



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

BIRKETT HOUSE COMMUNITY SPECIAL SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 120351

LEA: Leicestershire

Inspection Dates: 25 – 27 May 2004
Reporting Inspector: Eileen Visser HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Birkett House Community Special School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by 2 of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Birkett House is a community special school for 107 pupils aged 3 to 19 years, with severe and profound learning difficulties. Pupils in Key Stages 1-3 attend the main school and benefit from close links with local mainstream schools. Most students at 14 to 19 are co-located in a local mainstream community college. Residential accommodation at the Wigston sites provides an extended school day for forty pupils throughout the year.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

This school implements its vision of equality for all within every aspect of its work. Through the very good leadership and management and commitment from all staff, the school community works collaboratively to raise achievement and promote the personal development of the pupils. The senior management team has an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and of future development needs. Most pupils are achieving as much as they can given their prior attainment and complex learning, sensory and medical difficulties. They are actively engaged in learning and are happy in school. The assessment, recording and reporting arrangements have developed well but are not yet secure in all classes.

The 14 to 19 provision for students in a co-located mainstream college is exceptional. This demonstrates the desire of this special school to be outward looking and as inclusive as possible. Its attached residential provision offers a good service to pupils and their families that contributes to their achievements. This, together with high quality links with supporting agencies from the community, offers many of the features of an extended school. Parents appreciate these opportunities which also support family life.

The quality of the accommodation is inadequate in many respects. It is particularly poor for those with the most complex difficulties and those with autism. Nevertheless, it is a bright learning environment in most areas and staff use the display of pupils' work to very good effect.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made remarkable progress since its last inspection in 1999. All key issues have been fully addressed within a comprehensive action and development plan including:

- resolving weaknesses within middle management
- providing a broad, balanced and suitable curriculum for most pupils
- introducing comprehensive assessment procedures
- improving the quality of teaching and learning to a significant degree
- ensuring the residential provision is used flexibly and supports pupils' learning and social development.

Grade 1

Capacity to improve

The school has a strong leadership team, supported by a governing body fully aware of the improvements required. Financial constraints that have hampered developments over the past few years have been resolved by the LEA in negotiation with the headteacher. The school now has the financial security to implement many of the planned changes.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

The school's self-evaluation identified accurately areas for further development. Particular attention should be given to:

- ensuring assessment is consistently rigorous in all classes and for all groups of pupils
- improving the accommodation and provision for those pupils with the greatest need including those with autism.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The school uses information from its baseline assessments using P-scales to ensure very good outcomes for pupils. Individual and year group targets are realistically set to ensure the tracking of most pupils' achievements is thorough and contributes to whole school target setting. The trends over the last three years indicate continued improvements at all key stages. The achievements of students at the end of Key Stage 4 and the post-16 provision are particularly impressive demonstrating the cumulative effect of the good provision as children progress through the school. For example, last year all students left school with substantial accreditation with over half of the cohort achieving 188 modules within the 'Skills for Life' course.

Teacher assessment is usually accurate, supported by a developing moderation process to ensure the consistency of judgements across the school relevant to P-level performance irrespective of the age or class. The introduction of the flexible re-grouping of pupils according to their progress is promoting learning. Data analysis of individual progress and subject performance contribute to the wealth of information to track learning over time. The results of pupils' progress in communication skills are excellent. Despite these very good outcomes for most pupils there remain some inconsistencies in assessment. For example, a few higher attaining pupils could be challenged further and those with complex difficulties monitored more effectively.

Grade 1

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The personal development of all pupils is a strength of this school and one for which it is rightly proud. Attendance and behaviour are excellent. All staff know the pupils very well and the behaviour of those pupils that can be challenging is managed and understood to a high degree. Considerable care and attention are given consistently to ensure the rights of all are recognised and taken into full account.

- The start of the school day is an important event and each child is given a special welcome and time to adjust to a fresh environment. This is an important feature given the communication difficulties most pupils encounter in their everyday lives.
- The consistent use of different communication systems is a strong feature promoting personal development and enabling pupils to impose a sense of control within their lives.
- Pupils are encouraged to participate in the life of their school from the earliest years by taking opportunities in lessons and other activities to show independence according to their ability.
- There is a great sense of personal worth in this school. The mutual respect shown by adults is caught by the pupils who show concern and care for one another. This is demonstrated by impromptu applause for a success or compassion when someone is experiencing distress.
- Students located in a mainstream school are confident young adults, able to share their successes. For example, one student appearing on local television talked about his achievement in GCSE drama.

Grade 1

QUALITY OF PROVISION

Despite the considerable challenges of the accommodation the school states, and inspectors agree, that the overall quality of its provision is very good. The school's evaluation indicates that pupils are well taught. The curriculum is carefully matched to the wide range of the individual needs and a secure and caring environment has been created where pupils are guided and supported to ensure appropriate gains in their learning. The 14-19 provision for students at a co-located partner comprehensive school is exceptional.

Inspectors' evidence indicated that teaching was very good with only a small number of relative weaknesses.

- Nearly all teaching is lively and well planned. Teachers always work from the pupils' strengths. They are also precise in identifying their difficulties which they overcome through targeted support and small but significant changes to the activities.

- Relationships are warm and supportive. All staff know their pupils well, preparation for lessons is thorough and good use is made of stimulating resources to make the learning more accessible.
- Teachers make very good use of the well-trained support staff and work in seamless partnership during lessons.
- The total communication policy is a strength of the school. Signing is used effectively and consistently by all staff with targeted questioning used particularly well to develop pupils' strengths and to identify future teaching points.
- In the few cases where teachers are still developing aspects of their skills, assessment is not always used well.

Inspectors agree with the school's view that the curriculum is very good. Lessons are exciting and interesting. As well as the full range of subjects, pupils have access to a number of additional opportunities which enliven and enhance their experiences, for example, the movement sessions for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 who have difficulties with aspects of their physical development. Curricular opportunities in the post-16 department are outstanding. The department provides a rich and varied curriculum, which extends and develops each student according to their needs.

- Very good use is made of the expertise of part-time staff, for example the professional jazz musician who leads lessons in music.
- Despite the best efforts of the school, the curriculum for pupils with autism and for those with the most complex difficulties is adversely affected by the inadequacy of the accommodation.

Parents speak warmly about outstanding commitment of all staff in caring for their children and hold very positive views about the welfare arrangements. For example, parents are very pleased with the way the teachers and care staff prepare the pupils for staying in the residence and for inclusion sessions in mainstream schools.

- The school has robust and well-understood arrangements in place to ensure the safety of all pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable.
- Given the particular needs of the pupils, an especially high priority is given to health issues. A school nurse is available on site and there are other strong links with health professionals and those from other agencies.

Grade: 1

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Inspectors have no hesitation in agreeing with the self-evaluation of the school that the leadership of the governing body, headteacher, deputy headteacher and the senior management team is very good.

- The school's vision of inclusion and equality for all is demonstrated in action by all the senior managers, especially the headteacher. His commitment to high standards and a quality experience for all pupils throughout their school life – and beyond - is outstanding.
- The role of the school's curriculum and management leaders has improved significantly since the last inspection. They are now instrumental in ensuring that improvements are sustained across subjects and departments as a result of very good monitoring and evaluation systems.
- The governing body supports the school well. It is active and effective in carrying out its responsibilities.
- Funding has been used particularly well; the school provides very good value for money.
- Staffing is very well matched to pupils' needs. The school's resources adequately support the curriculum.
- An outstanding feature of the school is the high quality professional development offered to all staff based on a careful audit of skills and well matched to performance management reviews.

Grade 1:



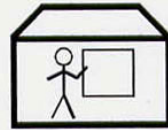
A REPORT OF BIRKETT HOUSE SCHOOL FOR



CHILDREN



by Elieen Visser and Anne Orton HMI



Our school is:



Very good.



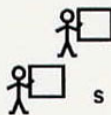
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It helps us to do the best we can.



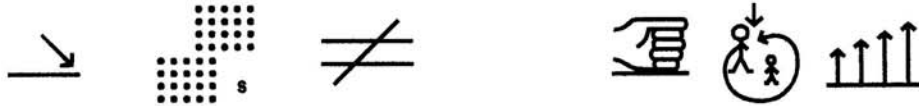
We come to school every day. We are kind to one another.



s



We listen to our teachers and do our best.



There are lots of different activities to help us grow.



Our teachers work hard and we like working with them. We



help each other.



We know lots of people around us who help us -



we have lots of visitors to share things with.



When we stay over night at school it helps us to grow up



and our families like it.



We are helped to move through the school and achieve a lot when



we go to college and leave school.

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