

Birtenshaw School

Darwen Road, Bromley Cross, Bolton, Lancashire, BL7 9AB

Inspection dates 19–20 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Following a period of uncertainty, the chief executive of the trust has taken over the running of the school. His knowledge, passion and drive have resulted in remarkable improvements in a short time.
- As a consequence of first-rate professional training and new appointments, the quality of teaching is good and this is mirrored in pupils' good achievement.
- Adults manage pupils' behaviour very well, creating a calm atmosphere conducive to learning. In the best lessons, adults use each pupil's preferred method of communication, and lessons are conducted with a sense of urgency.
- The provision for students in the sixth form is good.
- Considerable improvements have been made to the curriculum so pupils now receive their full entitlement.
- The school is successful in sustaining education for pupils who have experienced considerable difficulties in their previous placements.
- Behaviour is good. With the help of adults, pupils learn to manage their complex behaviour so that they and others can learn. They have an increasing awareness of keeping safe.
- Leadership and management are good. The trustees ask perceptive questions of leaders, particularly about the effect staff have on pupils' progress. Financial management is outstanding.
- Excellent partnerships have been established with numerous health and social agencies which benefit pupils significantly. Local authorities who place pupils at the school have a positive opinion of the provision, and of the progress the pupils in the school's care make.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding because there are some inconsistencies in the contribution of support assistants, and in the use of signs and symbols to aid pupils' communication. Lesson plans are sometimes too complicated, and occasionally the pace of the lesson slows so pupils lose concentration.
- While a wealth of information has been collected about pupils' achievements, this is not easily interpreted, and has not been shared sufficiently with class teachers.
- There is no overall leader of the curriculum.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in nine lessons or parts of lessons, of which three were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspector looked at the work in pupils' books.
- Discussions were held with pupils, representatives of the trustees, staff, including senior and middle managers, and representatives of the local authority.
- The inspector took into account the parents' responses to the school's own survey. There were no responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspector looked at a range of evidence including the school's own data on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents concerning safeguarding.

Inspection team

Katharine Halifax, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is maintained by the Birtenshaw Trust and caters for pupils with a range of disabilities and special educational needs including those with profound and multiple needs, those with autism, those with challenging behaviours, and pupils with significant physical disability, some of which are combined with complex health needs.
- Pupils come from eleven different local authorities, mostly in the North West of England. Three-quarters are in the care of their local authority and are resident in the trust's four community-based homes.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Three-quarters of the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This is well above average. Pupil premium funding is intended for the support of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority, or from families in the armed forces.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- At the time of the inspection, pupils' ages ranged from 10 to 19 years.
- Because of the small numbers, there are just three classes. All pupils and students are taught in the class most suited to their needs, rather than their age.
- The school moved to new purpose-built accommodation in June 2012.
- In the absence of a headteacher, the school is currently managed by the chief executive of the trust. A new headteacher is due to take up post at the start of the next term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to the highest level by:
 - making sure all adults sign and use symbols consistently when it is the pupils' preferred way of communicating
 - simplifying lesson planning
 - support assistants not intervening too soon
 - ensuring that all lessons are conducted at a rate that grasps pupils' interest and helps them maintain concentration.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by:
 - streamlining the recording of pupils' achievements and holding pupil progress discussions with teachers about what the information shows
 - making sure a senior leader takes overall responsibility for checking how the curriculum is taught, and that pupils do not cover the same area more than once, or miss out on any topics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' and students' attainment on entry to the school is very low because of their special educational needs. In addition, a number have been out of school for months, and in some cases, years. Inspection findings back those of parents and pupils that achievement is good.
- Although in very small steps, pupils make good progress in lessons and over time. Pupil numbers are small and all have very differing disabilities and special educational needs. There are no significant differences in the progress and achievement of pupils by gender, or by special educational needs. As yet, the school does not receive pupil premium funding. Nevertheless, staff do all they can to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn.
- Pupils make good progress in communication, language and literacy. Activities such as the daily greeting session enable pupils to, for example, identify classmates from their photographs, point to the relevant person, make eye contact, and greet them in their preferred way. Breaks and lunchtimes are used effectively to extend pupils' vocabulary using a picture exchange system to make their preferences understood. Pupils have an increased understanding of instructions.
- While many have very limited reading ability, the majority enjoy looking at books with adults. Higher-attaining pupils choose books and, with adult prompts, make sense of the text through looking at the illustrations and recognising simple words.
- Pupils make great strides in their physical development. This is because, in addition to weekly physical education lessons, all benefit from individual tuition in the swimming pool, on the trampoline, or exercising stiff limbs. Higher-attaining pupils and those who are physically able enjoy throwing and catching, or passing and dribbling a football
- By the end of the sixth form, students had accumulated a good number of units in the Entitlement and Quality Education for Pupils with Learning Difficulties (EQUALS) 'Moving on' programme. At the age of 19, while the majority transfer to adult services because of the complexity of their needs, a few go on to further education.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because staff have a good understanding of how pupils with autism and those with more profound and complex needs learn. Adults are skilled at helping pupils understand and manage their behaviour. They make sure pupils are clear about the plans for each day and any changes to routine. As a result, pupils grow in confidence and tackle new situations without upset.
- Lesson planning is much improved over the past few months and tasks are now matched to pupils' abilities. Sometimes, however, the planning is over-complicated and includes additional activities which do not relate to the overall intention of the lesson.
- Teachers use technology and music well to gain and hold pupils' interest. Such was the case in a lesson about North American Indians. However, where the pace of lessons slows, for example where activities are repeated or there is too much 'teacher talk', some pupils have difficulty maintaining concentration.
- Adults have a good understanding of pupils' preferred method of communication. Wherever a pupil is able, they expect them to vocalise and are not afraid to wait while pupils persevere. Most use signs and symbols well to support the spoken word, but occasionally some adults forget to do this.
- Skilled teaching assistants are used particularly well for one-to-one work, and sometimes lead classes such as dance. The majority know when to step back and when to prompt pupils, but a few are over-zealous in the classroom, sometimes intervening too soon, and this limits pupils' independent learning.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is accurate and the information is used well to plan the

