

Birkenshaw Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107768
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	356238
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Marianne Young HMI

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

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	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Karen Priestley
Headteacher	Miss Caroline Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Fifteen part lessons taught by 15 teachers were observed. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the headteacher, staff and members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at the school website and a range of information including safeguarding and other policy documents, pupils' targets and tracking data, whole-school and subject development plans and the minutes of recent governing body meetings. Inspectors also spoke informally to pupils at social times. They scrutinised 88 parent and carers questionnaires as well as 99 pupil questionnaires. Inspectors also considered 24 responses from staff which were completed recently.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The attainment, learning and progress of all pupils, especially those who are more able.
- The quality of teaching and learning and whether teachers are planning lessons which meet the needs of all pupils.
- The effectiveness and rigour with which leaders monitor and evaluate provision and the performance of the school, together with their capacity to drive improvement.

Information about the school

Birkenshaw Middle School provides education for pupils from the age of nine to thirteen. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. A below average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and there are few pupils with a statement of special education needs. The majority of pupils are White British. Together with other middle schools and the local high school, the school is part of the Whitcliffe Educational Improvement Partnership. The school holds a number of awards, the most recent being the Healthy Schools Award, the Gold Standard Inclusion Award and Investors in Pupils. Due to the reorganisation of education undertaken by the local authority, the school will close in 2013.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Pupils attending Birkenshaw Middle School are provided with a good quality of education. An inclusive ethos ensures that the school is a place where everyone feels able to play their part, enabling pupils to develop both academically and personally. It is very well regarded by parents and carers. Pupils view school as a safe place to be and can describe how the school monitors their safety including their access to the internet. They are very good ambassadors for the school, taking part in a number of activities within school and the local community.

When pupils enter the school in Year 5, school data indicate that their attainment is broadly average, with their skills in writing being a weaker aspect compared to reading and mathematics. Despite a slight change in pupils' ability at the start of Year 7, due to some pupils moving to other schools and new ones arriving, overall, they make good progress by the end of Year 8. This progress is especially noticeable in English and science, less so in mathematics. Teaching is strong in science and pupils report that they particularly enjoy this subject, features which contribute significantly to their scientific progress and attainment. Inspectors observed that when a few teachers plan work, they make variable use of the assessment information provided for them about the capabilities of different groups of pupils especially the more able. This is a key reason why, in less effective lessons, pupils' progress is limited. The most skilful teachers inspire and challenge pupils and provide opportunities for them to investigate, to develop enquiry skills and work to their capabilities. While there are examples of good verbal feedback to pupils about their work, the quality of marking in books is inconsistent.

Well-organised systems and coordinated support led exceptionally well by senior leaders contribute to the outstanding pastoral care for pupils. Parents are fully supportive of the provision, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those with particular needs. Most of the pupils spoken to by inspectors are proud of their school and enjoy the different opportunities provided for them, especially the changes to the curriculum and themed days. Attendance is high and pupils behave well.

Self-evaluation is ongoing, provision is monitored effectively and leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, although procedures sometimes lack rigour. Despite receiving a range of information, governors are not systematically involved in evaluating the work of the school and their capacity to ask critical questions and influence the strategic direction of the school is less well developed. Systematic monitoring of teaching is less formally organised; however, leaders provide support for individual teachers where needed and professional development opportunities to ensure that classroom practice improves. Leaders have identified, through their tracking information prior to the inspection, that standards for the more-able pupils in Key Stage 2 and in mathematics need to improve and represent challenges for the school. Given

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previous improvement since the last inspection and the overall rise in standards, the school provides good value for money and demonstrates good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of pupils' learning and attainment by:
 - – ensuring that teachers plan activities in lessons which provide suitable challenge and are matched closely to pupils' differing needs and capabilities, especially the more able
 - – ensuring that all teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide appropriate comments so that pupils know and can remember how to improve their work.
- Build on the best practice within the school to raise standards in mathematics by:
 - – giving greater attention to the teaching of the basic skills of numeracy
 - – creating more opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to develop their numeracy skills.
- Formalise monitoring and evaluation procedures by:
 - – ensuring that governors' capabilities to challenge and influence the strategic direction of the school is further developed
 - – making certain that evaluation is rigorous, systematic and linked closely to improving outcomes for all pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In 2010, attainment at the end of Year 6 improved and pupils made good progress relative to their broadly average starting points. Girls' attainment in English is higher than that of boys. However, although the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the higher Level 5 improved, it is still below average. School data indicate that a number of the most-able pupils leave at the end of Year 6 in order to go to other schools in the area. At the end of Year 8, according to school data, lesson observations and other evidence, pupils' attainment in English and science is higher than that normally expected. Attainment is lower in mathematics. The personalised programmes of study and support from additional adults ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make particularly good progress.

