



Birchfield Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103321
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276890
Inspection dates 28 February 2006 to 1 March 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Hodgkinson AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Trinity Road
School category	Community		Aston
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Birmingham, West Midlands B6 6AJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4645661
Number on roll	751	Fax number	0121 4645290
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Harriss
Date of previous inspection	4 February 2000	Headteacher	Ms M Foster-Brown

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large school serves areas of inner-city Birmingham containing some of the highest levels of social and economic deprivation in the country. Nearly all pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and most are from homes where English is not used as the first language. The population of some year groups shows a high degree of mobility because of the insecure or temporary housing arrangements of some families, including those of asylum seekers.

The school's collaborative work with other schools and community partners on education and social regeneration initiatives has won it much local and national recognition. Sessional care is offered for children aged 2-4 through the school's Pre-School Academy. A copy of the latest Pre-School Academy inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Birchfield is an outstanding school. Inspection evidence supports the school's view of its own effectiveness. The school's improvement has been driven forward at a rapid rate by the visionary leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by an outstanding team of leaders across the school. Together with the school staff, they share the view that the school can significantly improve the opportunities for young people and their families by offering them a comprehensive programme of high quality care, guidance and support. The school has worked exceptionally well with a very wide range of partners and community organisations in realising that vision.

Excellent systems for assessing and monitoring the progress of pupils ensure that staff recognise their needs very well. In lessons, there is plenty of support available from teachers and assistants to help pupils achieve their goals. Whilst a few lessons are less well managed than others, teaching is excellent overall. Pupils' enormous enthusiasm for learning is stimulated by a rich and varied curriculum. This is underpinned by a strong programme to develop their basic skills of literacy and numeracy. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress throughout the school, having got off to a flying start through the high quality of provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. Standards have risen at a rate far faster than the national trend since the last inspection. Attendance, too, has risen, although still too many parents take holidays during term time. The school is very well placed to make further improvement. It offers excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently very high across the school.
- Raise pupils' attendance still further, and continue to give a high priority to working with pupils and their families to raise their awareness of the importance of coming to school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is excellent. They make outstanding progress across all stages of their education. When children start in the Nursery, their basic skills in speaking and number are exceptionally low. Many speak only their heritage language and some feel bewildered by their surroundings. Despite this, they soon settle and make excellent progress in speaking, listening, number and social skills. In the Reception classes, children continue to achieve strongly. By the time they start Year 1, many meet the goals expected for their age.

Overall, standards of attainment are broadly in line with the national average. Standards in national tests by the end of Year 2 have been rising much faster than the national trend since the last inspection and in 2005 were above average overall. Such results reflect the excellent progress made by pupils, especially in their acquisition of language and literacy skills. Standards in national tests by the end of Year 6 have also been

rising much faster than the national trend, and were broadly average in all subjects in 2005. In both 2004 and 2005, pupils' progress between Year 2 and Year 6 was among the best in the country. The school's very well planned curriculum ensures that pupils make excellent progress across a broad range of subjects between Years 2 and 6.

The school closely monitors differences in attainment between ethnic groups and between boys and girls. Action is taken to address any concerns and this ensures that all groups, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make equally good progress. Targets for the school's results in national tests are very challenging and not always met, but reflect the high aspirations the school has for its pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding in all years. Pupils treat each other with respect and relationships with one another are good. The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is exemplary. In assemblies, lessons and circle time, pupils reflect on moral issues, and show a keen understanding of different faiths and cultures. These are reflected in the outstanding quality of displays around the school.

Parents and children say that pupils very much enjoy coming to school. The level of attendance is broadly average and has significantly improved, although still too many parents take children on holiday in term time. Pupils' good behaviour, politeness, and their obvious care and concern for others indicate very good social development. Exclusion for poor behaviour is exceptionally rare, and reflects the high quality of care and support available to pupils.

A range of initiatives encourages pupils to become highly aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Wholesome food is selected by pupils who are rewarded through the 'House System' for choosing the healthiest options. A large number of pupils choose to participate in the many additional sporting activities the school offers. Road safety campaigns and first aid courses, accredited through St John Ambulance, support pupils' strong awareness of safety. The school is particularly good at helping pupils to develop confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' literacy, numeracy and computer skills develop exceptionally well to support them in later life. Their leadership skills and sense of social responsibility are further developed through taking responsibilities such as school councillors, prefects and peer mediators. Very positive contributions are made to the wider community through, for example, raising money for UNICEF.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning, throughout the school, are outstanding. Pupils learn particularly well because teachers are challenging but supportive. They have very high expectations, plan well to take account of every child's needs and make sure that lessons move on

at a brisk pace. Years 1 and 2 staff place considerable emphasis on developing pupils' facility with language. This is the basis of later success. The very effective support staff (working in heritage languages when appropriate), language assistants and specialist teachers are all focused well on individual needs, and contribute significantly to pupils' outstanding progress. The marking of pupils' work is very thorough and consistent. Most lessons are good and many are outstanding. However, a high recent turnover of staff and variable teaching experience across a large teaching team means that in a small number of lessons, activities are not as challenging as they could be and there are some shortcomings in the teacher's management of both pupils and time. Where this occurs, learning is not as good, and classes occasionally become too noisy. School managers regularly check on standards of teaching, learning and pupils' attainment to provide additional support where necessary and ensure that pupils continue to make strong progress. In most cases, there is an excellent working atmosphere. Classrooms are very stimulating, making very effective use of visual materials to catch pupils' interest. Pupils use computers well for a range of tasks.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is tightly matched to the needs of the pupils, provides a very broad range of opportunities and experience and is constantly reviewed and adapted. For example, recent enhancement of resources, together with specialist teaching, has significantly extended pupils' learning in information and communication technology (ICT). Basic skills are strongly promoted, and literacy, mathematics and ICT are used very well in other subjects. The school makes flexible use of heritage languages when supporting individual pupils. It also enables pupils to experience other European languages through access to specialist language teaching. Planning for the stimulating and well balanced Foundation Stage curriculum is exceptionally thorough and rigorous.

The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent extra-curricular programme, including a wide range of sporting activities. The school is increasingly successful in competitive sports. A very good programme of outside visits and of visitors to school contributes well to pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for the pupils is outstanding. It is rooted in the school's aims, and manifested in a community which is sensitive to the needs of others. Rigorous attention is given to pupils' health and safety. Child protection procedures are secure. The school works sensitively with families to promote better attitudes towards attendance. Vulnerable pupils, including those recently arrived in the school from other countries and those who have learning difficulties and disabilities, are identified quickly and supported carefully, enabling them to gain confidence and make good progress in their learning.

Pupils are given very clear individual targets for achievement which are well matched to their capabilities. Pupils have an excellent understanding of these targets, and work hard to achieve them. Progress against these targets is very closely monitored by teachers and support is quickly deployed where necessary. The assessment of what children can do in the Nursery and Reception classes is a major strength and helps to promote their self-esteem. They are challenged to ask themselves 'what have I learned today?' and to be aware of their personal targets. This is a school in which all staff know every pupil very well, genuinely care, and help each child to fulfil his or her true potential.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school benefits from excellent leadership by the headteacher, who believes passionately that all pupils, whatever their circumstances, can achieve success. The senior leadership team is very strong and cohesive. The very good leadership qualities among key staff throughout the school have been central to securing all-round improvements in quality and standards since the last inspection. Highly effective leadership of the nursery and reception years is very focused on giving children the best possible start to their school lives.

The school's extensive work with its partners in the local community has helped it to secure much additional expertise and many additional resources. Its work with pupils' families is outstanding and has significantly broken down barriers faced by parents in contributing to the learning of their children. The school draws well on its links with parents and partners to find out how well it is performing and to plan for improvement. Its accurate self-evaluation is further secured by its own very close monitoring of teaching, learning, and the performance of pupils and staff.

There have been a number of internal disputes on the governing body which have led to long meetings and which have affected its ability to run smoothly and efficiently. However, the leadership of the governing body has been resolute in ensuring that the quality of education of the pupils gets its top priority. Governors have supported the school well in securing an outstanding rate of improvement and ensuring very good financial management and controls.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Thank you very much for your warm welcome when we visited your school for the recent inspection. All the pupils we spoke to were able to tell us very clearly what they thought of the school and how well they were learning. The school clearly helps you to be very confident in discussing such important matters.

You and your parents let us know that you think the school is a very good one. We think it is exceptionally good. The progress that pupils make at Birchfield is amongst the best in the country. You develop so many skills that are important for your later life, and learn to keep healthy and stay fit by taking part in lots of activities.

The school benefits a great deal from the inspirational leadership of its headteacher. She makes sure that you get excellent teaching and support from the staff in the school. The school works very hard to make a real difference to the quality of life in your community.

Although the school is already outstanding, we have suggested that, to get even better, it needs to:

- try to make sure that all classes get the very best teaching, and
- improve pupils' attendance further by continuing to stress to you and your families the importance of always being at school and not taking holidays in term time.

Once again, many thanks for your help during the inspection. Good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson Lead Inspector