

# The Birches School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105613
<b>Local Authority</b>	Manchester
<b>Inspection number</b>	308894
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Arif Hussain

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	114
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Sharon Byrne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Andy Pitts
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 October 2004
<b>School address</b>	Newholme Road West Didsbury Manchester Lancashire M20 2XZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 4488895
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 4454970

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school provides primary education for pupils who have severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A significant proportion of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties, and there is also a significant proportion with autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. Because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities the standards reached by pupils on entry are well below those expected nationally. A very small number of children start their education in the Foundation Stage. English is an additional language for 44% of the pupils and 50% are eligible for free school meals. The school has gained the Sports Active Mark, National Healthy Schools, Eco-Schools (Bronze) and Investors in People awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

The Birches provides a good standard of education in almost all areas. Pupils' achievement is good and their personal development is outstanding. Parents praise the school highly and pupils say they love going to school because lessons are fun. In the words of one pupil: 'it's brilliant'.

However, the school's overall effectiveness is inadequate because the procedures for safeguarding pupils do not meet in full the current government requirements. As a result, in accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to ensuring that all the legally required checks are carried out for adults who work in the school. Significant improvement is also required in relation to some health and safety procedures, in particular, assessing and managing risks to pupils.

From standards on entry that are well below average, pupils achieve well at each key stage because the quality of teaching and learning is good. Work in lessons is presented in a stimulating way so that pupils' interest is sustained and they are engaged in their learning. A strong emphasis on the development of communication skills is effective in raising pupils' self-confidence. Although teachers plan what they expect classes to learn generally, very few teachers plan and record what individuals are expected to learn in each lesson. This was an area for improvement at the last inspection.

Pupils' attitudes towards learning and behaviour are excellent because adults motivate pupils especially well in lessons. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils empathise with others particularly well. The school is a harmonious community because pupils value the rich diversity of the racial groups and cultures around them.

The curriculum is good because it provides well for pupils' interests and needs. The generally good opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and computer skills help pupils to prepare well for the future. There are several strong aspects of the school's provision for care, guidance and support. However, overall, this area of the school's work is inadequate because of the failure of the school to comply fully with the statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding checks and to ensure necessary risk management procedures are in place.

The Notice to Improve that has been issued to the school should not diminish the many good features of leadership and management, including the strong contribution of managers at all levels and governors. The new headteacher has been in post since the start of the school year and has developed good systems to measure pupils' achievement. Senior staff know the strengths of their school in most areas, and have combined effectively as a senior leadership team to establish an orderly school. The school has successfully addressed two of the three areas for improvement from the previous inspection and pupils' personal development has improved from good to outstanding. Given pupils' good achievement and the many positive features in supporting and promoting their personal development, the capacity to improve further is satisfactory, as is the value for money provided. Nevertheless, leaders and managers at all levels have not made certain that statutory requirements to ensure the health and safety of all pupils are up to date and rigorously enforced. Consequently, leadership and management are judged inadequate overall.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

The impact of strong leadership can be seen in the good progress children make across the areas of learning. Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills much lower than typical of children of this age, especially in language development and in their readiness for learning. Despite these barriers, children make good progress by the time they leave Reception, especially in their attitudes towards learning and communication skills. The adults' encouraging approach ensures that the children are unafraid to try new things. Teaching is good and the stimulating curriculum provides numerous practical activities for the children to enjoy.

### What the school should do to improve further

- \* Ensure that all safeguarding checks for all adults who are working in school comply fully with the statutory requirements
- \* Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels act to eliminate risks to health and safety
- \* Ensure that teachers' daily planning and recording identifies clearly what individual pupils are expected to learn in the lesson.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

All pupils make equally good progress, regardless of their learning difficulties or ethnicity. Challenging targets have been met across the school. For instance, those with the most complex difficulties move forward in very small steps and their achievement is good. Communication and language development is a strong focus in all aspects of learning and so pupils make good progress in this area throughout their time in school. The spoken word is often accompanied by signing or the use of symbols, pictures and aids that enable pupils to understand, and be understood. Every opportunity is taken to promote a love of books and this has resulted in good progress in reading. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool is introduced to pupils from an early age so that they grow up with a good awareness of computers and digital cameras as a means of communicating and recording their learning.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding personal development makes an excellent contribution to their learning. Parents and carers are particularly pleased about this aspect of the school's work. Pupils are thoughtful in discussion. They deal with moral issues such as fair treatment in a mature manner and aspire to the highest standards of respect and courtesy towards others. Pupils enjoy school life to the full and attendance is good. Pupils have developed exceptionally positive attitudes towards diversity. This promotes good race relations and community cohesion very effectively. Pupils say that bullying is not a problem and they are confident that adults are caring and supportive if they have any worries. Pupils all enjoy taking whatever form of exercise they are able to, and they make sensible choices about what they eat. The school council makes an excellent contribution to the community. For instance, applicants for senior management posts must give a presentation to the council and pupils' views are an integral part of the selection process.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Strengths in teaching include the good teaching of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, stimulating methods which engage pupils effectively and the promotion of teamwork to solve problems. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the success of lessons through providing skilful support. An outstanding science lesson was seen during the inspection where these features of teaching and learning led to pupils making outstanding progress. Pupils with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties could hardly wait to see if their predictions about habitats were correct as they searched the outdoor nature areas. Individual education plans are used well by teachers to ensure that pupils achieve, or come very close to achieving, their targets for the term. However, teachers do not plan and record what individual pupils are expected to learn in each lesson. This means pupils are not consistently challenged to progress as rapidly as they could; it was an area for improvement at the last inspection.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a wide variety of enjoyable learning opportunities that successfully appeal to pupils' interests. Personal, social and health education is excellent and is part of almost all areas of the curriculum. The good provision to develop communication skills is effective for all pupils, including those who have little or no oral language. Numeracy skills are satisfactorily developed in lessons through role plays involving real life situations such as buying and selling in a shop. There is a good range of sporting activities which make a significant contribution to health and well-being. School trips to places of interest help pupils to develop their understanding of their own and other cultural heritages. The school acknowledges that there is scope to improve further the curriculum for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties by providing more multi-sensory experiences.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 4

Although the school has some satisfactory and good provisions in these areas, the overall quality of care, guidance and support is inadequate because the school does not comply fully with all legal requirements for safeguarding and for ensuring pupils' health and safety. At the time of the inspection, the required records of checks on adults working in the school were incomplete. Similarly, procedures to minimise risk were not followed in full when pupils used the swimming/hydrotherapy pool.

The school's support for pupils with English as an additional language is well organised and effective. This ensures that these pupils achieve as well as anyone else. All the pupils respond very well to the constant praise and reward they receive for good behaviour and achievement. Welfare links with outside agencies are satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 4

In several respects, leadership and management are good. Senior managers and governors have a well informed view of the school's performance. Self-evaluation is satisfactory overall, and the school sets both challenging and realistic targets for its pupils. The headteacher has reviewed closely each pupils' progress. However, leadership and management are inadequate overall because of the failure to ensure that all statutory requirements are met in full. The headteacher was prompt to take action when safeguarding issues were raised during the inspection. Leaders and managers at all levels are committed to addressing these issues as quickly as possible.

The school has developed good inclusion links with mainstream schools and many pupils benefit from the valuable integration opportunities. There are good arrangements to evaluate teaching and improve it where necessary.. Governors provide a good level of challenge and support to the school regarding educational matters. However, they have relied too much on senior leaders and managers to ensure that legal requirements are met. Resources are used satisfactorily to support pupils' learning but inconsistency in the deployment of staff to ensure pupils' health and safety means that overall this aspect is inadequate.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of The Birches School, Manchester, M20 2XZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you and you were all very helpful. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out about your school.

You told us how much you love going to school. This is because teachers and other adults make lessons fun and provide lots of enjoyable things for you to do. You know what you need to do in order to be healthy and safe. Your behaviour is excellent and you are extremely good citizens. We were very impressed with the work of the school council and the way they help everyone. Well done!

The headteacher, staff and governors all work hard to make sure you all keep learning quickly. Although there are many good things about the school, we have asked your staff and governors to sort a few things out.

Firstly, all the adults who work with you must have checks carried out on them to make sure they are suitable to work with children. We have given the school a 'Notice to Improve' because this is so important. This means that other inspectors will come to the school in about six to eight months to check if things have improved.

Secondly, arrangements to make sure that you all stay healthy and safe, especially in the swimming/hydrotherapy pool, are not always good enough.

Thirdly, although teaching is good, inspectors want to see it get even better and so we have asked teachers to make sure each of you has your own learning targets in each lesson.