

Lincoln Birchwood Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120508
Local Authority	LINCOLNSHIRE LA
Inspection number	313643
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Marina Gough

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	288
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Allnutt
Headteacher	Mrs Tracey Bowman
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003
School address	Larchwood Crescent Lincoln Lincolnshire LN6 0NL
Telephone number	01522 800971
Fax number	01522800973

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated on the outskirts of the city of Lincoln in a large housing estate. The area is one of high social disadvantage and take up of free school meals is well above the national average. A very high percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and a high proportion have statements of special educational need. Pupils' attainment when they join school is typically below the national average. Mostly pupils are of White British ethnicity and only a small number have English as an additional language. Two pupils are from Eastern Europe and are at an early stage of learning English. A new headteacher started at the beginning of this term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that has the potential to do better under the leadership of the new headteacher. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory, but significant staff changes have delayed the implementation of some improvements. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Standards are below the national average in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. The pupils' starting point when they join in Year 3 is below the national average. Although pupils make satisfactory progress overall, they do not make the expected gains in learning in Year 3. The school is not yet doing enough to make the transition from infants to juniors smoother for all pupils so that they can have a positive start to their education. The school has made a good start in addressing this problem by initiating a new nurture group which is due to start in the very near future. However, there is still not enough being done to support Year 3 pupils academically.

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory overall. Pupils often behave well in lessons, especially when they are highly motivated about their learning. However, a number of pupils lack self-discipline and demonstrate inappropriate behaviour if they are not well managed. Pupils know how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and how to keep safe. However, because their basic skills of literacy and numeracy are weak they are not sufficiently well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Teaching is satisfactory and has some good and outstanding features. Teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and to capture the pupils' attention. They use interactive whiteboards well to bring learning to life and in the main manage pupils' behaviour very well. There are times, however, when staff do not always match work sufficiently closely to the needs of some individuals.

The school has done much to enliven the curriculum for pupils, and now provides a good range of visits for pupils to extend their learning and experience. The long morning sessions are not used to best effect. Some of the lessons in the morning are too long for those pupils who lack motivation and who have poor levels of concentration. The school provides satisfactory levels of care, support and guidance for pupils of all ages. One of its strengths is the way in which it supports vulnerable pupils pastorally, working hard to remove barriers to learning. The provision for pupils who have learning difficulties is good, and those pupils from Eastern European backgrounds make similar progress to other pupils.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and as a result the overall capacity to improve is satisfactory. The new headteacher has only been in post for four weeks, but together with the senior leadership team, is already setting a clear agenda for improvement that is appropriately focused on raising standards. Although the school knows itself well in many ways, the lack of a comprehensive rigorous tracking system means that it is not able to set accurate, challenging targets to bring about an improvement in standards. This aspect of the school's work is inadequate.

Almost half of the staff are newly qualified teachers, and whilst they bring a wealth of talent and creativity to the school they lack experience and can provide only limited support for leadership. The school lacks a middle tier of management, however, the governing body is supportive and capably fulfils its statutory duties.

What the school should do to improve further

- Introduce a rigorous tracking system so that accurate and challenging targets can be set.
- Ensure that the transition for Year 3 pupils is improved so that their progress is accelerated, and standards are raised.
- Make more imaginative use of the morning teaching sessions.
- Introduce a tier of middle management to strengthen the leadership of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards when pupils start school in Year 3 are below the national average. During their first year, the Year 3 pupils lose some ground. Pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 make satisfactory progress. By the time they leave school at the end of Year 6 standards are still below the national average although achievement is satisfactory. The school has made a good start in raising standards and has identified the key groups of pupils who are not doing as well as they should in individual subjects. Booster groups are supporting pupils who have more ground to make up than others. Pupils with special needs are well supported so that they make similar progress to their classmates. The progress of Eastern European pupils is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong and have an understanding of a range of faiths and cultures gained through activities such as 'diversity day'. They have a good awareness of the need to eat healthily and take regular exercise. Attendance is satisfactory and the school is working hard to improve it further. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and pupils are developing an awareness of the needs of each other through activities such as Circle Time. Behaviour is at its best in lessons where pupils are highly motivated and where teachers set clear boundaries. A small number of pupils lack self-discipline and can quickly become frustrated. Pupils feel safe and report that any instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly. Pupils enjoy having jobs around school and older pupils especially show good skills when working as a team member. Although pupils' basic skills of numeracy and literacy are weak, given their satisfactory progress and their positive attitudes they are soundly prepared for the next stage of their learning. The school council meets regularly and is justifiably proud of its contribution to the school community through the development of new playground facilities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

