



Birtenshaw Hall (Children's Charitable Trust)

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105280
Local Authority Bolton
Inspection number 287182
Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006
Reporting inspector Michael McDowell

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Darwen Road
School category	Non-maintained special		Bromley Cross, Bolton
Age range of pupils	3–19		Lancashire BL7 9AB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01204 304230
Number on roll (school)	16	Fax number	01204 597995
Number on roll (6th form)	7		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Ian Hurst
		Headteacher	Ms B Saddington
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004		

Age group 3–19	Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006	Inspection number 287182
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Birtenshaw Hall School is a special school maintained by Birtenshaw Hall (Children's Charitable Trust) for pupils aged between 3 and 19 who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are currently 16 pupils aged from 10 to 20, almost all of whom are 'looked after' by their local authority. Formerly, this was a residential special school, but the residential facility is now registered as a children's home. The Children's Charitable Trust has appointed a director with specific oversight duties in relation to this. Almost all of the pupils reside in the children's home for 38 or 52 weeks of the year. They are drawn from across England and Wales and are mostly White British. A small number of pupils are from British Asian families and English is not their home language. A few pupils live locally and travel to school daily.

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 that helps pupils to reach their potential while enjoying what they do. Because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, standards reached by pupils are very low. However, the achievement of those in Years 5 to 11 is good. Pupils make significant progress, meeting or exceeding the targets that are set for them. At the end of Year 11, pupils gain certificates in accredited courses. In the post 16 groups, progress is satisfactory because some opportunities have been lost due to staffing difficulties. At times, the post-16 groups have been without a full-time teacher, and, while the school has tried hard to fill the gap with support staff, working to the direction of a part-time teacher, the momentum of students' learning slowed.

Teachers understand their pupils very well and there are excellent relationships. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Carefully planned lessons build upon pupils' developing responsiveness and provide means by which all can be included in each activity. Every opportunity is taken to encourage pupils' by praising their efforts. Most pupils' show, through their actions, that they have positive attitudes and are happy learners. A minority present behavioural challenges. These are dealt with very effectively by classroom staff who skilfully anticipate the reactions of their pupils and divert their attention from situations that provoke anxiety. Because pupils' needs are so well understood, the activities provided engage pupils and extend their desire to communicate and participate. The curriculum is strongly enhanced by learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Pupils have many opportunities to develop and deepen their understanding of their own feelings and needs, and to recognise those of others. Those who are able to do so, make an effective contribution to the community.

Parents strongly support the school. They rightly believe that it offers a safe and stimulating environment for their children. Pupils are very well supported and guided and outstanding provision is made for their health, safety and welfare. Pupils are encouraged to eat nutritious food and helped to take part in physical exercise. The headteacher has shown outstanding ability to bring about improvement and has moved the school on well since the last inspection. Others carry out their leadership roles very well. The day to day management of the school is very effective and it runs smoothly.

The governing body rigorously oversees the work of the school and holds it to account. However, governors have not kept the headteacher fully informed about the consequences of some recent decisions that they had made in their other capacity as trustees of the Children's Trust. The school does not have a fully delegated budget so that it cannot be sure that its plans to maintain and further improve are affordable. However, under its present leadership, the school has good potential for further improvement; it offers good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the post-16 provision is adequate, its leadership and management is satisfactory. There are two parallel groups because the needs of a small number of students are distinct. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The long-term absence of one teacher has led to students in one group doing significantly less well than the other. This is because lessons, planned by a teacher, are not always taught by a teacher or teaching assistant but by care staff. In these lessons, therefore, while students' social and physical needs are well cared for, activities tend to lose their educational purpose and direction. Consequently, learning has slowed and although most did well, a minority underachieved. The achievement of post 16 students overall is satisfactory. In 2006, the work of students was verified under the AQA accreditation scheme. At present, students in both groups are making adequate progress in their recently revised and highly relevant curriculum. The curriculum is good; it places an appropriate emphasis on living skills, the use of leisure, and experience of the world of work. Students attend at a local college for half a day each week to prepare for their next steps. They explore community and leisure skills. With close supervision, students shop for ingredients one day each week and help to prepare their own meal. This demonstrates the outstanding care, guidance and support the students receive.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in the post-16 groups.
- Ensure that each class or teaching group has its own teacher.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of governors, the headteacher, trustees and the director in discussion making and sharpen the lines of communication between them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

All pupils work at a level far below the earliest stages of the National Curriculum. Their gains are measured by the degree to which they recognise and participate in the activities that their teachers carefully prepare for them. Progress, assessed using a scale that captures these very small gains, is good for all groups in Years 5 to 11. Pupils meet their challenging targets. At the end of Year 11, pupils' work is certified through the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations Board, (OCR), Accreditation for Life and Living Scheme. This is specially designed for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils in the Autistic Unit make good strides in working alongside others and developing their communication skills. Throughout the school, pupils develop their communication skills well because teachers use pictures, sounds, real objects and symbols to reinforce the spoken word. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills develop well because of the consistent use of specially adapted switches