Pupils willingly accept roles and responsibilities and display good consideration for other pupils and adults. They are confident and welcoming to visitors. Pupils readily engaged inspectors in conversations and were forthcoming when asked to give their view of the school. Pupils behave sensibly; there have been no cases of bullying or racial harassment recorded recently. Some excitable behaviour was observed. Pupils reported that they really enjoy and value the physical education activities provided and this, together with information regarding healthy eating, contributes well to their understanding of how to look after themselves. However, inspectors noted that not all pupils choose healthy options at break and lunch times. Leaders regularly consult and seek pupils' views so they are able, not only through the school council, to contribute ideas and suggestions. Pupils' enjoyment of what the school offers is reflected in their high attendance. Pupils are developing the personal qualities that will help them in their future lives; good examples

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are the way in which they learn to reflect on their own achievements and how to work with each other. These qualities also support their very good moral and social development. The school encourages and enables pupils to learn about a number of faiths and cultures through lessons and also visits. However, opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual awareness are often missed in lessons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Pupils make good progress in those lessons where teachers' expectations are high and the level of challenge allows them to deepen their thinking and understanding; well-considered tasks and targeted questioning are also notable features. In these lessons, pupils engage well and contribute significantly to their own learning. However, inspectors saw a few lessons where the teachers' restricted expectations of individual pupils' capabilities, especially for the more-able pupils meant that their progress was satisfactory. Pupils report that they appreciate and take note of the attainment levels and comments in their books. However, marking remains variable, with examples of weak practice in some areas.

The good curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to experience practical learning. Projects and whole school curriculum days provide fun approaches to learning which are enjoyed by both staff and pupils. Adapting areas around the school for initiatives, such as in science, is enabling the school to develop exciting and meaningful activities for pupils.

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Progress in improving pupils' basic skills, especially in mathematics, is uneven. Teachers' lesson planning and observations indicate that more worth is given to developing pupils' literacy as opposed to their numeracy skills.

Levels of support and care for students are exceptionally well targeted and help pupils recognise and understand factors that affect their well-being. The school provides a welcoming learning environment and the inclusion team especially, knows and understands the needs of pupils and their families extremely well, including those individual pupils who face challenging circumstances or who are potentially vulnerable. Transition arrangements are well organised and the effectiveness and helpfulness of these, in ensuring that pupils settle quickly, was confirmed by parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders clearly understand what the school needs to do to improve. Provision is regularly monitored, although this work is not always rooted in clearly documented systems. Consequently, self-evaluation sometimes lacks the rigour required to ensure critical appraisal as to the effectiveness of some aspects of the school's work. Nevertheless, priorities have been identified and are shared with the staff. The promotion of equal opportunities is strong and all forms of discrimination and barriers to learning are effectively tackled. Despite an uncertain future, due to the forthcoming closure of the school, morale remains high and staff work well together to improve provision and achievement. As a result, since the last inspection, improvements are evident and standards overall have risen. Raising the attainment of the more-able pupils at Key Stage 2 and the performance by all pupils in mathematics are correctly identified as challenges for the school.

Governors are supportive of the work of the school and bring a range of valuable expertise to the governing body. Regular reports inform them about the school and they fulfil their statutory duties effectively. Safeguarding is good and meets current government requirements. Partnerships with other institutions and services add significantly to the quality of education the school provides. The school promotes community cohesion well and this work contributes considerably to pupils' understanding, appreciation of and involvement in their own community and in other societies across the globe.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were returned from a quarter of parents and carers. Of these, a very large majority were supportive of the school. A very few had concerns about how: the school helps pupils to have a healthy lifestyle; how parents and carers are informed about the progress of their children; and whether parents and carers are helped in supporting their child's learning. Inspectors responded by speaking to pupils and carers and staff. They found that the school provides well balanced menus, good physical education opportunities and teaches pupils, especially through the personal, social, health and citizenship programme about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Parents and carers are regularly informed about their child's progress and information in pupils' planners is a helpful mechanism to inform them about the subjects that pupils are learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birkenshaw Middle School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 97 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 361 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	48	47	48	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	41	42	55	57	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	26	65	67	6	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	38	54	56	5	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	39	40	52	54	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	24	62	64	7	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	30	63	65	5	5	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	32	33	55	57	3	3	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	38	55	57	4	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	38	53	55	4	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	27	59	61	4	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	47	46	47	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	57	38	39	3	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



12 November 2010

Inspection of Birkenshaw Middle School, Cleckheaton BD19 4BE

Dear Pupils

Thank you for the welcome you gave me and my colleagues when we inspected your school recently. Thank you also to those of you who filled in the questionnaire. Your views helped us to find out about the school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection.

You go to a good school. The care, support and guidance you are given is outstanding and the staff have a real belief that all of you can succeed. We were impressed by the way the school works hard to support those of you, in particular, who find work a bit of a challenge. Many of you told us that you feel safe and there is always an adult to help. Your behaviour around school is good and the vast majority of you have a very positive attitude to your work. We have congratulated the school on the way attendance has improved. Leaders consult you all regularly to seek your opinions, especially if they are planning changes. We also noticed many displays which celebrate your links with other schools and your visits to different places.

Leaders are determined that you should all do as well as you possibly can and that your school should continue to improve. In order for this to happen leaders are going to ensure that you all do as well in mathematics as in English and science. Also those of you who are more able will be helped to reach the higher levels in Year 6. Finally I have asked leaders to check systematically on how well the school is doing.

I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young

Her Majesty's Inspector

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