

Birchfield Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103321
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323796
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	667
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joe Cahill
Headteacher	Moira Foster-Brown
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Trinity Road Aston Birmingham B6 6AJ
Telephone number	01214 645661
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Birchfield is much larger than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much greater than average. The very large majority of pupils are of Asian heritage. Nearly half are of Pakistani origin and most of the remainder are almost equally divided between Indian and Bangladeshi backgrounds. There is Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in a full-time 60-place Nursery and three Reception classes. The school plays a major role in the management of the Pre-School Academy, which is run on the school site. The school is also a centre for family and adult learning. There have been considerable staffing problems in recent years, with a number of long-term staff absences and difficulties in appointing staff to senior positions.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Birchfield Community School is providing a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has been through some difficult times in recent years with staff absence and problems in appointing staff to senior positions. Standards consequently fell and pupils' achievement declined until it was inadequate. However, the corner has been turned, as all senior management positions are filled, the quality of teaching has improved, pupils' progress has accelerated and achievement is now satisfactory, though standards are still somewhat below average.

There are some considerable strengths to the school's provision. One of the most important of these is the way in which the school works with families and the local community to promote cohesion. The school is a harmonious community and is held in high regard by all sections of the local community. This is reflected in the very positive tone in the high number of responses to the inspection parents' questionnaire and comments such as, 'The school caters well for children from all backgrounds.' This also demonstrates the very good links the school has, particularly with parents and the local community. Family learning sessions are popular and well attended.

Children make a good start in the EYFS as provision for them is good. Strong links with the Pre-School Academy ensure that children who have had this pre-school experience settle quickly. Provision for the welfare of children in the EYFS is good and this good pastoral care continues through the school. Pupils say they feel very safe and are confident that adults take their concerns seriously. The good pastoral care is resulting in pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils behave well, take responsibilities they are given sensibly and have a keen awareness of social issues. This leads to significant sums being raised for those in need. Academic support and guidance has some limitations. Although targets are set, these are not used consistently to help pupils improve their work. For instance, pupils are not always aware of their targets and teachers do not often use these targets when marking pupils' work.

Pupils' accelerated progress is due to improving teaching. Inadequate teaching has almost been eliminated and the proportion of good teaching is rising, though there are inconsistencies in practice between classes. For instance, not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. In some classes, the objectives for what the pupils are expected to learn, and the criteria by which the success of this learning can be measured, are insufficiently clear.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is satisfactory. Although they enjoy the wide range of extra activities and events, they find their lessons less appealing. They commented that they 'would like to do other subjects, not just English, maths and religious education'. They also felt that opportunities are missed for them to be actively involved in events and sometimes in lessons. Although all subjects are taught, coverage for some subjects, such as geography, history and design and technology, is limited in depth.

The progress that is being made is due to the hard work of the headteacher and the relatively new leadership team, who have a clear picture of what needs to be done to maintain progress. Their combined efforts are having a significant impact on the performance of the school. Because of its good recent progress, the school is well placed to continue on the upward path.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children respond well to their learning environment, which provides a variety of stimulating learning activities. There is a good balance between activities led by an adult and those children choose for themselves. However, although the outside area is used well for learning in the Nursery, children in the Reception classes do not have these same opportunities as they have no accessible outdoor space. Good provision for learning and development results in children making good progress and achieving well. Children in the Nursery enjoy making pizzas, for instance, naming, smelling, feeling and describing the ingredients. In the Reception classes, most children know their letter sounds and are beginning to develop calculation skills. There are occasions when adults miss opportunities to develop key skills and language, particularly in the Reception classes. This hinders the promotion of speaking and listening and writing skills.

Children are cared for well in a safe environment and adults are good role models and use praise well to encourage and motivate children. This results in children's good personal, social and emotional development. Children behave well and feel secure because of good relationships with adults. Opportunities are sometimes missed for children to be more independent, for example in making choices and being allowed to collect their own food.

The EYFS is led and managed well and there are clear systems in place to continue improvement. There are good assessment procedures, but the accuracy of assessments is not consistent between all classes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teachers' expectations and improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is raised.
- Raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress by using learning targets more consistently to help pupils to improve their work, and improve the effectiveness of teachers' use of these targets in their marking.
- Ensure that the necessary focus on raising standards in the key skills of literacy and numeracy does not result in a narrowing of curriculum opportunities, so that pupils are also able to develop better skills and knowledge in other subjects.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children start in the Nursery with levels of skills and knowledge that are below those expected for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and have almost reached average standards by the end of their time in Reception. In the recent past, pupils did not make adequate progress through the rest of the school and fell behind. The improvements in teaching have quickened progress, but this is still no better than satisfactory during their time in the school because pupils have had to catch up lost ground. Standards are still below average but the improved rate of learning means that achievement is now satisfactory. The school has rightly identified that raising standards in writing is a particular area for development

and this is being addressed effectively. Pupils at an early stage of learning English are supported well and make the same progress as their classmates. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have satisfactory plans made for their learning and so make sound progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are developing well into responsible young people. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their sense of self develops well through the many opportunities they have to take responsibility and express themselves. Their behaviour is good because there are strong relationships and they feel that adults are caring and approachable. They are developing healthy and safe lifestyles well, many taking advantage of the good range of sporting opportunities available after school. Pupils like many aspects of school but find some of their lessons dull.

