

# Birch House School

Independent school standard inspection report

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Birch House School, which is located near the centre of Manchester, is a mixed gender school for students aged 11 to 16 with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. The school opened in April 1996. All the students have been placed at the school by their local authority because they have experienced significant disruption to their education, primarily because of poor attendance and challenging behaviour. There are currently 17 students on roll, 13 of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Thirteen of the students are currently in care. The students come from various parts of the country, although most are from Manchester. The school aims to 'remove barriers to learning by providing a positive, safe and caring environment within which the students feel happy and secure in their learning.' It further aims to 'develop students' self-esteem by helping them to manage their behaviour, develop independence and social skills to mix with others, in and out of school.'

## **Evaluation of the school**

Birch House School provides a good quality of education for its students. The majority of students develop their confidence and interest in school because they attend more regularly and are better able to control their behaviour and show more positive attitudes to learning in school. Standards of work are generally below average, but given the students' significantly disrupted prior education, the gains in their personal and social skills, and academic performance at the school, are good. The school has made good progress since its previous inspection in September 2009 and meets its stated aims very well. The school meets all the regulations for independent schools, which includes all aspects of safeguarding the students.

## **Quality of education**

The quality of the curriculum is good, and provides the students with a suitable balance of different subjects that match well with their identified learning needs. The school's emphasis on developing key literacy and numeracy skills through regular timetabled lessons is helping the students to become more confident in reading, writing and using number for different purposes. The overall curricular provision is

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

full of good quality learning opportunities for all the students, including some very useful life skills, such as cooking as part of food technology. The school uses published schemes of work and examination syllabuses to plan the content of the lessons. Some staff are more adept than others at being able to modify these to suit the particular needs of the students. However, lessons are generally well planned because teachers know the students very well, particularly the vagaries of their behaviour when in school. The requirements specified in students' statements of special educational needs are met. The school is generally good at recognising the limits of its own provision, and through the use of external facilities provides additional learning experiences for the students; for example, games at local sports facilities. However, the facilities for practical science are limited. Links with the local Connexions service and local businesses are providing older students with opportunities to experience the world of work, and for them to start thinking about possible future careers.

The quality and effectiveness of teaching and assessment are good. The staff are skilled at de-escalating potentially difficult situations in lessons, and there are relatively few disruptions that affect the students' learning. As a result, the vast majority of students make good progress. Teachers have good working relationships with the students, which mean that the students work reasonably hard and appear to enjoy their lessons. Teachers ensure that they explain lesson tasks clearly and that they check the students' understanding regularly; this latter quality sometimes works to the detriment of the students' learning because some teachers too often interrupt the students when they are working, which limits the opportunities for them to show their competence and ability to work alone for long periods of time. Teachers use praise to good effect, which motivates the students' interest in their work. Teachers' comments in text books vary in quality and helpfulness in helping the students to know how to improve their work, but marking is carried out regularly by all staff. The school uses additional adults, dedicated teaching assistants and/or care staff, to support teachers in lessons, but too often they have no pre-defined or focused role to specifically support individual students' learning. As a result, some opportunities for targeted one-to-one learning support are lost.

The school's assessment procedures are very good. All students are assessed when they first start at the school by an educational psychologist, and via teacher assessment from classroom staff. The combination of these assessments ensures that the school has a clear picture of the abilities and behavioural traits of all students, irrespective of the fact that it rarely receives prior attainment information from the students' previous schools. Students' progress is recorded each half term in all subjects, and then compared to start and expected finish points for the end of the school year. Additional behavioural targets are also set and regularly used with the students to help them understand and appreciate their successes and occasional failures in school.

Initial assessments show that the students generally start at the school at least two or more National Curriculum levels lower in English and mathematics than expected for their age. These low or very low standards are most evident in the students' key

literacy and numeracy skills. While the majority of students appreciate the need to write for different purposes, the quality of their written work is occasionally poor and shows too little personal pride in what they have produced for the teacher. The students are developing their ability to understand how to use numbers for a range of different purposes. During their time in the school, the vast majority make good progress so that by the time they leave the school the majority has achieved some form of nationally recognised qualification. The students' progress in their improved attendance and reduced behaviour outbursts are also good for the vast majority.

The school development plan, which includes priorities and action for the curriculum, teaching and assessment, student progress and teacher development, is satisfactory overall. However, there are no time milestones to help staff assess the on-going progress of the plan, insufficient links between actions and improved outcomes, too little shared responsibility among all staff for monitoring progress of different actions, and a lack of clarity about lesson observations, teacher performance and continuous professional development.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The quality and effectiveness of the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students are good. The students are well aware of the rules in school, and what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The students know the difference between right and wrong, although a few fail to consistently practise the former. Behaviour is satisfactory. The behaviour seen during the inspection was generally good for the vast majority, but the trend over a longer period of time is more satisfactory for all but a few students. The regular attendance of most students is improving from that seen in their previous schools. However, there is a small but significant minority whose attendance is poor and this adversely affects their ability to regain the lost ground in their education from previous schools attended. The school is, however, doing all that it can reasonably do to work with the local authorities to encourage prompt and decisive action to tackle this poor attendance.

