

Birkenshaw Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107768
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	287909
Inspection dates	2–3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Philip Jarrett HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	MrsCarolynn Cook
Headteacher	Miss Caroline Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2002
School address	Bradford Road Gomersal Cleckheaton West Yorkshire BD19 4BE
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspection was observed by a newly appointed HMI.

Description of the school

Birkenshaw Middle School is a school for pupils aged from nine to thirteen on the edge of Kirklees. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils eligible to receive free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average although there are few pupils with a statement of special educational need. Standards on entry to the school are broadly average. However, a significant minority of pupils leave midway through the school to take up places at the local grammar school and this affects the results at the end of Year 8. The local authority is currently consulting on the closure of some of its middle schools as part of a proposed three to two tier reorganisation in the immediate area. The school has received a number of awards including the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Birkenshaw Middle School is a good school that looks after its pupils well. Good leadership ensures that it has a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to bring about improvement. The school receives enthusiastic support from its parents who are pleased to see that their children are happy and do well in the friendly atmosphere that exists.

The school has improved since the previous inspection and dealt successfully with weaknesses identified at that time. Standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science and this reflects good progress. Assessment at the end of Year 8 shows that pupils make very good progress in mathematics and reach high standards, especially the more able pupils. Standards in English and science are nearer to the national average, with some underachievement in English especially by boys and some pupils identified for extra support. However, the overall progress of pupils as they move through the school is good.

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils are very keen to learn and this enables them to make progress even when lessons do not fully motivate them. The best teaching stimulates pupils through a good range of activities that challenge them and help them to understand what they have learnt. Some lessons observed were not as effective at planning for the full range of ability in classes.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and rates of attendance are high. They are very well behaved and feel safe. They form good relationships with others. Staff support them well and pupils always know who to turn to, should the need arise. Pupils are able to participate fully in the school, particularly through the school forum and through regular opportunities to express their views. This supports personal development well. As one parent commented, 'the school encourages children to be responsible for their actions'.

The curriculum is balanced and meets pupils' needs well. It is enhanced by a range of initiatives such as a summer school for gifted and talented pupils and strong local sports partnerships. The curriculum gives pupils a satisfactory insight into the cultures of other countries, but provision for developing their understanding of the diversity of their local culture is weaker.

The headteacher and other senior teachers provide good leadership and this has helped the school to improve. Examples of recent improvements include the use of information and communication technology (ICT), rising standards in science at Key Stage 3 and improved facilities and resources. The school has a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in English, especially for boys and for pupils who are identified as needing extra support.
- Extend the impact of teaching through more consistent planning for the needs of all groups of pupils.
- Enhance pupils' cultural development, including their understanding of the diversity of the local culture.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 2 and have improved consistently over recent years. A significant minority of able pupils then leave to attend a local grammar school. As a result, standards are closer to average overall when pupils reach the end of Year 8. Standards in mathematics are very high but standards in science and English are broadly in line with national expectations.

Standards on entry to the school are average, except in writing where they are below average. Test results and other data confirm that pupils make good progress overall in Years 5 and 6. Achievement in Years 7 and 8 shows significant differences between subjects. Progress in mathematics is very good, with some of the most able pupils achieving levels that are extremely high for their age. Pupils do less well in science and the school has rightly identified that progress in English has not always been good enough. Nevertheless, evidence of pupils' progress over the four years that they are in the school shows that achievement overall is good.

Most groups of pupils make good progress. This includes pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups. However, boys make less progress than girls in English and some pupils identified as needing extra support also do less well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are polite, courteous and work well together. Their behaviour is excellent and this contributes significantly to the good progress they make in lessons. They enjoy lessons, particularly in Years 7 and 8 where there is a wider range of specialist teaching. As a result, attendance is good.

The school provides a strongly caring ethos where pupils are happy and feel secure. One parent wrote that the school 'makes every effort to make pupils feel at ease' and new pupils settle in quickly. Their moral and social development is good. Spiritual development is restricted by the limited opportunities for reflection and daily worship. There are good links with a school in the Gambia and pupils learn about different cultures. However, too little use is made of the diverse cultures within the local area to further enhance pupils' understanding of living in a multicultural society.

All pupils take part in two hours of physical exercise during school time and many continue this after school, particularly older pupils. This is enhanced by the school's participation in a thriving local sports partnership. As a result, pupils have a good understanding about healthy living. All Year 8 pupils complete a Young Leaders award and their work with pupils that are about to join the school aids personal development. Pupils develop an understanding of the school community through regular opportunities to express their views, for instance, about subjects, and this is enhanced by an effective school forum. High standards in mathematics provide pupils with a secure basis for future study but English skills are weaker.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress as a result of teaching that is mostly effective. All teachers form good relationships with pupils and manage classroom learning well. Learning objectives are clear and explained well, providing a good focus to lessons. Some lessons observed were especially effective because teachers used lively and sometimes practical activities that engaged pupils, including good use of paired and small group work.

Lessons observed that were less effective were sometimes dull, chiefly because they lacked challenge for pupils. The very best lessons were well planned to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. In other lessons, different groups of pupils were not equally well challenged and teachers missed opportunities to make full use of classroom assistants.

