

The Byrchall High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106533
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	287541
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Janet Palmer HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr I Bragg
Headteacher	Mr A Birchall
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2002
School address	Warrington Road Ashton-in-Makerfield Wigan Lancashire WN4 9PQ
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Byrchall High School is larger than most secondary schools and serves a relatively affluent area in the Ashton-Golborne wards of Wigan. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average, although it is increasing over time. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Four pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The Byrchall High is a designated training school, accredited to promote good practice in the training of new teachers. The school has recently been awarded specialist status for mathematics and computing beginning September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Byrchall High School provides a satisfactory education. It has several good features. The standards reached by the pupils are broadly in line with the national average, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

To raise standards, the headteacher and the senior team, many of whom are recent appointments, have introduced rigorous monitoring of the work of individual teachers and departments. This has resulted in improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. These are now good overall. The headteacher works in close partnership with the local authority to ensure effective support for staff wherever underperformance is identified, at present, in English. The majority of teachers now monitor pupils' learning well and plan their lessons to best meet their individual learning needs. However, a minority do not provide work that is adapted for the range of pupils in their classes and not all pupils are sufficiently challenged.

Pupils and parents are regularly consulted and the school council plays a particularly effective role in ensuring the pupils' opinions are listened to and acted upon. In response to the consultations, teaching styles and the curriculum are now more suited to the range of pupils in the school. The curriculum provides a wider selection of subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4, and there are many extra-curricular and enrichment activities to enhance learning and develop pupils' skills.

Pupils behave well in school and their social and moral development is good. However, their spiritual development and understanding of the range of cultures in Britain is limited. Pupils are well cared for by the school and receive good guidance and support from teachers and other support staff.

The senior team has good capacity to bring about further improvement based on its proven track record. It manages the school finances well and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards at both key stages, particularly in English.
- Develop pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness.
- Improve the consistency of teaching to ensure all teachers cater for pupils' different learning needs.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards, which are on an upward trend, are broadly average. Pupils enter the school at Year 7 with broadly average standards. The results of the 2006 national tests showed that by the end of Year 9, standards in mathematics and science were slightly above the national average, but English had dipped to below average.

Standards in the GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 have fluctuated over recent years but in 2006, including English and mathematics, they were above the national average. This

represents broadly satisfactory achievement over pupils' five year journey through the school. Work seen during the inspection indicates that pupils' standards are gradually improving as a result of the improvements in teaching and the strategies used to make pupils more aware of how well they are learning.

Lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities now make similar progress to other pupils in the school. This improvement is due to the introduction of more effective assessment and tracking systems allied to more consistent and helpful intervention programmes that are tailored to the specific needs of these pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. Pupils develop a good understanding of moral issues and they know that bullying and unfair treatment of others is not to be tolerated. They relate well to one another and to adults. However, their spiritual awareness and their understanding of cultural diversity is less strong. For example, pupils do not routinely reflect on spiritual and cultural issues during form time or assembly and they have few cultural links with young people beyond their own community.

Behaviour is good. Records maintained by the school indicate that unacceptable behaviour has reduced significantly over this year due to the clear expectations that have been set. Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school, enabling effective learning to take place. Attendance is satisfactory and improving as a result of close monitoring and intervention with individual pupils whose attendance or punctuality gives cause for concern. Pupils' enjoy most of their lessons. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are rare. In practical lessons such as art, technology and physical education, pupils show good understanding of safe practices.

Pupils understand the elements of a healthy lifestyle, but do not always adopt them. Uptake of physical exercise is good, but not all pupils eat healthy diets or are fully committed to the school's anti-smoking rules. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community with a developing sense of belonging. There are good examples of pupils supporting their fellow pupils, including mentoring and school sports partnerships. Pupils contribute well to decision making in school through the excellent school council which has successfully campaigned to improve the school environment and has helped the school develop policies for pupil behaviour. Involvement with people outside the school environment, especially those from different backgrounds, is less well developed. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in developing the personal qualities that will enable them to contribute effectively to the community and secure their own future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Most lessons have a clear outline, a lively starter activity, followed by a more substantial main section and a useful end to the lesson which reviews the learning and ties it all together. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and pupils show a willingness to learn and participate. Teachers make good use of a wide range of interesting resources including information and communications technology (ICT). Some

very proficient use of digital projectors is taking place to enliven lessons and maintain a good pace and variety.