During the inspection some good teaching was seen which was characterised by high expectations, a real sense of purpose and very positive management of those pupils who have difficulty in managing their behaviour. Teachers make good use of questions to extend the pupils' learning and to check their understanding. Interactive whiteboards are used to very good effect to bring learning to life. Pupils respond well to the imaginative and visual way of presenting information that these facilitate. A weakness of teaching is that there is not enough reliable assessment information for teachers to use as a basis for their planning. This means

that there are times when work is not always matched sufficiently close enough to pupils' levels of ability. Some of the teaching seen during the inspection was exceptionally creative and pupils responded extremely well to the highly stimulating tasks they were given. The good monitoring of teaching by the headteacher and senior leadership team, and the appointment of some lively and enthusiastic newly qualified teachers, have done much to improve teaching and learning over recent months.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has effectively broadened pupils' horizons by providing a good range of trips and visitors to the school. Pupils are offered a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities although they say that they would like more. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good, and the social and emotional aspects of learning programme is having a positive impact on learning and behaviour. The recent focus on raising standards in English and mathematics has resulted in the school devoting most morning sessions to these two subjects. Given the short attention spans of some of the pupils, these long lessons are too demanding. The school has recognised that this optimum learning time could be used more imaginatively to maximise its full potential.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

One of the school's strengths is the way in which it has reached out into the local and wider communities to bring in external professional support for some of the most vulnerable pupils. There are good child protection procedures in place, and appropriate steps are taken to safeguard the pupils and to ensure their well-being. Pupils' progress is slow in Year 3. This is largely because they are very unsettled when they join the junior school having come from two smaller infant schools into a new and very different setting. The current arrangement whereby they are in mixed age classes with Year 4 pupils makes it even more difficult for the most needy pupils to settle in quickly to the new routines. The school has introduced individual and group targets to help pupils to improve aspects of their work, although this process is still being embedded. Pupils do not yet have enough information and understanding about the long-term goals that they are working towards and the means by which they can achieve them. This is why care and guidance is satisfactory overall.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although the headteacher has only recently taken up post she has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The senior leadership team works well together and there is a good sense of team work amongst the staff and a shared desire to take the school forward.

The school is at a critical time in its development. Many good strategies are in place to bring about further improvements in the school. However, the lack of accurate and detailed information about pupils' progress and attainment as they move through the school is a weakness that constrains the school's ability to set challenging and accurate targets. Overall the school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

Over the last few months there has been a high staff turnover and almost half of the teaching staff is newly qualified. This means that there is currently no opportunity to share out leadership roles for subjects and aspects within the school, the bulk of the leadership resting with the senior team. This places a heavy workload on a few people. The school is aware of the need to devolve some of the responsibilities as soon as the new staff have the necessary experience. Governors are supportive and are regular visitors to the school. They diligently fulfil their statutory duties.

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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?	3
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
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	3
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	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lincoln Birchwood Junior School, Lincoln, LN6 0NL

Thank you for making our visit to your school so enjoyable. We were pleased to see how well most of you get on with one another, and that you enjoy your lessons.

Most of you make satisfactory progress in Birchwood, but even so when you leave school at the end of Year 6 the standards you reach in English, mathematics and science are not high enough. One of the reasons for this is that in Year 3, pupils sometimes find learning difficult because they take a long time to settle into their new school. These pupils sometimes do not get off to a good enough start and we have asked the school to see if they can do something about this. We can see that your teachers are now giving you targets but we would like them to keep good records of your progress so they know exactly how well you are doing as you move through the school.

Your teachers work hard to make lessons interesting for you, and we can see how much you like the interactive whiteboards. However, some of the mathematics and English lessons are very long and so we have asked teachers to look at ways of making the morning sessions more interesting for you. We were pleased to hear that you now go on a good number of trips to places of interest, and you told us how much you enjoy visitors coming to the school to help you with your learning.

Many of your teachers are new not only to your school but to the job of teaching. Whilst this is good in many ways, they are not yet allowed to take on extra responsibilities. This means that the headteacher and other staff who have been teaching for a little while do most of the extra work. We are keen that the new staff take on some additional roles as soon as is possible so that the work of running the school can be shared more evenly.

Your new headteacher and governors have a good idea of what they need to do to make Birchwood an even better school, and to help you to succeed.

Marina Gough

Lead inspector