They make a good contribution to the school and local communities. They have a keen sense of equality and of their rights, though, at this stage, their awareness of the responsibilities that go along with these rights is more limited. Pupils are being prepared satisfactorily for their future as, although they are developing a good work ethic, their achievement in key skills remains no more than satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils show good attitudes towards their work because of teachers' good behaviour management, which creates a calm and orderly working environment in classes. Teachers' sound subject knowledge enables them to use a range of teaching styles in order to engage learners; however, this is inconsistent and there are occasions when lessons are not sufficiently interesting to motivate pupils. Planning is usually clear, with it being evident what pupils are expected to learn in the lesson, but not always. A start has been made at getting pupils to assess how well these objectives have been met, but this is not happening often enough. Work is usually planned to suit the range of abilities in each class, but this is not always the case and some pupils find their work too easy because teachers do not always have high enough expectations. Teaching assistants play a valuable role in lessons, in particular when they are supporting those at an early stage of learning English or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has rightly put an emphasis on literacy and numeracy in order to raise standards. This has been effective and pupils' progress is now improving in these subjects. Good provision is made for personal, social, health and citizenship education and considerable curriculum time is allocated to this. The result has been that other subjects have not been covered in sufficient depth. The exceptions are physical education and music, which both have a high priority in the school. Although some topics are covered using the links between subjects, these are insufficiently clearly planned to ensure that pupils are developing skills in these other subjects sufficiently rapidly. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, visits and events which support pupils' learning well. The school, as well as teaching French, has started teaching Japanese to some pupils, which they find a valuable extra opportunity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils feel confident and secure as a result of good pastoral care. All child protection procedures are in place and rigorously maintained. Other health and safety requirements, such as risk assessments, are fully in place. The school has implemented robust procedures to raise attendance levels. These have been effective as parents now have a better understanding of the importance of regular attendance. There is a comprehensive range of displays to promote issues such as staying healthy and safe and the rights of a child.

Although careful records are kept of pupils' progress, some of the assessments on which these are based are inaccurate. Targets are set for pupils to help them to know how to progress, but these are sometimes not specific enough for pupils to know exactly how to improve their work. These targets are not embedded, as teachers do not refer to them enough in their marking and pupils often do not know their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The determined leadership of the headteacher and newly constituted senior team is steadily improving the school. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, though their view is sometimes rather more positive than the actuality. The involvement of other managers in systems of monitoring and evaluation is being developed effectively and leaders focus strongly on supporting and mentoring teachers. A particular strength is that the school actively and successfully promotes equal opportunities and inclusion for all learners. This contributes to the good promotion of community cohesion, where the development of the local and school communities are especially strong, although the promotion of understanding of the wider UK community is less well developed. Governors are supportive and offer good levels of challenge. The school has strong links with parents, the local community and other schools and these benefit pupils' learning. Good use is also made, when necessary, of other agencies to support individual pupils or families.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

15 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchfield Community School, Birmingham B6 6AJ

Thank you so much for welcoming us to your school when we visited recently. We very much enjoyed talking to you and were impressed with your behaviour and how polite you were. Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education, and it is improving. You are beginning to make faster progress, although the standards you reach in the classes with the oldest pupils are below average.

These are some of the things we found out about your school.

- You are developing well into sensible young people because all adults look after you well and you have lots of lessons to help you develop your knowledge of how to stay safe and healthy and know all about your rights.
- Your school has worked hard to make sure that all of you have equal opportunities and that the school is an important part of the local community.
- Your headteacher and teachers know what they need to do to make your school better.
- The younger children in the Nursery and Reception classes have a good start to their education because they have a good range of interesting things to learn.
- Your teachers usually make your lessons varied and interesting and the teaching assistants help you a lot.
- You enjoy the range of after-school activities and the music lessons.

These are the things we have asked your school to improve.

- Some of you occasionally find your work too easy. We have asked your school to try to make sure that all lessons are as good as the best and that you always get work that makes you think.
- The targets that you have are not helping all of you improve your work and teachers do not always refer to these targets when they mark your work.
- Some of you told us that you would like to do more of other subjects, rather than English, mathematics and religious education. We agree and think your curriculum could be more interesting and exciting.

We are sure you will do your best to help your teachers by continuing to work hard.

Yours faithfully

John D Eadie

Lead inspector