The staff work well with the students and are always keen to praise their efforts, when deserved. There are many opportunities for the students to gather together and reflect on their achievements in school. The students mix well with each other and are beginning to appreciate and understand how to work productively with peers and staff. These opportunities are helping the students to develop acceptable personal communication skills, and appreciate that it is important to mix with others, in and out of school, in a socially acceptable way.

Many students at the school have developed negative attitudes towards some of the public service providers. However, through the school's curricular provision in personal, social and health education, visitors to school, and visits out of school, the majority of students are beginning to understand the importance of the support that is provided by public services. Further opportunities for the students to study

different world religions means that they are developing a greater appreciation and acceptance of different faiths and cultures; locally, nationally and internationally.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school's measures to promote the welfare, health and safety of its students are good, with all the regulations being met fully. Site and school security are very good. The supervision of students is good, and movement in and around the building is generally clam because staff are visible and always in close proximity to the students. The management of behaviour in lessons is good, with additional adults supporting class teachers effectively. On those occasions when a student needs to leave the lesson, they are always accompanied. There is some bullying and occasional aggressive behaviour is school, but this is managed very effectively by the staff. The vast majority of students feel safe in school. The school updates its health and safety policies in accordance with changing regulations and current statutory guidance.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school meets all the regulations. The single central register includes all relevant information about the checks made to ensure the suitability of staff to work in the school and about the members of the proprietorial body.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school meets all the regulations. The school building is in a good state of repair, with a suitably-sized area to the front for parking and a suitably secured area to the rear, which is in good condition and large enough to cater for those students who wish to play small-sided games. The school offices, separate staff and students' toilets, a food technology room, dining room, kitchen and recreation rooms are on the ground floor. The classrooms, which include separate art and computer rooms, are on the first floor. All rooms are kept locked and accessed only by staff or students who are supervised. Classrooms are of a good size for the number of students using them. The furniture is appropriate for the age of the students, and there is easy access to toilets and washbasins. Although parts of the premises are satisfactory, the majority of the accommodation is in good condition.

## **Provision of information**

The school meets all the regulations. The school's policies are detailed and updated to take account of any changes to the regulations, or the practices in school. Although the annual reports to parents and carers generally meet the standards expected, some teachers fail to make it clear what progress the student has made during the year.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school's procedures for handling complaints comply fully with all the regulations.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

## **What the school could do to improve further**

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Under the guidance and direction of class teachers, ensure that all teaching assistants have a clearer and more focused role in lessons to help targeted students improve their learning.
- Improve the quality of annual reports by ensuring that all teachers report clearly on student' progress during the year.
- Improve the school development plan by:
  - identifying milestones to help senior leaders and all staff monitor the progress being made over the life of the plan against all priorities and actions
  - make clearer what evaluation strategies the school will use to monitor progress
  - identify more clearly how a greater number of staff take individual or shared responsibility for monitoring progress against selected priorities and actions
  - linking all priorities and actions to specific outcomes, especially the achievements of students.
- Develop further the school's strategy of monitoring teacher performance by:
  - ensuring that all lesson observations link the quality of teaching seen to students' achievement in the lesson ensuring that all staff continuous professional development links specifically to identified teacher needs
  - ensuring that the impact of staff continuous professional development is assessed in terms of its impact on the quality of provision, especially on students' achievement in lessons.

## Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils			✓	

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special secondary day school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
<b>Date school opened</b>	April 1996		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 13	Girls: 1	Total: 14
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 13	Girls: 0	Total: 13
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 12	Girls: 1	Total: 13
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£27,300		
<b>Address of school</b>	98 -100 Birch Lane Longsight Manchester  M14 0WN		
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 224 7500		
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:bilal@birchhouseschool.co.uk">bilal@birchhouseschool.co.uk</a>		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Bilal Mahmud		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Advanced Childcare Group Ltd		

**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.**



7 December 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Birch House School, Manchester, M14 0WN**

Following my recent visit your school, I am writing to you with a summary of my inspection judgments. I should like to begin, however, by thanking you for the way you behaved throughout the two days I was in school. I enjoyed meeting you and your teachers.

These are my inspection judgements and the recommendations I have made to help the school improve further.

- The quality of education at Birch House School is good.
- Your standards of work are low or very low when you start at the school, but those of you who attend regularly and work hard make good progress during your time at the school. This is really good, given the disruption to your education before you started at Birch House.
- Your behaviour is satisfactory, but is improving all the time.
- Teaching is good because lessons provide you with a variety of activities to help you make progress. The additional adults who are in lessons also help you but I am asking the school to give them more specific responsibility to help you with your learning in lessons.
- You get good information about the quality of work you do in school but not all teachers make clear in your annual end-of-year report how much progress you have made over the year. I am, therefore, asking that all teachers improve this aspect.
- Your teachers are working hard to make your school better. To help them, I have asked that all teachers are regularly watched and that they attend some training to help them get even better. Also, I have asked that the headteacher ensures that all staff work and plan together to help the school get even better.

I hope that you continue to attend school regularly and do the very best that you can the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector