Ghana.

Students' behaviour around the school is variable, for example, students were observed eating plates and tubs of food at lunchtime in the corridors and outside. Some throwing of food and rough behaviour was observed during breaks and

lunches. Some students have been repeatedly excluded for fighting. The number of behavioural incidents increased last year and there was one permanent exclusion. Although fixed-term exclusions for 2011 are broadly average this masks a picture of relatively high internal exclusions, referrals to other classrooms, the use of a 'remove room' and a learning unit that also takes students who have been excluded from lessons. When combined, the frequency of students being removed from lessons is of concern. A small number of incidents of very serious misbehaviour were reported to inspectors by parents and carers along with concerns from staff about how behavioural incidents are not followed up by senior leaders. As one parent commented, 'More should be done about the pupils who on a daily basis display unacceptable behaviour in all of their lessons thus unsettling their classes. Stricter measures need to be undertaken.'

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	4
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The large majority of teaching observed by inspectors was either satisfactory or inadequate. Too often, planning does not meet the needs of individuals or groups of students and therefore fails to inspire and engage them. However, some good teaching was seen, for example, in a Year 7 art lesson, students continued to work on a piece of pop art from a previous lesson. The teacher had marked each piece of work and given clear levels of attainment. This marking ensured students were informed about the strengths of their work and given areas to develop, which helped them to take ownership of their learning and to work independently for much of the lesson.

The curriculum is satisfactory. The school offers a range of courses based around GCSEs and supplemented by diplomas and vocational pathways in horticulture, ICT and science. The curriculum is appropriate for the students it serves but its effectiveness is dependent upon the quality of teaching. Cross-curricular literacy, numeracy and ICT are currently being developed with some variability. Some positive impact of the mathematics specialism include students' work with local primary schools to teach mathematics, take part in the junior sports leader award and to gain

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

the Duke of Edinburgh Award. A series of annual enrichment days allow students to explore issues such as tolerance. The specialist subjects have been used to drive improvements in teaching and learning, although the impact of this is limited.

Many aspects of care, guidance and support are strong, including procedures to promote high attendance and reduce persistent absence, but strategies to secure good behaviour are ineffective. Students receive appropriate advice and guidance for their next steps on leaving school and some parents and carers report very smooth transitions from primary school. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children enjoy school and most feel they are well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training. Students report positively about their work with mentors in the learning centre and feel that there are adults to whom they can turn to if they need to. School leaders can point to striking examples of effective pastoral support for individual students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. School leaders are reviewing the provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, with the help of an external consultant.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have not successfully driven improvements in recent years. The quality of education and outcomes have deteriorated since the previous inspection. A major, contributory shortcoming to this decline is the ineffective leadership and management of teaching and learning. Senior leaders do not have effective systems for monitoring, evaluation and review. Self-evaluation is incomplete, out-of-date and inaccurate. Interventions take place primarily at departmental level and opportunities are missed to take a strategic view in the monitoring and tracking of students' progress and against the priorities in the school development plan.

Nearly half of the staff who responded to the questionnaire expressed concerns that behaviour was not managed effectively and that the school was not well led and managed. Other staff raised concerns about their lack of involvement and that of the governing body in self-evaluation. They believe that the governing body does not have a full picture of what is going on in the school. Inspection findings endorse these views.

School leaders engage effectively with parents and carers through reports, review days and recently re-instated parents' evenings. Although school leaders have developed partnerships to promote students' learning and well-being, outcomes remain inadequate. Consequently, the school does not provide satisfactory value for money. The effectiveness with which school leaders promote equal opportunities and

discrimination is inadequate because leaders are not tackling the different rates of progress made by different groups.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. While some safety concerns were raised during the inspection, staff and students spoken to during the inspection felt that students were safe, as did the overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire.

The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. School leaders have planned a series of actions to strengthen community links, including engaging with more senior members of the local community and working with primary schools. However, evaluation of the impact of this work remains at departmental level and is patchy.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	4
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that the school keeps their children safe and that their children enjoy school. Most parents and carers feel that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Many positive comments were also received regarding how well the school has supports children and thanks were expressed to pastoral staff and form tutors for their work. Some parents and carers also praised the merit system and appreciated staff taking the time to phone them to praise their children.

However, a very small minority of parents and carers expressed serious concerns about behaviour and disappointment in the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. For example, concerns were raised over injuries sustained by students playing football at lunchtime and some very serious incidents that had occurred in school, some of which are ongoing. Inspectors observed behaviour in classrooms and around the school, held discussions with staff and students and scrutinised behaviour and other relevant records. These findings are presented in the report. Concerns were also raised about the progress that students were making and the setting and marking of homework. Inspectors followed up all of these matters and shared their serious concerns with the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birkdale High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 355 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 926 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	150	42	187	53	13	4	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	171	48	176	50	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	163	46	175	49	14	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	153	43	175	49	22	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	151	43	188	53	8	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	126	35	183	52	33	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	96	27	228	64	20	6	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	128	36	192	54	9	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	141	40	186	52	15	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	146	41	181	51	14	4	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	100	28	203	57	17	5	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	157	44	175	49	8	2	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	182	51	154	43	10	3	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Birkdale High School, Southport, PR8 3DT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school just prior to Christmas. Thank you also for the time you spent telling us about your school and explaining why you are so proud of it. Thank you for completing the questionnaires. We listened carefully to what you said and your contribution helped us reach our judgements.

We feel that many of you are polite and well mannered and care very much about your school. You make a positive contribution to your school and local community and make positive health choices, by the large numbers of you who cycle to school and take part in sporting activities, and you have high attendance. However, we have identified a number of important issues that need urgent improvement and for that reason, the school has been placed in special measures. To help your school improve quickly and ensure that the quality of your education improves, we have asked leaders to:

- improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that it is consistently good
- improve achievement for all students and ensure senior leaders monitor your progress more regularly and closely
- ensure that you are sufficiently supported and challenged in your learning
- plan and put into place systems for regularly checking attainment in school
- raise expectations for good behaviour in all lessons and around the school and devise and implement effective systems to manage poor behaviour.

We have asked the governing body to check that the school is carrying out these actions effectively and for it to become more involved in directly evaluating many aspects of school life. Inspectors will also visit again to check the progress being made by the school.

You can all continue to maintain your high attendance and ask for help when you do not understand the task you have been given or when the work is not challenging enough for you. You all can also play your part by behaving well in lessons and around the school.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector

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