that enable pupils to control electronic devices, or to communicate their messages and greetings.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development, well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The pupils learn to be part of a group and to acknowledge, tolerate and enjoy the presence of other learners. They respond well to the prompts of their teachers. In greeting sessions, they vocalise, or use their switches, to acknowledge their name and to greet their classmates. Pupils come to recognise their own feelings and needs, and in a few cases, those of others. They show contentment in their own way, by facial expression, limb movement or quiet vocalisation. These reactions are especially evident as they listen to music or experience the play of light in a darkened room. They enjoy the opportunities the school provides to hear music at concerts or to work with visiting theatre groups. Pupils with higher ability are conscious of responsibility to the school and the wider community and take part in activities such as a recycling project. Challenging behaviour is a characteristic of the learning difficulties of a very small minority of pupils. This is effectively managed and, overall, behaviour is good. Attendance is excellent in comparison to similar schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teachers know their pupils very well. They observe them carefully and make thorough, accurate assessments of what they enjoy, tolerate, understand and can do. They use this knowledge to build up positive, gentle, and close relationships with their pupils and to set learning targets that match their needs and promote their development. Lessons, of which a few are outstanding, are well planned and unfussy. All the classroom staff know how best to help their pupils understand what to do and how to do it. Some higher attaining pupils anticipate the steps of well established routines and most pupils meet their targets for behaving well and taking part. It is clear that pupils enjoy their lessons and they like their teachers very much.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It matches the needs of all pupils and students well. Learners' stated needs, together with information from baseline assessment, are used in

devising individual programmes. The sensory and developmental emphasis of these programmes is precisely what is needed. Communication is emphasised and planned for individually. The spoken word is augmented by good use of picture, sound and symbol cues. Small objects that can be grasped, seen or touched are also used effectively to provide learners with prompts. Effective use is made of ICT to enable pupils to interact. Pupils with autism benefit well from the emphasis placed on the development of their social communication and tolerance of others. The curriculum is enhanced by good opportunities to make visits and to learn outside of the classroom. Sex education and education for drugs awareness is given at an appropriate level.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are first rate. All staff are committed to keeping pupils, including the most vulnerable, safe, healthy, and happy. Risks to pupils are carefully assessed. Their physical and medical needs are catered for through excellent liaison between the school and health professionals, including the nurse and the physiotherapist, who are always in attendance. Intimate care is provided very discretely and the dignity of pupils is preserved. In the classrooms, teachers and their assistants work tirelessly and successfully to help pupils make the individually planned gains that lead to them recognising their own needs and feelings, noticing others, and wanting to communicate with them. Learners are sensitively guided to behave well. Individual behaviour plans are used effectively to modify the actions of those who become distressed or challenging. The school offers many opportunities to bring about the personal development of learners. These include excellent use of music and light to stimulate or relax them, sensory story telling, and visits to concerts. The school works closely with parents and carers and seeks their views. These are overwhelmingly positive. Child protection arrangements are robust; there is a named person through whom concerns are channelled and staff are vigilant and fully aware of their roles. Checks on those who have access to children are made and a clear record is kept.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher is an excellent leader. She is correct in her analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has brought about significant improvements since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, and assessment of the school's performance, have all improved. Others in school leadership roles have given strong support. Achievements of pupils are now clearly known. The quality of teaching and learning is kept under review and the performance of the headteacher is regularly assessed by the governors. Good use is made of resources, and links have been developed with other institutions to support pupils' learning. The school works closely with the children's home in which most pupils reside. An improvement plan

with appropriate priorities is in place, but the affordability of plans is not clear. The governors act as a critical friend to the school, monitor its work and hold it to account. However, most of the governors are also trustees of the Charitable Trust. Whilst, as governors, they try to act solely in the interests of the school and its pupils, the overlap in roles makes this difficult and misunderstandings arise. Past actions of the trustees have had consequences for the school but governors have not always made these clear to the headteacher. For example, there was confusion about the status of the school following the conversion of the residential facility into a children's home. When trustees appointed a director, governors did not explain the boundaries between responsibilities. These omissions have led to staff experiencing uncertainty.

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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?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	3

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	3
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school. I enjoyed watching you learn and play and wish to thank James especially for answering my questions. It was clear that all of you like your school very much and think that it is good. You trust the teachers and all the other adults in the school to do their best for you and to give you interesting things to do.

I agree with you that yours is a good school and that your teachers help you a great deal. They plan very carefully so that what you are asked to do in the classroom is right for you. I know that you also like other adults who work with you in the classroom, make your food, help you at break and meal times or take care to be gentle when they move you, or fit you into your special chairs and boards and frames. Your teachers know a lot about you and they think carefully about what you should do next. You are getting on well because of this.

Some of you in the post-16 groups have not always had your teacher with you throughout every lesson and this has meant that while you make progress it is a little slower than it could be. Your headteacher, who is an excellent leader, knows this and is working to put it right. Your school runs smoothly because it is well managed.

In order to make your school even better I have asked your headteacher to:

- help those of you in post-16 groups to do even better
- make sure that every teaching group has its own teacher.

And I have asked the governors to:

- help your headteacher by making sure that they tell her, in good time, all of their plans that might affect the school and involve her in making all important decisions.