



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

**Inspection report**  
**Birdholme Nursery and Infant School**

**Derbyshire Education Authority**

Dates of inspection: 12 and 13 October 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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## **Basic information about the school**

Name of school:	Birdholme Nursery and Infant School
Type of school:	Nursery and Infant
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 7 years
Headteacher:	Ms J Garrett
Address of school:	Derby Road Chesterfield Derbyshire S40 2EU
Telephone:	01246 234727
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mrs M Lievesley
Local education authority area:	Derbyshire
Unique reference number:	112660
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs K M Gisborne HMI
Dates of inspection:	12 and 13 October 2004

## Introduction

1. Birdholme Nursery and Infant School is situated on the outskirts of Chesterfield. Pupils mostly come from the school's immediate area, where there is a high level of social deprivation. There are 85 pupils on roll and a further 66 who attend the community nursery on a part-time basis. A diagnostic nursery for pupils who have special educational needs, attached to the school, takes children from a wider area, and has 16 pupils on roll. Almost all the pupils in the school are from white, English speaking backgrounds. Fifty four per cent of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals; this is well above the national average. Thirteen pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need; all of whom attend the diagnostic nursery. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are well below those expected for their age.

2. The school was inspected in October 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of October 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on four occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In October 2004, two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of October 2002.

## Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- the school's results in the 2003 national tests at the end of Key Stage 1, when set against those of 2001, showed a significant improvement in the percentages achieving the expected Level 2. The percentages of pupils achieving the higher sub-levels within Level 2 were well above those of similar schools in reading, writing and mathematics;
- the results of the 2004 national tests, as yet unvalidated, show that this trend of improvement has continued. In reading, writing and mathematics all pupils achieved Level 2 with an average of 90 per cent gaining the higher sub-levels. These are very good results for this school;
- the pupils enter the nursery with levels of attainment that are well below those expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress overall, and good progress in some areas of learning. However, the nursery's approach to the focused teaching of communication, language and literacy and mathematical development is too formal;

- in the reception class, the pupils make very good progress and the majority of them achieve the expected goals for their learning, with a significant proportion working at higher levels;
  - limited language and communication skills hold back pupils' progress in other subjects;
  - evidence from lessons and the pupils' work shows a wide range of attainment among current pupils in Year 2, but overall their attainment is below national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. However, these pupils are making good progress and many have the potential to achieve Level 2 with a small group on course to achieve Level 3;
  - the pupils' knowledge in science is appropriate for their age, and their investigative skills are developing well. Their attainment in the foundation subjects is generally in line with the expectations for their age;
  - in Key Stage 1, standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are lower than they should be. The teachers are beginning to broaden the use of technology in their teaching. However, they do not yet have a secure knowledge of the levels at which pupils are working or the skills to use the ICT resources to improve the pupils' learning;
  - the pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to their work are good in most lessons;
  - the school has very good procedures for monitoring and improving the pupils' attendance. However, despite improvements over the past three years, the attendance figure of 93.5 per cent for last term remains below the national figure;
  - the provision for pupils' social, moral and spiritual development is good. Cultural development is less well developed. The school is aware that further work is needed in expanding the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the multicultural society in which they live;
  - the quality of teaching was good or better in half of the lessons. This is a very good improvement since the inspection of October 2002;
  - the curriculum for pupils in the Foundation Stage is good. Appropriate emphasis is given to communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. In Key Stage 1, the curriculum, with the exception of ICT, meets the pupils' needs. The school makes good use of targeted intervention and enrichment activities to address the specific needs of pupils of different abilities;
  - the school has very good procedures for assessment and uses the data it has to very good effect. The use of individual and group targets for pupils is improving the pace at which they learn and enhancing the pupils' self-esteem;
  - the provision for the pupils in the diagnostic nursery is very good;
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- the headteacher has a clear vision for the school and provides effective leadership. Her evaluation of the school's current position is good. The school has a strong senior management team whose members are committed to raising standards and improving the quality of provision. The co-ordinators for English, mathematics and assessment lead their areas very well and have high levels of expertise. The school fosters a strong team spirit;
- the school's plan for improvement is good. It is firmly based on a thorough analysis of the school's current position and gives a strategic overview of future developments;
- the governing body is increasingly well informed about the school's performance. Governors are beginning to monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively. They are led by a strong and committed chair;
- The local education authority (LEA) has provided good support for the school during the time that it has been subject to special measures. The support has been well co-ordinated and matched to the school's needs. The support provided by the link adviser has been very good. She has provided the practical assistance that was needed and has worked well with staff and governors.

