



Birches Green Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103168
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286581
Inspection dates 5–6 October 2006
Reporting inspector Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Birches Green Road
School category	Community		Erdington
Age range of pupils	7–11		Birmingham B24 9SR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 3733457
Number on roll (school)	238	Fax number	0121 3820619
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	George Bamford
		Headteacher	Mike Gospel
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
7–11	5–6 October 2006	286581

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated in a socially disadvantaged area of Erdington in the north of Birmingham. The percentage of pupils claiming free school meals is above average and the school has a high number of pupils with a statement of special educational need. Five per cent of pupils are at the early stages of learning English. National test data show that attainment on entry to the school is broadly average, but the school's very thorough baseline assessment, supported by the inspection evidence, shows that attainment on entry is slightly below average as pupils have weaknesses in spelling, letter formation and the concept of number.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with several outstanding features. Pupils achieve well and attain average standards. Everyone matters in this school community and parents rightly say that it is like 'belonging to a family'. At the heart of the school's success are the good leadership and management of a highly dedicated headteacher, his senior management team, governing body and effective school self-evaluation. The headteacher is the driving force in this school and cares passionately for the whole school community. The school has good capacity to improve because all staff are very keen to build upon previous best performance.

In spite of the many barriers to learning that these pupils have, they attain broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science and their achievements are good in relation to their starting points. Pupils have high self-esteem and know how to work through their problems because of the outstanding pastoral care, guidance and support they receive. 'Nobody gives up on you here, even when you are naughty,' said one pupil.

In reading, pupils make outstanding progress and they develop a love of books. In speaking and listening, writing and mathematics, progress is good overall but there are areas for improvement in writing and problem solving in mathematics. In some classes, teachers are not yet using assessment information sufficiently well to ensure that tasks are challenging the most able pupils. There is also a lack of consistency among year groups in approaching problem solving in a systematic way, resulting in pupils not building upon their previous learning. These two features slow down pupils' rates of progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those in the early stages of learning English as an additional language make consistently good progress because of the good level of support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants in lessons.

Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding examples of numeracy teaching seen in a Year 5 and a Year 6 class. There are too few opportunities for teachers to learn from one another to spread the most effective practice throughout the school. Pupils achieve well because the curriculum is outstanding and is extensively enriched with educational visits, extra-curricular clubs and residential visits. 'You have a job dragging your children away from school!' said one parent. The outstanding learning opportunities offered to pupils contribute significantly to their good attitudes and behaviour. Attendance is satisfactory and the school has successfully worked very hard with parents to improve attendance levels. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good because pupils are well cared for, guided and supported. Pupils have a good understanding about leading healthy lifestyles, especially how to manage their emotions. They are safety conscious and they make an outstanding contribution to the community in the way they welcome and look after senior citizens, such as inviting them into the school for lunch and music concerts.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Use assessment information consistently to ensure that writing activities challenge the higher attaining pupils.
- Implement a whole-school approach for problem solving in mathematics.
- Ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to share and learn from the best practices within the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and attain average standards. The 2006 national test results show an improvement on the previous year's performance in writing and most pupils attained the higher levels through an increased emphasis on the use of assessment. Whilst there was a slight drop in the results in mathematics and science, the school's data show that several pupils just missed reaching the expected level. Pupils have good knowledge of their targets for literacy and numeracy.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and learning English as an additional language make good progress because staff are aware of their individual targets. These pupils receive good support from teaching assistants and the English as an additional language coordinator and make good progress in lessons.

Pupils' achievement in reading is outstanding because of the very effective teaching and modelling of intonation and awareness of audience. However, pupils' progress, especially that of the small number of higher attaining pupils, is inconsistent in writing. In spite of good assessment procedures, not all tasks are suitably matched to pupils' needs, especially the higher attainers. Nevertheless, overall progress remains good.

In mathematics, pupils make good progress. They are taught the four rules of number well but not enough attention is paid to developing their problem solving skills. There is a lack of a whole-school approach to teaching this area of mathematics. Pupils enjoy learning and achieve well because all staff ensure that a 'can do' culture permeates all aspects of school life. 'They keep on at you until you get it and this helps us learn,' said one pupil during an interview with inspectors.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Attendance has improved and is now average. Pupils love coming to school. They are very proud of their achievements and educational successes. They have a clear understanding about healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. Pupils are consulted on all aspects of school life and have their say on how they want playground games to be organised. They are delighted with the new playground equipment and improved toilet facilities.

The school is a racially harmonious community because of the good provision made for the pupils' multicultural development. In spite of good relationships, there are still times in the older classes when pupils struggle to work in teams and find it difficult to look beyond their own needs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding features seen in two classes in numeracy in Years 5 and 6. There is no unsatisfactory teaching because of the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by the headteacher and subject leaders and the high emphasis placed on the professional development of staff. Teachers take their work very seriously in this school. They are effective models for their pupils and generally have very high expectations of them. For example, they expect and gain their total attention in lessons. In one outstanding Year 5 lesson in numeracy, the teacher noticed a pupil fiddling with pens while vital explanations were being given. Very gently, the teacher asked the pupil to explain how this activity helped him learn. As a result, attention was re-focused and learning continued.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to support learning and pupils' work is regularly marked, with pointers given for improvement. However, not all pupils are given sufficient opportunity to undertake corrections. As a result, mistakes are repeated. An element of inconsistency exists amongst year groups in how information from assessments is used to challenge the higher attaining pupils in each class in writing, especially lower down the school.

The teaching of reading is outstanding. Teachers push pupils to understand the intentions of authors and sense of audience. When teaching problem solving in mathematics, too many different approaches confuse pupils' understanding in some cases and slows down their rates of progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because of the school's attempts to 'make learning real'. A particularly strong feature of the curriculum is the annual opportunity for pupils in each year group to go on residential visits. This prepares pupils well for their economic well-being as they develop high self-esteem and good teamworking skills.

Trips to educational places of interests, such as Aston Hall, The Botanical Gardens and Blakesley Hall, enliven learning and there are very good links with art, music, literacy, numeracy and ICT. Pupils learn about different cultures through International Week and Black History Week and this has a positive effect on their personal development.

Another strong aspect is the way that subject-specific skills are identified in teachers' planning, such as the development of experimentation and enquiry in science and

orienteering and map skills in geography. Numerous extra-curricular activities, especially sport, support the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The outstanding curriculum has a positive effect on pupils' enjoyment of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

An outstanding feature of the good care, guidance and support given to pupils is the emphasis placed upon pastoral care. Pupils are taught how to manage their emotions and how to get themselves out of any negative states that might affect learning. Pupils are given good opportunities to mark one another's work and help each other, and are constantly reminded that school is like a family where each member is supported.

Procedures for health and safety and child protection are robust and pupils' transition to secondary school is managed effectively. All members of the school community, including dinner ladies, are fully briefed on how to handle any aspects of boisterous behaviour and pupils are fully aware of what is expected of them. Pupils know their academic targets but, on occasions, insufficient emphasis is placed on ensuring that pupils learn from the guidance given to them by the teachers' marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher, an inspirational role model to his staff, knows his school inside out. His motto of 'children matter' is at the heart of all that is undertaken in the school. Parents praise the headteacher very highly, saying: 'He has made this school well known in the community. Everybody wants to get their children into this school.'

The school improvement plan, whilst accurate, does not identify success criteria for measuring the school's effectiveness. This restricts the effectiveness of the governing body in undertaking its monitoring role.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 October 2006

Dear Pupils

Birches Green Junior School, Birches Green Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B24 9SR

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school. You go to a good school and make good progress. Your progress in reading is outstanding and we were particularly impressed with your writing projects undertaken with an author/illustrator.

You cherish your certificates for good work in music, art and writing. You sing well and your rendering of 'Autumn Days' was energetic and tuneful. You have good attitudes to learning and you behave well in lessons and around the school. We can see why your parents are so pleased with your work and with what the school offers, especially the residential visits. The school council has certainly made a lot of improvements to the school, especially during lunch time play with the new play equipment and improved toilet facilities. We agree with you that your headteacher and teachers are good to you and that they want the very best education for you.

We have asked your headteacher and teachers to do some things to make your school even better. We want them to use information from the tests that you do to provide harder work for those of you who find learning easy. We have also asked your teachers to look at different ways of teaching problem solving so that you can remember what you have previously learnt. We have also asked your teachers to look at one another teaching, especially as many of them have such good ideas to help you in your learning.

You can help them by ensuring that:

- those of you who find learning easy, ask your teachers what you need to do in order to improve your writing
- when you solve problems you try to remember what you have previously learnt.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

B Matusiak-Varley Lead Inspector