



Birch Hill Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109893
LEA Bracknell Forest LEA
Inspection number 278304
Inspection dates 3 July 2006 to 4 July 2006
Reporting inspector Steven Hill AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Leppington
School category	Community		Bracknell
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		RG12 7WW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01344 455815
Number on roll	488	Fax number	01344 306573
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr David Clitherow
Date of previous inspection	10 July 2000	Headteacher	Mr Alan Harding

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 3 July 2006 - 4 July 2006	Inspection number 278304
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school with a nursery, serving a socially diverse area in Bracknell. Over 90% of pupils are of White British origin, with the rest having a range of minority ethnic heritages. About 95% of pupils have a home language of English, and three are at the early stages of learning English. The attainment of pupils when they start in the Nursery is below average, particularly in speaking and listening skills. A number of pupils from a local special school spend four days a week at Birch Hill.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school judges that it provides a satisfactory education and is improving, and the inspection team agrees. Achievement is satisfactory because of satisfactory teaching and learning. Standards are broadly average by the time pupils leave.

The school has some notable strengths. Pupils' personal development is good, because of the good care and guidance they receive from all staff. They behave well, enjoy school, and form very positive relationships with each other and with staff. They are cared for very well and develop into confident, well-adjusted young people who play an active and responsible part in the school and wider community. There is an exciting curriculum with a wide programme of enrichment activities.

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good, and standards are broadly average by the end of Reception. Pupils make good progress up to Year 2 and reach above-average standards because of good teaching, small classes and very effective help from skilled teaching assistants. They make satisfactory progress from Years 3 to 6, where teaching in these larger classes is satisfactory, with some significant strengths. A slowing down of progress in Year 3 in previous years has been eliminated by recent changes in class arrangements.

The school's assessment systems are satisfactory, but vary between subjects. A good track is kept of the overall progress, and teachers try to match work to pupils' individual needs. However, the effectiveness of this varies between lessons, because the assessment is often not in a form that helps teachers' planning. Teachers set targets for pupils, but these are not always sufficiently individual, and pupils are not involved enough in devising them.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection, and is now well placed to improve further. Issues identified then have largely been rectified but, until this year, the school had not made much impact on the weaker achievement of older pupils. Subject leaders provide a clear direction to colleagues, but have insufficient opportunities to observe each other teaching, to share good practice and so bring about improvements. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give subject leaders more opportunities to observe colleagues so they can help them refine and improve their practice
- Improve assessment procedures so that teachers are better able to match work to pupils' needs
- Involve pupils more in setting their targets, and make them more specific to the individual, so that pupils can take more responsibility for their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average overall. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, and do particularly well in their language skills and their personal and social development. At the end of Year 2, standards have been above average for several years because of good achievement in the younger classes. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 3 to 6.

For some time, as the school had correctly identified, achievement was not as good in the older classes, leading to broadly average standards by Year 6. The school identified that this was because of the major differences in pupils' experiences as they went into the junior classes, largely due to the particular class organisation used. This led to a major slow down in progress during Year 3. Class arrangements were changed in September 2005, and results are positive. Pupils are now making satisfactory progress in Year 3, as well as in the other older classes. The attainment of the current pupils in Year 6 is average in English, and slightly above average in mathematics and science. Suitably challenging targets are set and pupils generally meet them, although this had been a problem at Year 3 in previous years.

Achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory, an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because of the effective, well-organised help they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school. As a pupil in Year 2 said, 'We enjoy school because teachers are honest and they make us to do some new things every day'. Pupils behave well and show good attitudes to learning. Relationships are excellent and, from Nursery onwards, children are polite and friendly to each other. Attendance is average and pupils arrive on time.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They reflect on feelings and emotions, and on issues such as bullying and sharing, and talk sensitively about these. They show strong social skills when participating in the 'buddy system' and 'peer mediation'. Pupils from this school and the special school play and work well together, valuing their contributions and respecting differences. Pupils show a good understanding of different cultures.

They know what constitutes a healthy diet and engage in a wide range of physical activities. They eagerly take responsibilities, such as on the school council, and show good levels of independence. They make valuable contributions to the community, for example through fund raising and getting involved in local events. Their sound achievements in basic skills help to prepare them for their future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are good in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2. Teaching through the school shows the same range of strengths and weaknesses, but there is more good teaching in the younger classes.