## **Key issues**

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- raise standards in ICT;
- improve pupils' communication and language skills;
- ensure that, in the nursery, communication, language and literacy and mathematics are taught in a way that is appropriate for the pupils' ages.

## **Inspection findings**

### **Standards achieved by the pupils**

7. Standards in Year 2 have improved significantly since the inspection of October 2002. In the 2003 national tests, the percentages of pupils who achieved Level 2, the basic standard, was well above those of similar schools in reading and above in writing and mathematics. In reading, there was an increase of 18 percentage points and in mathematics 21 percentage points over the two-year period. There have been corresponding improvements in the proportions of pupils who reached higher sub-levels within Level 2, and in 2003 the school's results were well above those of similar schools.

8. The results of the 2004 national tests, as yet unvalidated, show that this trend of improvement has continued. In reading, writing and mathematics all pupils achieved Level 2 with around 90 per cent achieving the higher sub-levels. Considering the low levels at which many of these pupils entered the school, these are very good results. The improvement in

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standards is attributable to higher quality teaching, better use of assessment data and higher expectations of what the pupils can achieve.

9. The pupils enter the Foundation Stage with levels of attainment that are well below average. Their communication skills and personal and social development are poor. In the nursery, they make satisfactory progress overall, and good progress in some areas of learning. Over the past six months there have been many very positive changes in practice, which have resulted in a faster pace of learning for many pupils. The nursery staff have shown a real commitment to improvement, but their practice is too formal in the more focused teaching of communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. The staff have not yet developed the confidence to blend the richness of exciting activities with rigorous assessment and high expectations. In the reception class, the pupils make very good progress and in 2003 the majority achieved the learning goals expected for their age with a significant proportion working at higher levels. They benefit from a range of well-planned experiences and are enthusiastic about their learning.

10. The pupils' have limited language and communication skills which hold back their learning in other subjects. They speak with confidence, but in mathematics they find it hard to find the right words to explain their methods, and inaccuracies in their speech are reflected in their writing. Their basic vocabulary and sentence construction are not sufficiently developed. Teachers make every effort to introduce and explain new technical vocabulary and the pupils are beginning to use these words when they talk about their work; for example, reception pupils are beginning to understand the words 'independent work' and can name objects such as a magnifying glass.

11. At this early stage in the school year, evidence from lessons and the pupils' work shows a wide range of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1. Overall, the pupils' levels of attainment are below national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the Year 2 pupils are making good progress and many pupils have the potential to achieve Level 2, with a small group on course to achieve the higher Level 3.

12. The pupils read simple texts with accuracy and recognise a reasonable range of words on sight. They use more than one strategy to help them read unfamiliar words, but find it hard to identify an unknown word from its context. They know the purpose of simple punctuation, but do not use it when reading aloud to make sense of the text. Many pupils' reading lacks breadth and only the more able can talk about the books they have enjoyed and their favourite authors.

13. Many pupils' writing reflects their speech and their poor vocabulary; for example, writing 'they was' instead of 'they were', and using very basic vocabulary to express their ideas. The more-able pupils write stories that have a beginning, middle and end. They are beginning to extend their sentences through the use of conjunctions and to use words such as 'next' and 'after that' to denote the passage of time. Simple punctuation is used appropriately, and in their spelling the pupils make good use of their phonic knowledge to write unfamiliar words. In some cases, the writing of less-able pupils is difficult to decipher. They do not always use spaces to separate their words and the letters are not of a consistent size. Their ideas are not developed in order and they are expressed in very simple phrases.

14. In mathematics, the pupils are good at recognising numbers and have a developing understanding of place value. Their mental and oral skills are not so secure. Many cannot

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quickly recall the numbers that make ten. When adding two numbers together, too few count on from the larger number, but put two sets of objects together and count from one. Only the more-able pupils are beginning to see patterns in numbers and to apply what they know to more difficult problems; for example, using the fact that they know 6+4 makes 10 to add together 26 and 4. All pupils have a good knowledge of the names and properties of two and three-dimensional shapes.

15. The pupils' knowledge in science is appropriate for their age, and their investigative skills are developing well. Their attainment in the foundation subjects is generally in line with what is expected for their age.

16. In Key Stage 1, standards in ICT are lower than they should be and the teachers do not have a secure knowledge of the levels at which pupils are working. There have been improvements in the school's provision for this subject, including resources, but the improvements are recent and have had a limited impact on the standards that the pupils are achieving in all strands of the subject.

17. The pupils enter the nursery with levels of attainment that are well below those expected for their age. They make good progress overall in the Foundation Stage. This good pace of learning continues for most pupils in Key Stage 1.

