

# Birchwood Community High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111444
<b>Local authority</b>	Warrington
<b>Inspection number</b>	395292
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 May 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Susan Wareing HMI

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>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,124
<b>Of which number on roll in the sixth form</b>	106
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Barry Sanson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anne Bright
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 December 2008
<b>School address</b>	Brock Road Birchwood Warrington WA3 7PT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01925 853500
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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Susan Wareing  
Bernard Robinson  
Paul Latham  
Mary Liptrot  
Liam Trippier

Her Majesty's Inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 39 staff and three of these observations were jointly conducted with members of the senior team. Inspectors also met with five groups of learners, nominated staff, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the Community Governor, as well as a representative from the local authority. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation, documentation for safeguarding learners, school policies and its attainment and tracking data. Inspectors also looked at 248 parental and carers' questionnaires as well as 146 from learners and 46 from staff.

### Information about the school

The school is of larger than average size. A lower proportion of learners are disabled or have special educational needs than in most similar schools. This includes those who are supported by school action or school action with a statement. Of these, the majority have moderate learning difficulties. Almost all the learners are of White British heritage. The proportions of learners of minority ethnic heritages, of those who speak English as an additional language, and of those known to be eligible for free school meals are much lower than national averages. The school exceeds the current floor standards, which the government sets for the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school's specialisms are business enterprise and applied learning. In September 2010 the school opened a sixth form centre, Birchwood College.

**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

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key Findings

- Birchwood Community High School is a good and highly inclusive school that provides good outcomes for its learners. It is not yet outstanding because although the quality of teaching is good overall it is not consistently high enough to ensure that learners make excellent progress. The headteacher and senior leaders share a clarity of vision and determination to develop leadership at all levels. This, together with the governing body's increasingly effective support and challenge to pursue further improvements are key to the school's good capacity for future development. In this harmonious community, learners are supported exceptionally well. Learners say they feel very safe, and their parents and carers overwhelmingly agree. The recently opened Sixth Form has made a good start, although it is too early to judge its overall effectiveness.
- Achievement is good overall. Learners' attainment at the end of Year 11 is mostly above the national average and most learners make good progress from their starting points. However there has recently been some unevenness in achievement across subjects and between groups of learners, although gaps are narrowing rapidly. Learning and progress in Sixth Form lessons observed during the inspection are at least satisfactory and mainly good or better. The progress of learners who are disabled or who have special educational needs and are supported by School Action or School Action Plus is better than that of similar learners nationally, due to the high quality support that they receive.
- The mostly good or better teaching across the school demonstrates high expectations of learners, high quality planning adapted precisely to their learning needs and the development of their independent thinking. There is some inconsistency between subject teachers' use of written feedback in marking learners' work. Where learners do not receive such feedback, they are unclear about how they can make better progress.
- While most learners and their parents and carers considered behaviour, overall and in lessons, to be good, a small minority expressed concerns about disruption to learning in some lessons. Inspectors found student behaviour to be generally good, with very positive relationships between learners and with their teachers. This promoted positive attitudes to learning.

- Senior leaders have a very accurate grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have established robust systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of their actions, but improvement planning does not always focus on the small number of key, measurable steps that would have the quickest impact, for example on the improvement of teaching. There is some variation in the incisive use of information gained from departmental monitoring and evaluation.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - ensuring consistency in the regularity and quality of teachers' marking across all subjects, so that all learners know exactly what they need to do in order to improve their work
  - sharpening the analysis at departmental level of information gained through the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress, so that all teaching is precisely tailored to learners' individual learning needs
  - focusing whole-school planning, for the improvement of teaching, consistently and precisely on the few key, measurable actions that will have the most impact.

## **Main Report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

Learners enter the school with attainment that is slightly above average. Their outcomes since the previous inspection have been consistently significantly above average. Despite a dip in performance in some key measures in 2011, overall attainment was at least average, and in most cases above or well above average, exceeding the Government's current floor standard. The school identified underperformance in some specific groups: some boys, learners known to be eligible for free school meals and a small number of learners who have special educational needs and are supported by School Action and School Action Plus. There was also some variation in performance between subjects, for example in sciences and languages and in pass rates at grades A-A\* at GCSE. Data held by the school point to an upturn in the attainment of most current Year 11 learners and a more significant improvement in Year 10, including previously under achieving groups.

Overall, most learners make better progress than learners nationally and in most lessons observed during the inspection, learning and progress were good. Most learners are confident communicators and generally read fluently. They are therefore very well prepared for the next stage of their education, but opportunities for learners to apply their skills in literacy and mathematics across the curriculum have not yet been systematically implemented.

There are as yet no national data with which to compare achievement in the recently opened Sixth Form. However, in lessons observed, the learning and progress of Sixth Form students was at least satisfactory, with examples of good and outstanding achievement.

## Quality of teaching

Almost all parents, carers and pupils who expressed their views believe that learners are well taught at Birchwood. This is strongly endorsed by inspection evidence, which shows improvement in teaching since the last inspection, so that the large majority of it is now good or better. However, there is some variation in the quality of teaching between key stages and subjects. Teaching is best in the Sixth Form and in Years 10 and 11. Stronger subjects include English and performance subjects. On the whole, teaching in science is weaker.