Teachers have positive relationships with pupils and establish clear expectations of work and behaviour. As a result, lessons are orderly, and pupils work hard and concentrate well. Pupils who struggle with their work get good support from teaching assistants, and make good progress. In the better lessons, tasks are well matched to the different needs of all pupils. Lessons have a good pace, and pupils are given interesting, challenging or practical things to do that engender concentration and enthusiasm.

Lessons that are only satisfactory frequently have a more mundane pace, often related to weaknesses in teachers' understanding of how to teach particular aspects of a subject. In others, the match of work to pupils' needs is not precise enough, so it is too easy for some pupils, or too hard for others.

Assessment procedures are variable. Regular assessments are made of pupils' progress, but these are not always recorded in a way that helps teachers to plan for the next steps in learning. This underpins the weaknesses sometimes seen in matching work to the needs of individuals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum is greatly enriched by visits and visitors. Pupils participate in an extensive range of extra curricular activities, which include sports, arts, French and problem solving. These contribute to pupils' physical, social and cultural development and add to their enjoyment of school. Recent changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 2 have ensured a better match to pupils' individual needs, leading to better progress, particularly in Year 3. Good use is made of ICT to support work in other subjects. Pupils in Year 3 spoke enthusiastically of the need to construct grammatically correct e-mails when writing to another school. Pupils are learning to live healthy lives and to stay safe through the school's effective personal, social and health education programme. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is good, with a good balance between teacher directed activities and those children choose for themselves.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All pupils are helped to feel special. They feel safe and secure because, as a pupil in Year 6 said, 'This is a friendly place and everyone feels included.' This contributes

enormously to their good personal development. Pupils are confident that an adult or another pupil will always be there ready to help if they need it. Secure child protection, health and safety and risk assessment procedures are in place and reviewed regularly. Arrangements for transition to the next school are good.

Pupils are taught very effectively about healthy lifestyles, through such things as the extensive and popular provision for exercise, consistent encouragement to drink lots of water, and healthy options at lunchtimes.

Pupils who struggle with their work do well because they are supported very effectively. The school uses assessment information to set targets for learning for all groups of pupils. However, these are not individual enough and pupils are not sufficiently involved in devising and monitoring them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide good leadership and clear direction. They ensure a shared vision for the school, leading to good quality care, coupled with a clear focus on raising standards. The school is inclusive. All pupils are made welcome and are valued. Standards are above average in younger classes and, as a result of recent improvements, are rising for older pupils.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory. Development planning accurately highlights the school's strengths and weaknesses and outlines action to bring about improvements. School leaders ensure that all teachers contribute their views through participation in subject 'development groups'. The views of pupils and parents are sought and valued. Tracking of pupils' progress showed the need to raise standards for older pupils, and action this year in reorganising the class structure is starting to bear fruit. The monitoring of teaching gives senior management a clear overview of strengths and weaknesses. However, subject leaders are not sufficiently involved in this, so lack opportunities to help their colleagues improve their practice.

The governors are supportive. They have a secure understanding of the strategic development of the school and act effectively as 'critical friends'. The sound improvements since the last inspection, and the recent work to raise standards, show the school is well placed to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Pupils

Thank you for all your help when we visited your school. We enjoyed watching you working in lessons, and talking to you about the school. This is what we found out.

Birch Hill is a satisfactory school with lots of good things going on. We were very impressed by your good behaviour, your hard work and how well you all get on. You are right to be proud of the good work that you do to help each other, by taking on jobs like buddies, peer mediators and school council members. You get lots of exciting things to do in class, and have plenty of clubs to go to at other times. The youngest children get off to a flying start with their learning. In the last few years, this slowed down too much when you went into Year 3, but the school has changed the class arrangements and the older children are now doing much better. By the time you leave, most pupils have reached the standards the government expects. You generally learn well in lessons because teachers explain things clearly. Teachers try to make sure that you get work that is just right for you. Sometimes they find this hard, because the notes that are kept about how you are doing are difficult to use, so some children get work that is too hard or too easy. We have asked the school to improve this. You get targets for learning in your groups, but we think you should have targets that are just for you, and that you should help your teachers decide on these, and use them to keep track on how you are doing.

The headteacher and deputy are good at organising the school, and all the staff work hard to make it even better. Teachers try hard to help each other, and we think they should spend more time visiting each other's classrooms, so they can share good ideas and pass on tips to each other about helping you learn. We hope that you enjoy the rest of term, and that it isn't quite so hot!

Best wishes,

Steven Hill

Lead Inspector