



Redditch, Birchensale Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116967
LEA Worcestershire
Inspection number 279965
Inspection dates 5 July 2006 to 6 July 2006
Reporting inspector Clive Kempton HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Bridley Moor Road
School category	Community		Redditch
Age range of pupils	9 to 13		Worcestershire B97 6HT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01527 68430
Number on roll	365	Fax number	01527 584190
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr John Witherspoon
Date of previous inspection	3 April 2000	Headteacher	Ms Ingrid Bridgewater

Age group 9 to 13	Inspection dates 5 July 2006 - 6 July 2006	Inspection number 279965
-----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Birchensale Middle School is situated in a socially disadvantaged area close to the centre of Redditch. The number of pupils from ethnic minority groups is higher than average. There is a higher than average number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school has a newly refurbished and well-resourced building. Standards on entry to the school are generally below average. It has achieved Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark awards for the quality of its provision. The school is the hub for the recently awarded extended school status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Birchensale Middle is a good school, a view shared by parents and other professionals who work with the school. The school is a special place in the community that cares about all its pupils. As a consequence, pupils' personal development and the guidance and support they receive are good. Whilst standards are below those expected nationally in Year 6, they are improving year on year and predicted by the school to reach national averages by 2008. Standards are broadly average by the time pupils reach Year 8. Pupils make good progress taking account of their starting points when they enter the school, and by the time they reach the end of Year 9 in the high schools, most have achieved national standards. However more able pupils in Year 5 are not consistently challenged. Teaching and the curriculum are both good and pupils have rich opportunities in after school clubs and school holiday activities to learn more.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection despite the disruptive time when it was being extended and refurbished. The quality of leadership and management is generally good. The head and deputy lead by example with vision and determination, supported by a committed senior leadership team. They are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses identified in their own self-evaluation, such as the need to continue to raise standards, especially in writing, and appropriately plan lessons to challenge all pupils. The award of lead school in the extended school initiative has provided an added dimension to their work and provides good opportunities for family learning and additional out of school activities that also have the potential to further raise pupils' standards. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the more able pupils, especially in Year 5, are consistently challenged in all lessons.
- Ensure that all lesson planning takes account of the wide range of ability in each class.
- Improve writing across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are improving. Relatively high numbers of pupils transfer to Birchensale Middle School from their first schools with lower standards in English and mathematics than the national average. Results in national tests are still below average in English and mathematics in Year 6 but have improved steadily over the last two years. Test results in 2006 are the best ever for the school, especially in science. Standards seen in lessons suggest this trend of improvement is likely to continue and pupils' performance will move closer to the national averages.

The school tests pupils on entry in Year 5, and typically, over half do not read at the level expected for their age, which impacts on standards in all subjects. However, in

2006 national tests showed that by the end of Year 6 three quarters of the pupils had reached expected reading levels. Achievement in writing, though, is less marked and is moving at a slower pace. There are missed opportunities to extend pupils' writing skills in subjects beyond English. In mathematics achievement is improving for all groups of learners. Considering their starting points, most pupils make good progress during their four years at the school, although more could be done specifically to challenge more able pupils in Year 5. In Year 7 and Year 8, pupils continue to make good progress and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school. The local high schools report that most pupils securely reach national expectations by the end of Year 9. Generally, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those whose first language is not English also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. They enjoy their education, are enthusiastic, behave well, and have positive attitudes towards the school and their work. They are polite, friendly and very supportive towards each other. Attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils are proud of their school. Pupils report that they feel safe around the school. They enjoy accepting responsibility and helping one another. This is demonstrated by the School Council and the anti-bullying 'buddy' system. Pupils feel their opinions are listened to and acted upon.

Pupils make a positive contribution to their community through, for example, the 'Dreamscheme' where pupils tidy up local gardens, or give music performances in local homes for the elderly such as the school choir. The Dreamscheme initiative also makes a positive contribution to pupils' economic well-being and enterprise skills, through growing plants from seeds, selling to the public, financial accounting and developing their own gardens at home, and enjoying the produce with the families. The school promotes healthy lifestyles through its healthy lunchtime options, and pupils know about the importance of exercise and eating healthy food.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The successful charity work allows pupils to empathise with others. The school has achieved the Artsmark gold award and has acquired a range of funding to work with professional artists to produce impressive sculptures in the school grounds that involve links with local fabrication companies. The school environment is stimulating and demonstrates a rich cultural and social experience for pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good. Pupils enjoy their lessons and their positive attitudes towards learning ensure that most make good progress. The school is working hard to encourage 'pupil autonomy' so that pupils take more responsibility for their own