Relationships between staff and learners are cordial and constructive. They work well together in group and pair activities, reflecting the school's good work in fostering learners' social development. Good and outstanding teaching is characterised by a brisk pace and high expectations, so that learners make at least good progress and develop good attitudes to learning.

The best teaching is underpinned by detailed, high quality planning that takes precise account of learners' individual learning needs. Learners, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, then engage enthusiastically in a variety of stimulating activities, with space to develop and exchange their own independent thinking. Feedback on their progress is regular, clear and detailed, so that they know precisely what they need to do in order to improve. This good quality marking is not yet consistently applied across all subject areas.

In teaching that is no better than satisfactory, learners are too heavily directed by the teacher. This slows the pace of learning and the development of learners' resilience when faced with challenging work. Planning is focused on doing rather than learning and work is not as well-matched to learners' needs. The work of other adults is not systematically planned and focused in partnership with the teacher, in order to have the maximum impact on achievement.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

In the questionnaires returned to inspectors, an overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very positive about behaviour. A small minority of parents and a few learners, however, expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found learners to be typically courteous, welcoming to, and appreciative of visitors. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their above average attendance and their punctuality. The school's attendance team makes exceptionally strenuous efforts to ensure that all learners attend school regularly.

Exclusions are low and behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good or better. However, in the few lessons, predominantly in Years 7 to 9, where teaching does not fully engage all learners, low-level disruption occasionally occurs. Most learners feel that staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. Learners, including those in the Sixth Form, feel very safe in school and well supported by the staff. Bullying is very rare and dealt with very effectively when it occurs. Learners show clear understanding that racist name-calling or any other form of bullying, including that based on the sexual orientation of others, is unacceptable.

The school's determinedly inclusive ethos is palpable in the excellent work of the dedicated Learner Services team. Their work is greatly valued by learners. The school also draws on

the expertise of a wide range of external agencies and shares its expertise and facilities with a cluster of local primary schools. Through this partnership the school can point to many examples of success in supporting vulnerable learners and their families in the school and its wider community.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher and the senior leadership team set a very clear sense of direction for the school, much needed in the past two years of significant change, including the establishment of Sixth Form provision and some instability in staffing. Restructured and strengthened by new appointments, the senior leadership team's capacity for further improvement is strong. This reflects the headteacher's firm commitment to developing such leadership capacity through coaching and wide professional learning, often through the school's many external partnerships.

Improvement planning is detailed and systems have been put in place for rigorous and honest self-evaluation. This gives the school a very accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and of the quality of the teaching and learning it provides. This understanding is reflected in the improvements in teaching since the last inspection. However, there is some inconsistency amongst subject leaders in the sharp analysis of information gained from the monitoring and evaluation processes, and whole-school planning does not always focus sharply on the few key actions that would have the quickest impact, for example on the quality of teaching.

The curriculum is good and improving, being broad, balanced and well tailored to learners' individual learning needs and aspirations. There is an increasingly rich choice of pathways at each key stage, including in the Sixth Form, where the blend of academic and vocational options and high quality support maintains in full-time education some learners who might not otherwise consider it. Learners are very satisfied with the improved information, advice and guidance that they receive for planning the next stage in their education and future lives, so that almost all learners progress to further education, employment or training on leaving the school. The school takes good steps to enrich learners' experience through a wide range of extra-curricular activities including popular performing arts and sports events, youth residentials and visits abroad. Learners relish the chance to express their views, for example, as 'learner governors' and would welcome a wider range of opportunities to do so. Through such experiences and taught programmes learners develop good awareness of and respect for diverse cultures, backgrounds and beliefs. For example, in a Year 7 history lesson two learners from different spiritual traditions engaged amicably and with impressive maturity in a discussion about what their different beliefs meant to them.

The school's highly inclusive approach to all aspects of its work promotes equality and tackles discrimination energetically in the school and the community that it serves.

Governors are knowledgeable and highly committed to the school. They play an increasingly active part in the life of the school and are confident to provide a robust challenge to the school when necessary. They are actively involved in the regular review of the school's good safeguarding arrangements, which meet all statutory requirements.

While it is too early to judge the overall effectiveness of the Sixth Form in the absence of formal examination results, there is clearly good leadership capacity for the future. The Sixth

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Form management team has worked energetically to build a firm footing for the College and a good range of assessments have been established to measure students' progress.



## 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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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](http://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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
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.**



14 May 2012

Dear Learners and Students

### **Inspection of Birchwood Community High School, Warrington, WA3 7PT**

I would like to thank you all on behalf of the inspection team for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and talking to a good number of you, and we were pleased to find out how much most of you enjoy your time in school. These are the main findings of the inspection.

- Birchwood Community High school is a good school where most of you make good progress and achieve well.
- Teaching, behaviour and safety are all good. The school's support for you, especially when you have personal problems or problems with your learning, is exceptionally good.
- The school promotes your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Your school is led and managed well, with good plans for how it can be even better.

The headteacher agrees with the inspection team that there are areas which could be better still and we have asked that the following improvements be implemented.

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by:
  - making sure that teachers' marking in all subjects, lets you know exactly what you need to do in order to improve your work
  - checking that all your work is set at just the right level to help you make the best progress you can
  - making sure, when your school leaders plan to improve teaching, that they concentrate on the few most important things that will make the most difference to the teaching you experience.

You can play an important part in helping the staff to make your good school even better. On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Wareing  
Her Majesty's Inspector