next stage of learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils enjoy their learning. Their attendance is above average. There is a marked improvement in their behaviour. Individual programmes are created for the pupils who need help in order to control their own behaviour and emotions. These are successful because staff follow the agreed steps and so pupils learn what is expected of them.
- The reason behaviour is not outstanding is because, on occasion, where teaching is less effective or the pace of lessons slows, pupils sometimes lose concentration. Furthermore, longer-established pupils are wary of newcomers, and there are occasional differences while they sort out the 'pecking order'.
- Pupils show tremendous perseverance, being determined to succeed even when tasks are mentally and physically demanding, for example, when creating an 'acrostic' poem, being resolute in finding words to match the letters in their name and completing the written task.
- Although most pupils have difficulty forming relationships because of their special needs, they are tolerant of each other and readily celebrate everyone's achievements. Pupils are thrilled when given responsibilities such as leading the class signing and singing to number songs in mathematics lessons.
- Through the good provision for their personal development, as pupils become familiar with routines, they grow in confidence, taking on more responsibility and independence as they, for example, collect their own equipment. They begin to understand how to react in public, behaving appropriately when visiting supermarkets and cafés. A major step forward for all pupils has been coping with the change in routine when school lunches changed to self-service.
- Pupils have a growing awareness of keeping safe in and out of school and when using the Internet. They indicate they feel safe in school and that they have never experienced bullying at Birtenshaw School. While visiting the site of the old school building in history to compare old and new buildings, they were aware of the health and safety risks that were around.
- Pupils are proud of their fund-raising efforts and art work, for example, collages of important buildings in Bolton such as the Town Hall and the Octagon Theatre.

The leadership and management are good

- The chief executive has a strong, influential presence around the school. In addition to managing successfully the move to the new building with minimum disruption to learning and to the pupils' confidence, systems have been introduced which make the school more efficient. Staff appreciate the improved communication systems, reporting that they now feel part of a team.
- Training has been matched carefully to the needs of individual staff and to the school's priorities. Checks on the performance of teaching and support assistants are now rigorous with individual targets linked to pupils' progress. The chief executive and trustees use this information when deciding whether teachers should be paid more.
- Careful consideration is given to the number of adults working in each classroom. This gives pupils equality of opportunity while taking account of the need to give them as much independence as they can cope with, be it in the classroom, around school or out of school.
- Pupils' achievements are recorded regularly and held centrally. However, the system is cumbersome and does not allow for differences in performance to be identified easily, for example between subjects, or for pupils with different needs. Furthermore, the information is not shared sufficiently with teachers through, for example, regular pupil progress discussions.
- Keeping pupils safe is given very high priority. Staff training is thorough and includes matters that particularly affect disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Excellent

procedures are in place to protect and maintain the safety of all pupils, including those whose circumstances mean they have the potential to be vulnerable.

- Significant changes have been made to the curriculum. Pupils now spend the recommended time in lessons and all the required subjects are taught. Topics have been chosen to appeal to pupils' age and interests. However, because of the small numbers, pupils spend more than two years in each class. As there is no curriculum leader overseeing the long-term plans some pupils may repeat topics and miss others.
 - The curriculum policy is dated and does not include the identification and provision for pupils who may have a gift or talent. Good arrangements are in place for pupils new to the school who find it difficult to cope in the classroom.
 - Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development benefits from a range of visit and visitors and events such as 'Polish week'. The 'life-skills' programme improves pupils' social development.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance by the committee of trustees is good. A new chair has been appointed since the previous inspection, and a recruitment drive procured members from backgrounds that are an asset to the school such as finance and education. Members are not afraid to challenge school leaders and the chief executive, for example, in the effectiveness of staff, or the finance of the new building. They have provided very good support for the chief executive during very trying times, and have made some good appointments. Trustees are aware of the school's entitlement to the pupil premium and are doing all they can to secure the funding. Sensible, yet exciting, plans have been drawn up for increasing the number of pupils while making sure there is no risk to the current population.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105280
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	400773

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kath Smith
Headteacher	David Reid (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2009
Telephone number	01204 306043
Fax number	01204 597995
Email address	enquiries@birtenshaw.org.uk

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