learning. Lessons are calm and orderly with a purposeful atmosphere. Pupils answer questions eagerly and relationships between teachers and pupils are positive. Whilst teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, not all lessons are planned to meet fully the needs of all learners. This means that sometimes, more able pupils in Year 5 are not sufficiently challenged. Teachers mark work thoroughly and pupils are encouraged to assess their own and others' work. The school uses a very good and detailed system for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets to help them improve. Classroom assistants are particularly good at supporting those with learning difficulties and disabilities or those pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is well planned and appropriate for all learners. It meets national requirements with a strong emphasis on developing communication and life skills. The curriculum is enriched by a very wide range of projects and events linked to the Arts, sport and music. Visits, including ski trips abroad and other residential trips, further enhance pupils' experiences. Of particular note is an adventure weekend with parents in an outdoor activity centre. All involved speak enthusiastically about these opportunities, some of which are rewards for hard work. There is a good range of before and after school activities that are well attended and extend pupils' learning. Staff volunteer their time to develop pupils' skills and enjoyment. The school, through extended school status, fully supports parents who want advice on helping their children succeed by running curriculum workshops and promoting family literacy.

The Learning Resource area is taking a positive lead in promoting a reading culture for pupils. Supplementary programmes to support those who have learning difficulties and disabilities are effective and are helping pupils to make good progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support for pupils is good. There are good systems in place for monitoring attendance. There are a range of measures in place to reward 100% attendance, from a house point for a week's attendance to a certificate and raffle tickets for a term. Two students have just won a bicycle in the raffle for their good attendance.

Teaching and non-teaching staff know their pupils very well and work hard to provide a good level of care and support. The school is successful in integrating pupils with behavioural difficulties from other schools. It has good links with a range of other agencies. If pupils are experiencing emotional difficulties, timely support and intervention ensure they get the help they need. There is a 're-focus room' and a recently appointed learning mentor is available to support pupils with personal problems.

The procedures for protecting the welfare of pupils and ensuring their safety are rigorous. The school provides a safe and secure environment for its pupils. It has

implemented a good range of security measures such as fencing and CCTV cameras which have substantially reduced the incidents of break-ins in recent years. The school has good procedures and systems in place for child protection and health and safety. Pupils report that incidents of bullying and racism are rare and effectively dealt with by the 'bully buddies' or pastoral staff. The school's pastoral system supports pupils well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher and her deputy lead with vision and purpose and, supported by the two assistant headteachers, have successfully managed to develop a dynamic team of committed staff who work hard to support pupils. They know the school well through their regular monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of its provision and are clearly able to demonstrate pupils' good progress. Between 2001 and 2003 the school suffered a period of serious decline in standards when it was difficult to recruit appropriate senior staff, and a massive wrap-around building extension and refurbishment programme disrupted pupils' learning. Whilst the school is now very well resourced and accommodation is bright and plentiful, it is cold in the winter and hot in the summer, creating an occasionally uncomfortable working environment. In other respects, the school has made rapid progress from a low point and clearly has the capacity to continue to improve.

The senior managers appreciate, value and promote the individual skills of both members of staff and pupils. The Administrative Officer for example, has acquired a business qualification and taken on additional management roles with line management responsibility for some of the administrative staff. Pupils have been democratically elected to posts of responsibility such as head boy and girl, prefects, buddies, peer mentors, and various class monitors and representatives.

Parents are very positive about the school and the significance of its role within the community. They are regularly consulted about their views and these are acted upon, for example an interim report of pupil progress to parents was introduced. The governors are critical friends to the school, one working extensively with pupils on the Dreamscheme initiative, but they are not yet sufficiently involved in the school's self-evaluation process. Other professionals involved with the school, such as the local community policeman, are impressed with its achievements and its unstinting desire to work with the community to extend and improve pupils' opportunities.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	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	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	2	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	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	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	2	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	Yes
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

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we visited your school in July. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. We thought you would like to know what we thought about your school and how it could become even better.

You were all very polite and well behaved in your lessons and as you moved around the school.

Most of you try really hard with your work.

Those of you who need extra help are getting some good support to help you learn.

You all looked very smart in your school uniform.

Your teachers work very hard for you and prepare interesting lessons that give you lots of learning activities.

Mrs Bridgewater and her senior team lead the school well. All the teachers and support staff are very proud of your achievements.

You are very lucky that the school provides so many opportunities for you to get involved in other activities outside school time and in the school holidays.

Your attendance at school is good. The greatest progress is made with those of you who attend regularly.

Your charity work helps others who are not as fortunate as you.

You and your parents obviously enjoy the residential weekends and opportunities to do things together.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked Mrs Bridgewater and the teachers to make sure:

that those of you with special talents should get more challenging work

that all of you get the sort of work in lessons that suits your ability

that your writing improves in all subjects, not just in literacy.

Clive Kempton HMI Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools