



# Birch Wood School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 134640  
**LEA** Leicestershire  
**Inspection number** 282627  
**Inspection dates** 10 July 2006 to 10 July 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Michael Megee AI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Grange Drive
<b>School category</b>	Community		Melton Mowbray
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 19		Leicestershire LE13 1HA
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01664 483340
<b>Number on roll</b>	93	<b>Fax number</b>	01664 483349
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Dr Matthew O'Callaghan
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Kate Waplington

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
5 to 19	10 July 2006 - 10 July 2006	282627

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## **Description of the school**

Birch Wood is a special school that serves Melton Mowbray and the surrounding area. Two thirds of the pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Most of the remainder have severe learning difficulties, with a small number of pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. More than half the pupils have autism in addition to their learning difficulties. A very small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few have English as an additional language. When pupils start school their overall level of attainment is well below the national average. The school was formed in 2004, as a result of the amalgamation of two special schools. It shares a campus with mainstream nursery, primary and secondary schools.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Birch Wood is a good and improving school. It has achieved a lot in a short while since opening and it is well set to become even more effective in the future. It gives good value for money. The findings of the inspection are consistent with the school's own evaluations. The school is a very pleasant, harmonious and enjoyable place for pupils to learn in.

Pupils make good progress in school because, on the whole, their work is well planned to match their levels of ability and to provide activities that will interest and challenge them. Achievement is good in most subjects, apart from information and communication technology (ICT), where progress has been hampered by a lack of resources. Teaching quality is good because of the effective teamwork, productive relationships and the timely encouragement which pupils receive. One or two teachers are not as skilled as others in supporting communication or in precisely matching the work to individual pupils' needs. Pupils' personal development is first-class because they and their families receive much valued expert care, guidance and support. Students at post-16 achieve well but they do not yet have their own distinctive provision. The headteacher and her deputy are determined that all pupils will do well in all aspects of their life in school and they make the most of being sited right next to mainstream schools. In a short time they have built up excellent relationships with these other schools. They are working hard to ensure that all staff and the governors make a full contribution to the effective running of the school. The subject leaders do not yet monitor or evaluate learning and teaching in their subjects across the school but this is planned for next year.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve standards in ICT by providing more resources to meet the needs of the pupils.
- Ensure that all teaching fully supports pupils' communication and matches the activities accurately to each pupil's capability.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' achievement is good and pupils say that this is because the work suits them very well. Pupils' standards on entry and throughout their education are consistently well below the average for their age because of their learning difficulties. Once at the school, pupils achieve at a good pace. This is evident in their lessons and in their past work. The pupils enjoy the challenges presented to them and they work hard to reach the demanding targets which are set. All pupils have carefully planned programmes

of individual work that are based on a thorough assessment of their needs. Pupils with autism are given good specialised teaching in a well-structured environment so that their progress is as good as everyone else's.

Pupils make good progress in their learning, particularly in literacy, numeracy, science, music and art. Progress in ICT is satisfactory rather than good because of the limited resources available for the subject. Achievement at post-16 is good on the accredited programmes which are offered. There are no evident differences in the overall performance of different groups of pupils, although in a small minority of lessons, progress is held back because the teaching is not quite so skilful. Parents are very pleased with the progress which their children make, especially those with the most complex needs. One said, 'I cannot believe the change since my son has come to the school. He is communicating much more, and he's now even trying to speak. We thought this would never happen.'

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils really enjoy coming to school and love their lessons, and this is reflected in their very high attendance and excellent attitudes to learning. Behaviour is good rather than outstanding. Pupils and parents say that there is a little amount of 'subtle bullying' going on, involving one or two pupils. Though distressing, this is relatively rare and on the whole the school has created an extremely happy learning environment which contributes very well to its overall success.

Pupils and parents talk passionately about the practical activities, such as the recent musicals, which teachers plan to make learning interesting and fun, and they say there is very little they would want to change.

Through the work of their school council, pupils are involved in decision-making and are particularly proud of their efforts to buy new playground equipment. Pupils are successfully taught about how to make healthy and safe choices in their lives and the take-up of healthy lunchtime menus and good range of sporting activities testify to this. The school has just received a national award for its excellent work in this area.

Pupils demonstrate a wide range of social skills and eagerly take on responsibilities, for example, by washing up after cookery. The 'inclusion programme' and 'buddy scheme' help them enormously in this aspect, by providing them with good role models to emulate. Raising funds for charities and learning about other cultures develop pupils' awareness of the community beyond school. By the time they leave the school, pupils have gained an excellent range of personal skills. With these and the good improvements in their academic skills, they are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils do well because they receive continual, well-focused encouragement in their lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together and this enables every pupil to learn well. The good relationships, as well as the positive and caring approach to managing difficult behaviour, result in the calm and productive atmosphere in lessons. Pupils, especially those with autism, become increasingly comfortable and secure when taking on challenging tasks.

Planning of learning is based on good knowledge of each pupil and pupils work on tasks which are demanding and practicable. However, in a few cases, teachers do not take enough account of each pupil's communication needs or match the activities closely enough to their ability.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and provides pupils of all abilities with the right level of challenge and a good range of practical and academic experiences. It has been adapted well to meet the specific learning needs of pupils with more complex difficulties, such as autism, and this is a major factor in the good progress they make.

There is very good provision for personal development, which promotes pupils' sense of worth, independence and confidence. There are regular opportunities for spiritual development and for reflection. There is good support for creativity in the provision for music, textiles and pottery. The school provides good opportunities for linking up subjects. For example, two recent musical shows made learning more exciting for pupils. The school recognises that the lack of resources means that ICT equipment is not always available to support learning in other subjects.

Students at post-16 follow a programme which is appropriate to their age and maturity. However, they are taught in the same class as those in Years 10 and 11, which means that the provision is not quite as distinctive as the students require. The school is aware of this and it intends to make separate provision for this group next year.

Pupils value the good range of theme days, residential visits, visitors and sporting activities which enrich the curriculum. At present there are very few after-school clubs but the school plans to develop these further next year.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding level of care, guidance and support for all its pupils. Teachers, support staff and other agencies collaborate very well to support the pupils' good achievement and personal development. Behaviour is very well managed. Risk assessments and child protection procedures are secure and all pupils are kept

safe and looked after very thoroughly. Parents say that they have 'complete faith and utter confidence' in the staff when their children go on residential trips, such as the one to Center Parcs. Pupils say they feel safe and secure. They say that there is a little bullying but it does not worry them unduly. They are confident that the staff are always there to help them.

Pupils' progress is very carefully tracked and recorded. Parents are kept fully informed, especially through the home-school diary, and receive excellent timely guidance and support on how they can work together with the school for their children's benefit. One parent spoke of the hours which the staff took in making a customised set of symbols to be used at home.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Good leadership and management by the headteacher, governors and senior staff ensure that pupils make good progress. The successful leadership and management have resulted in the school becoming effective within only two years of opening and all the signs are that they will continue to improve. The senior managers' good, clear and accurate evaluation of the school's work is beginning to form a solid basis for ambitious target setting and detailed and effective improvement planning. The views of all the stakeholders, including pupils, staff and parents, are regularly sought and are taken fully into account when making decisions about the future. The school has made excellent links with its neighbouring schools and with others further afield for the benefit of all the pupils involved.

The school is regarded as a reservoir of expertise by local schools, not only on the joint campus but further afield. Through its outreach work, it gives expert support to mainstream schools seeking guidance and advice on learning difficulties or autism.

The senior management team (SMT) monitors and co-ordinates the work of the school very effectively. They are well supported by a challenging and committed governing body. The SMT successfully identifies the professional needs of the staff through its effective performance management procedures and provides a good range of training to meet those needs. The subject managers are not yet fully involved in monitoring and evaluation across the school, although this is planned for next year.

One of the school's priorities is the promotion of pupils' development through its links with mainstream schools, and its location on a joint campus. This is rapidly being realised as about half the pupils now attend mainstream lessons for part of their timetable.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
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	Yes

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils,

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed talking to you and discovering what you think about your school. Thanks especially to the members of the school council who met me. You told me all about your great fundraising efforts for new swings. You also told me that the best things in school are your staff, who look after you so well, the sports you play, and the trips you go on.

There are many other good things in your school as well. These are the main ones.

- You really enjoy your learning, try very hard and achieve good results.
- You are well behaved, and although there is little bit of bullying, it is well dealt with by the teachers.
- You get on very well with each other.
- The teachers and other adults in school give you very good support, care for you greatly and give you excellent advice on how to achieve even more.
- The school leaders, like your headteacher, want to provide the best education possible for you, and they are well on the way to doing that.

I have identified two main areas for improvement in school.

- Your school needs to provide more computers to help you learn.
- All your teachers need to make sure that they help you to communicate better and match up what they give you to do with what you need.

Your headteacher and your teachers want to make these changes.

Good luck to all of you for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mick Megee Lead Inspector