### **The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

18. The pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to their work are good in most lessons. They are interested in their work and confident to respond to the teachers' questions. They listen attentively, follow instructions well and settle quickly to their tasks. Pupils work independently, take turns and support each other where necessary. At break and lunchtime they play well together. The pupils are respectful of one another and their teachers. They are courteous to visitors and have a sense of pride in their school.

19. The school provides a safe and caring environment for its pupils. All staff fully support a range of strategies designed to reward and promote good behaviour. Pupils who behave inappropriately are dealt with sensitively on an individual basis. Pupils' achievements are suitably acknowledged at assemblies to which the parents of those who are to receive awards are invited. The physical environment of the school is much improved and displays and objects of interest capture the pupils' interest and motivate them to learn.

20. There are very good procedures for monitoring and improving the pupils' attendance. However, despite improvements over the past three years, the school's attendance of 93.5 per cent last term remains below the national figure. The school's detailed analysis of absence data shows that in the past year almost two per cent is attributable to family holidays in term time. The school is doing all it can to improve the pupils' attendance.

21. The provision for pupils' social and moral development is good. The headteacher and the staff have created a calm and well-ordered environment in which pupils feel secure. Opportunities for collaborative working in lessons are encouraged through small group and paired activities. At playtime and lunchtime pupils are encouraged to be active and a wide range of resources is made available to encourage social play. Older pupils can volunteer as 'friendship buddies' to offer support to others during break times. The 'buddy' system has helped promote a culture of social responsibility. The importance of kindness to others is

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reinforced by posters and displays around the school. The school's clear behaviour code is helping pupils to recognise right from wrong.

22. A healthy living project promotes healthy eating; it has been successfully included in the curriculum and determines the school lunch menu. All the children and staff, together with members of the local community, have been involved in the creation of an organic wildlife garden. As yet, the involvement of parents in this initiative has been limited. Although in its early stages, this exciting new project has the potential to become a valuable learning resource.

23. Provision for spiritual development is good. A regular visitor leads faith assemblies which include an act of collective worship. The pupils enjoy this experience and participate enthusiastically in singing. Pupils in Year 2 recently visited a local church as part of their religious education. Pupils' reflections on the visit were positive and they willingly shared their experiences with their class visitor.

24. The pupils' awareness of other cultures is less well developed. A recent music event introduced the pupils to African music, and photographs and posters of the event are displayed prominently. Work on the tropical rainforest included a study of the indigenous people of the region. The school is aware that further work is needed in expanding the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the multicultural society in which they live.

### **The quality of education**

25. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. The teaching was satisfactory or better in 14 of the 16 lessons; it was good in five and very good in three. This is a very good improvement since the inspection of October 2002. However, lower attaining pupils in Year 1 are not taught as well as those in the rest of the school. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to teaching at group level, but the quality of their contributions to whole-class sessions is too variable.

26. The teachers know their pupils well and set work that matches their abilities. They care for the pupils as individual children as well as members of their class. There are well-established routines and high expectations of behaviour. Praise is used to good effect and all pupils are already involved in lessons. An appropriate emphasis is given to improving the pupils' vocabulary. Teachers and support staff work well together and provide good role models for the pupils.

27. Where the teaching was good or very good, the teachers provided stimulating activities that the pupils were eager to explore. Practical resources were very well prepared and enabled the pupils to investigate and learn for themselves. There was a good balance of direct teaching and the development of the pupils' own ideas. The teachers made links between different subjects, which made the learning more relevant, without losing the focus for their lessons. Their use of body language and facial expression added interest and enjoyment for their pupils. Questioning was at a high level and teachers encouraged their pupils to improve and extend their answers.

28. Where unsatisfactory teaching occurred, routines were not sufficiently established and pupils took too long to respond to the teacher's instructions; as a result the pace of learning was too slow. The activities did not provide sufficient challenge for more-able

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pupils and there was too much emphasis on what pupils had done rather than what they had learned. Lessons were taught in a monotone and, as a result, the pupils lost interest.

29. The curriculum for pupils in the Foundation Stage is good, and includes all the areas of learning, with appropriate emphasis given to communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. Regular monitoring and evaluation procedures help to ensure that the curriculum is taught effectively.

30. In Key Stage 1 the curriculum, with the exception of ICT, meets the pupils' needs. In English and mathematics the school makes good use of targeted intervention and enrichment activities to address the specific needs of pupils of different abilities. The curriculum for science has recently been updated and good emphasis has been given to the importance of investigations. The recent provision of a well-equipped computer suite has provided the school with improved facilities for the teaching of ICT. The teachers are at the very early stages of using the suite as a teaching resource. They do not yet use the facilities to foster better learning. Teachers do not have a secure knowledge of the levels that their pupils are working at and consequently the match of work to their ability is not secure. The pupils do not have sufficient access to computers in the classrooms or in the computer suite.

31. The school has very good procedures for assessment and uses the data it has to very good effect. Teachers carry out regular assessments of their pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and use the results to assess the progress that individuals have made and to set targets for the future. When discussing interventions, senior managers focus very appropriately on those pupils who are underachieving, as opposed to those who attain the lower levels. These interventions are well-thought-out and carefully matched to need. The use of individual and group targets for pupils is improving the pace at which they learn and enhancing their self-esteem.

32. The provision for the pupils in the diagnostic nursery is very good. There is a safe and secure environment in which the pupils make appropriate progress. The staff know the pupils well and provide effectively for their individual needs. They show infinite patience and care and the pupils are happy to be with them. There is a good balance between the time that pupils have to explore their environment and time for direct teaching. The staff deal skilfully with difficult situations that arise.

33. The school is developing its relationships with parents and the local community. Parents are welcomed into classrooms each morning to work briefly with their children. The parents have given good support to the school's policy on uniform. A group of volunteer workers helps the school on a regular basis. Links with a private provider have enabled the school to offer extended hours for care and education. The school has strong links with local junior and secondary schools and they work well together as part of an 'excellence cluster'.

### **Leadership and management**

34. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and provides effective leadership. Her evaluation of the school's current position is good. She has a clear view of the impact that recent initiatives have had on the pupils' learning and identifies and plans in detail for what is needed next. She works well with the senior management team and provides them with good opportunities for their own professional development. The strong senior management team is committed to raising standards and improving the quality of provision.

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They work well together and provide the headteacher with a very good level of support. This is a good improvement since the inspection of October 2002.

35. The co-ordinators for English, mathematics and assessment lead their areas very well and have high levels of expertise. Those responsible for science and ICT know what is needed to bring about improvements in their subjects and are currently establishing good systems and structures to enable this. All developments follow on from a thorough audit of need and are carefully monitored and evaluated to ensure that they contribute to the school's goal of raising achievement. There is a strong team spirit.

36. The school's plan for improvement is good. It is firmly based on a thorough analysis of the current position and gives a strategic overview of future developments in important aspects of provision. The overall plan is supported well by more detailed improvement plans for subjects and aspects of the school's work. The targets contained in the plans enable the school to effectively monitor and evaluate its progress. The school reflects on its performance and carefully monitors and evaluates all that it does.

37. The governing body is increasingly well informed about the school's performance. A good structure of committees with clear terms of reference has been established. Governors have an improved knowledge of the curriculum and are beginning to monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively. They have benefited from training on this aspect of their role. Individual governors are beginning to take responsibility for monitoring the development of subjects. The governors are led by a strong and committed chair who knows the school well and has effectively supported the school in making difficult decisions about staffing.

38. The LEA has provided good support for the school during the time that it has been subject to special measures. The support has been well co-ordinated and matched to the school's needs. As the school has become more able to identify and implement its own agenda for improvement the LEA has appropriately taken a less active strategic role. The support provided by the link adviser has been very good. She has provided the practical assistance that the school has needed and has worked well with staff and governors. The additional financial support that the LEA has provided has been well-thought-out and matched to the school's needs.

### **Implementation of the action plan**

39. The inspection report of 2002 required the school to address three main areas for improvement. These were: to raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics; to improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in Year 1; and to improve the leadership and management at all levels within the school. After a slow start in addressing the key issues related to teaching and leadership and management, the school has made good progress overall.

40. There has been a good improvement in the standards in most classes and a very good improvement in the reception class and Year 2. However, improvements have taken longer to achieve in some year groups than in others. The slower progress that some pupils have made has been the result of frequent staffing changes. This has been beyond the school's control, but has been resolved very recently.

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41. With the exception of Year 1, where there is no permanent teacher and the quality of teaching remains lower than it should be, there has been a very good improvement in the quality of the teaching. The proportion of good teaching has increased significantly.

42. The leadership and management of the school are much improved at all levels. Improvement was slow initially but changes in membership of the senior management team have led to rapid improvement over the last two terms.

## **Appendix – Information about the inspection**

Birdholme Nursery and Infant School was inspected in October 2002 by an HMI and an Additional Inspector under section 3 of the School's Inspection Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in May and October 2003, and in January and May 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of October 2002.

In October 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Sixteen lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, key staff, the chair of governors and a representative of the LEA and informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of October 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.