There are some real strengths in assessment. Pupils understand the levels they are expected to reach in all subjects. Developing practice in pupil peer- and self-assessment helps them to reflect on their learning. The most effective marking provides specific learning targets that pupils find very helpful. In some subjects, the targets set are too general or relate to teaching tasks rather than pupil actions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and successfully meets the needs of pupils. Priority is given to developing basic skills and this leads to high standards at Key Stage 2 and very good progress by older pupils in mathematics. However, the curriculum is also enriched by features that help to extend pupils' enjoyment. For instance, pupils particularly enjoyed the recent 'Junior Jam', a day of activities that included dance, writing songs and opportunities to be a disc jockey. There is a good range of educational visits and visitors to the school. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their work on 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' which was brought to life for them by a visiting theatre group. An annual residential visit for all Year 6 pupils successfully develops their independence and social skills.

Successful links with the local sports partnership have helped to develop sport as a strong aspect of school life. Pupils enjoy sport and respond well to the wide range of after-school sporting activities. The success of this work is shown by the fact that all Year 8 pupils have achieved a 'Young Sports Leader' qualification and used this to work successfully with younger pupils from local schools. There is a good range of after-school activities, although these tend to focus on sport and are mostly aimed at the older pupils.

The curriculum for the oldest pupils is taught by subject specialists, making good use of improved resources in areas including art, design and technology, ICT and science. The school's learning resources centre has been developed significantly over recent years and is being increasingly used to support pupils' independent learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils speak highly of the support available, for instance through the learning mentor or the nurse. They feel safe and secure in school and can always find someone to talk to. The effect

of this is seen in high standards of behaviour, positive relationships and good progress. Attendance is above average.

Transition arrangements for pupils joining in Year 5 are effective and older pupils are used well in supporting new pupils. Guidance and support for pupils transferring to their next school is also good and these close relationships continue through the sport partnerships programmes.

Clear policies are in place to help pupils understand how to improve. Teachers mostly have a good knowledge of their pupils' needs and use this well to set personal targets and to help pupils reflect on their learning. The progress of vulnerable pupils is tracked carefully and the school knows which pupils need extra support. Pupils know what their short and long-term targets are and teachers review them regularly. Teachers track pupils' progress carefully and take action where they are falling behind. Parents are kept well informed about pupils' progress and diaries are used effectively to facilitate communication between school and home. The school communicates well with parents and parents report that issues are dealt with quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Effective leadership ensures that the school has continued to improve. Because the school has a good leadership team, it knows its strengths and weaknesses well and there are successful strategies in place to bring about improvements. For example, recent action is leading to improvements in science and there is a clear policy for further extending teaching and learning.

The school is well led by the headteacher. A visible presence around the school with a 'finger on every pulse' (according to one governor), she is well respected by pupils and parents. She gives a clear sense of direction to the school, welcomes partnership with parents, and encourages pupils to participate in decisions.

The headteacher also delegates well. This has resulted in a good leadership team who work closely together while giving individual direction to different aspects of the school's work. Expectations are high and the targets set are increasingly challenging. One priority for the school has been to develop the role of subject leaders. This has been successful and they are becoming more involved in self-evaluation and subject planning. At present, subject plans do not always focus sufficiently on outcomes for pupils.

Governance is good. Governors are kept well informed and are increasingly taking on a more strategic role through contributions to whole-school planning and discussions with the school improvement partner. They question and challenge when appropriate.

This is a school that has improved in recent years. However, there is no complacency. The senior leaders acknowledge, for instance, that standards in some areas at Key Stage 2 should be higher. This confirms a good capacity for further improvement.

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

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	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

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

My colleagues and I enjoyed meeting you when we came to inspect your school on the 2-3 October 2007. Many of you came up to talk to us and we appreciated your honesty and openness. We enjoyed our discussions with pupils from all the different year groups as well as meeting the School Forum.

We think that yours is a good school. Pupils like coming to school. You all get on well together. You told us that behaviour is good and that teachers quickly sort out any problems that arise. You said that you feel safe in school and know who to talk to if things are not going well. Many of your parents wrote to me and they nearly all said how much they liked the school. They think that it's very friendly and welcoming.

We found that pupils make good progress. This differs a little from subject to subject. For instance, standards are very high in mathematics by the end of Year 8 but we think, and the school agrees, that some of you should do better in English. You all work very hard in lessons and this helps you to make progress. Teaching is good and you do especially well when lessons have lively and practical tasks. In a few lessons, we felt that the teachers did not always manage to ensure that all groups of pupils made equally good progress.

You like the curriculum the school provides. It has a good mixture of work across subjects and includes some extra activities that you especially enjoyed. For instance, pupils told us about the 'Junior Jam' and the visit by a theatre group who performed 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Some of you have also done some interesting work involving a school in Gambia. However, we think that the area around your school is very interesting because of the mixture of different cultures and the school should make better use of it in lessons.

Thank you again for welcoming us into your school. We enjoyed talking to you and the teachers.