

Birchensale Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	116967
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	379337
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2012
Lead inspector	James McNeillie HMI

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	397
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tracey Gallen
Headteacher	Hilary Dowding
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2009
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

James McNeillie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lisa Fraser

Additional inspector

Steven Goldsmith

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 21 lessons taught by 20 teachers as well as spending time visiting lessons for a short amount of time looking at the development of pupils' literacy skills. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors met groups of pupils, listened to some pupils read and observed other aspects of the school's work. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, and looked at documentation related to school improvement planning, the quality of teaching, records of pupils' current achievement, and considered the views given by 175 parents and carers in response to Ofsted's questionnaire.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized middle school, although smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Pupils are mainly from the Bacthley area of Redditch. A very high proportion of pupils have special educational needs or are disabled, most of whom have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social needs. A small number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A higher proportion of pupils than the national average is known to be eligible for free school meals. The school is an ethnically diverse community of pupils from White British, Asian, and Eastern European heritages. There is high mobility into and out of the school at times of transfer other than the usual, linked in part to new arrivals from overseas, particularly Eastern Europe. Around a fifth of the pupils speaks English as an additional language and a small minority of these are beginners in learning the language.

The school meets current national floor standards, which set the minimum standards expected for attainment and progress. The school has maintained a number of awards since the last inspection, including Healthy Schools, Artsmark Gold, International Schools, Eco Green Flag, and Sportsmark Gold. In addition, The school has two leading Aspect awards, one for developing family links and community partnerships, the second for removing barriers to learning. The school also holds the Leading Parent Partnership Award

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory and improving school. The inclusive and encouraging ethos of the school means that pupils are cared for very well, feel safe and enjoy their learning. Parents and carers agree with this. Not all groups of pupils are making good progress and this is why achievement and the overall effectiveness of the school are judged satisfactory and not good.
- All groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language, make nationally expected progress. In English, pupils, particularly boys, make less progress during Years 7 and 8 than they do in the earlier years. Opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills in other subjects are missed sometimes.
- Teaching helps pupils to make satisfactory progress and pupils' day-to-day experience is improving. In the best learning, activities support, stretch and challenge pupils of all abilities. In those lessons, there are also good opportunities for pupils to learn together and the teaching of reading and writing is structured well. Those strengths are not consistent in all teaching.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere around the site, where they conduct themselves well. They have positive attitudes to learning and show respect for each other; these positive features contribute to the calm atmosphere and harmonious school community.
- School leaders have a secure understanding of the next steps to improve pupils' achievement and how to achieve that. The management of teachers' performance is consistent and linked to good-quality professional development. There is, however, inconsistency in how well middle leaders use a range of strategies to evaluate the quality of teaching and then take decisive action to make improvements. Opportunities to share good practice in teaching are not fully exploited.

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Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement for all groups of pupils and, in particular, their progress in English, by ensuring that:
 - all day-to-day teaching across the curriculum supports at least good progress over time
 - the progress pupils make in English during Years 7 and 8, and in particular the progress of boys, is accelerated to match that of Years 5 and 6
 - pupils are supported in applying well-developed literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it has at least a good impact over time by ensuring that:
 - the teaching of English, particularly in Years 7 and 8, focuses consistently on the structured development of pupils' reading and writing skills
 - teachers ensure that there is sufficient stretch and challenge in learning for all groups of pupils
 - the systematic opportunities to share existing good practice are extended.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that middle leaders:
 - utilise a range of strategies to monitor and evaluate the work of their areas
 - produce sharply focused plans for improvement that result in better classroom practice and stronger achievement for all groups of pupils.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

All groups of pupils make satisfactory progress over time and this is improving. By the time they leave school, their attainment is broadly average overall. Pupils make the quickest progress in English during Years 5 and 6, but this slows in Years 7 and 8, particularly for boys. The oldest pupils in the school are making more progress in writing than reading, however, this imbalance is much less evident for all other year groups. Pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics, with an increasing number of individuals making good progress. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and pupils learning English as an additional language also make at least expected progress given their starting points; some individuals make good progress. This is as a result of the careful tracking of their levels of attainment, appropriate interventions when necessary, and the effectiveness of the additional support they receive in lessons.

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Pupils enjoy school and want to learn. These positive attitudes mean that lessons are rarely disrupted by inattention or poor behaviour. When learning is good, pupils respond well to the opportunities to work together in pairs or groups to work out solutions or find information. Too often, learning is satisfactory because pupils are not challenged to extend their thinking, understanding, or skills.

Pupils develop a range of skills across the curriculum and apply them satisfactorily. This was evident, for example, in lessons when pupils responded orally and in writing, using precise and technical language. They enjoy reading, see the value in it and some use the reading strategies they have learnt in English in other subjects, such as in humanities and in science.

Quality of teaching

Very many parents and carers hold positive views on how well their children are taught. Teaching is judged to be satisfactory because, over time, pupils make satisfactory and not good progress when compared to all students nationally. The quality of teaching the pupils experience is improving and this was confirmed by examples of good and better teaching observed during the inspection. When teaching is at its best, the learning needs of all pupils are met, for example, in the different activities planned. Good and outstanding teaching is also characterised by highly effective assessment in lessons as a result of carefully chosen questioning by teachers. Too much, however, remains satisfactory. The reasons for this include that the learning planned for in lessons does not support and challenge pupils of all abilities, which often results in all pupils completing the same work. On other occasions, the pace of learning is slow and pupils are not given good-quality opportunities to work together or think for themselves. The well-structured approach to the teaching of reading and writing skills evident in some English lessons is not consistent. When it is less strong, there lacks a direct focus on the specific strategies or techniques pupils need to acquire or apply, such as skimming a text to explore or review it, or the format and style required for a piece of writing. School leaders agree this is a factor in the slower progress pupils make in this subject during Years 7 and 8. In many lessons, even when teaching is no more than satisfactory, pupils are still given opportunities to reflect on their own and others' work. This feature, their good attitudes to each other and their willingness to support each other make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. The school's curriculum has increased the focus on the explicit development of pupils' literacy skills in a range of subjects. Many lessons are planned to include literacy objectives, but not all teachers are explicit about giving pupils opportunities to apply these skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils told inspectors that they feel very safe while in school and there is always someone they can approach if they have concerns or worries. They also feel confident that if any issues arise, school leaders will deal with them quickly. Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying and are reassured that, on the rare occasion when this happens, the school deals with it quickly and well. This is

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one of the factors contributing to the school's harmonious community. Another is the good level of respect pupils show for each other, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, disability, or special need. Parents and carers are positive about these aspects of the school's work.

Behaviour in lessons and around the site is good. Pupils contribute willingly to learning and are courteous and polite to each other and adults. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school day. Pupils are proud to be part of the school and show this in their positive attitudes, the ways in which they keep the school site neat and tidy, and their above-average levels of attendance. Exclusion rates are low and incidences of disruption to learning in lessons are rare. Pupils comment positively on the way in which teachers promote positive behaviour, including the use of rewards, and are aware of what sanctions there are and why they may be used.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's good leadership has embedded a clear vision for the school's future improvement and this is shared by senior and middle leaders, teachers, and support staff. School self-evaluation is secure and the school's tracking system means that leaders know where and when pupils are underachieving. This and action taken since the previous inspection has improved the quality of older pupils' writing. The impact of the school's work, which is focused on raising standards of attainment, is evident in the most recent 2011 Key Stage 2 results and the current attainment and progress of Year 8 pupils. A structured approach to performance management of teaching staff and the linked professional development opportunities have supported an increase in the quality of teaching, as is shown in the school's own monitoring records. All of which confirms the school's capacity to sustain improvement. A whole-school monitoring and evaluation cycle is in place, but there is variation in how well middle leaders use this to improve classroom practice. In addition, the planning and actions as a result of these evaluations are not focused consistently on improving pupils' outcomes. The current opportunities to share good practice in leadership and teaching within the school are not fully developed and the findings of the inspection endorse the senior leaders' views that this is a priority for improvement. For these reasons, the effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory and not good.

Leaders have had a good impact on improving behaviour and attendance, as can be seen in the reduction of fixed-term exclusions, the increase in pupils' overall levels of attendance to above the national average, and the decreasing number of pupils who are persistently absent. Positive relationships with parents and carers have made a good contribution. Those pupils who join the school other than at the normal transfer times, of which there is a sizeable number, and those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable are supported well by the school's inclusion team and its strong work with external agencies. Similarly, the increasing proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language are cared for well and given good support to be able to access the curriculum. One example of that support is that the school

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has employed a Polish teaching assistant who works with Polish-speaking children in small group and individual situations to help develop their English skills. These are some of the features of the school's success in ensuring equality of opportunity. Safeguarding arrangements, the school's curriculum and the high-quality pastoral care mean that pupils are safe, feel safe, and know how to be safe. Parents and carers endorse this view strongly. The governing body understands the strengths of the school and, as a result of training organised by the headteacher and revised structures, such as subject link governors, it is better able than previously to hold school leaders to account.

The school's curriculum is matched to the needs of the pupils. The promotion of reading for enjoyment is a particularly strong feature. The skills to support it are not consistently taught well across all year groups and opportunities are missed for all subjects to enable pupils to apply explicitly their wider range of literacy skills. The taught curriculum, as well as assemblies and enrichment activities, helps pupils of different ages to understand and appreciate themselves and each other. Positive celebrations of Eid and other religious and cultural events mean that children can share their beliefs. Leadership opportunities, such as those given in physical education, the school council, and the school's bank, are embraced by pupils; all of which supports pupils' good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



15 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchensale Middle School, Redditch, B97 6HT

Thank you for making us so welcome when I visited your school with my colleagues. Your good behaviour, positive attitudes to learning and to each other, and your above-average levels of attendance are all strengths of this school. We enjoyed listening to you read, talking to you, and hearing about the different activities you are involved in, such as the school bank and sports leadership teams.

The progress pupils make between Years 5 and 8 is satisfactory when compared to pupils across England. This is the reason why your school is judged to be a satisfactory school. The inspection team has given the school a point for improvement, which is to make sure that all pupils make good progress and in particular that older pupils, especially boys, make quicker progress in English. It is also important that you have more opportunities and help when you need it to use your English skills in other subjects. You can help by doing your best to use these skills.

The best teaching you experience is when the activities challenge all of you to extend your thinking, give you opportunities to work together and to be involved in your own learning. In English, you learn best when teachers structure their lessons so that there is a clear focus on helping you develop reading and writing skills. We have told the school that more teaching needs to be like the best and that the good and outstanding parts of lessons should be shared more with all teachers. You told me and my colleagues that the different members of the school staff help you feel comfortable and safe. We agree. We also agree that those of you who join during the school year and those of you with particular needs are well supported and cared for.

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector

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