Teachers nurture a good work ethic in pupils who respond well to their high expectations. In the good and outstanding lessons teachers plan well to meet the needs of individual pupils. However, this does not happen consistently. In less effective lessons too little attention is being paid to the range of ability levels within the class and there are too few opportunities for pupils to actively participate in their own learning.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in class by learning assistants. The marking of pupils' written work is completed on a regular basis and is positive and supportive. Pupils particularly enjoy receiving stickers and rewards for their good work. However, not all marking makes clear to the pupils what levels they have attained and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Statutory requirements are enhanced by the opportunity for most pupils in Years 8 and 9 to study a second modern foreign language. Good efforts have been made by the school to establish a curriculum that better meets the needs of all Year 10 and 11 pupils. In addition to the range of traditional GCSE courses, applied GCSEs and vocational courses such as construction, motor vehicle engineering, salon services and child care have been introduced and others will commence next year. Some of these have been as a result of partnerships with other schools and colleges.

There is good additional support and intervention for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. More able pupils have the opportunity to extend their learning in high ability classes, through access to additional courses and through the gifted and talented programmes. There are after-school support classes in a number of subjects and a range of extra-curricular activities on offer, particularly in sports and the expressive arts. Pupils also benefit from the many opportunities for visits and excursions to enhance learning and broaden their experience. Work-related skills are developed through the two weeks work experience in Year 10 or 11, enrichment days and support from the business world. The school is working with Wigan Education Business Partnership to develop work-related and enterprise education. The fair trade group and environmental club add to the pupils' personal development as well as making a valuable contribution to the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Staff show a high level of commitment to providing good care and support for pupils. As a result, systems to monitor the personal development and well-being of pupils are secure. Meticulous records are maintained for pupils whose progress or well-being gives cause for concern. Risk assessments are carefully attended to and the school provides a safe and supportive environment. Legal requirements for safeguarding pupils are met to a high standard. The school has worked hard to promote all aspects of pupils' health, with good results in relation to physical exercise.

Good provision is made through the curriculum and personal support to meet the needs of all learners, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked-after children. The school works well with parents and other agencies to intervene early to enable the progress

of these pupils. The use of exclusion has reduced over the last year and detailed evidence is kept as to which pupils it has involved and its effects. The school has now established robust systems to set targets and to monitor the progress of pupils towards them. This enables identification of those pupils who are underachieving. These pupils receive appropriate help to improve their performance. However, not all lessons cater for the range of pupils' needs.

Pupils reported that the induction activities helped them to settle smoothly from primary school. As they move through the school they receive good support and guidance to enable them to make informed decisions about subject choices and career pathways.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall with many emerging strengths. The headteacher provides effective leadership and he is well supported by new senior staff. The school has benefited from useful advice and support from the local authority and a renewed sense of direction and purpose is evident from staff and pupils.

Robust systems have been introduced to measure progress and to monitor the quality of teaching. The majority of middle managers are having a positive impact and are actively involved in establishing agreed priorities. However, in some areas subject leadership is less secure. The school provides a very good programme of professional development opportunities for staff and is a well established training school for initial teacher training.

School self-evaluation provides an accurate view of the school's position. The leadership team recognises where more work needs to be done and their improvement planning is detailed and comprehensive. The views of parents, pupils and other stakeholders are sought and help inform the school's decision making. The school is increasing its engagement with primary schools and the local community, and its newly acquired status as a specialist school for mathematics and computing underpins this work.

Governors know the school well and offer an increasing level of support and challenge. Overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

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Annex A

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

Personal development and well-being

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

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?	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of The Byrchall High School, Ashton-in-Makerfield, WN4 9PQ

I would like to thank you on behalf of the inspection team for making us feel so welcome at your school. We appreciate the time many of you gave to tell us about your work and other activities. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education overall with some good features.

Mr Birchall and the senior management team have worked hard with the local authority to bring about improvements to the school. The curriculum is now good with opportunities for you to study a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. You also have many popular extra-curricular sports, clubs, trips and residential visits. Your lessons are now mostly good and some are even outstanding. We were impressed at the way your teachers use interactive whiteboards to make lessons more interesting and active. Most of your teachers ensure that the work you are doing in class is suited to your ability levels, but in some cases you need to be stretched a bit more.

Teachers track your progress well and most of you know how well you are doing and what to do to improve your levels and grades. As a result of these improvements, together with your hard work and good behaviour, the standards you reach are now just above the national average. However, your progress in English is still not as good as it should be. The school realises this and there are plans in place to improve your results. You told us that the school is mostly friendly and safe and the work of the school council is helping you to have your voice heard and bring about improvements to the school environment, teaching and the curriculum. You have a good understanding of your social and moral responsibilities and enjoy making contributions to the community. However, you need to learn more about other people's cultures and customs in Britain and around the world.

We have recommended that your school makes the following improvements.

- Raise achievement and standards at both key stages, particularly in English.
- Develop your spiritual and cultural awareness.
- Improve the consistency of lesson planning to ensure your teachers cater for your different learning needs.

Finally, I would like to thank you again for welcoming us into your school and being so friendly and courteous. I wish you every success for the future.