

Benfield Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114412
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	289900
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Martin
Headteacher	Lisa Perrins
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002
School address	255 Old Shoreham Road Portslade Brighton BN41 1XS
Telephone number	01273 294950
Fax number	01273 294948

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average junior school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, although an increasing number from minority ethnic backgrounds are joining the school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school which is improving and has some good features. For example, pupils' personal development is good. Most pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to their work. Their attendance has recently improved, which points towards an enjoyment of the changes made to life in school. These include a wider range of out of school activities and increased opportunities to develop their creative talents through drama, art and music. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, saying that recent improvements allow them to take a more active role in their children's learning in school and at home.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they reach standards that are broadly average by the time they leave Year 6. This is an improvement, as standards were below average at the last inspection. A particular strength is the good progress that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make, which results from the extra support they are given that effectively meets their individual needs. Achievement in mathematics is relatively weaker than in English and science. This is because the work set for pupils does not always provide sufficient challenge, particularly for the more able. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but there are inconsistencies between classes that mean some pupils make better progress than others. The school had already identified this and is taking action to deal with the issue, through making lesson observations more rigorous to bring about improvement. Teaching assistants play a valuable role in supporting pupils' progress, particularly those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The satisfactory curriculum is effectively enriched by a wide range of out of school clubs and visits, including residential stays in all age groups, to places of educational interest. Parents are pleased with the experiences their children receive, with one parental comment being typical of many, 'I am very happy with Benfield School. My son enjoys school because there is plenty of variety and interesting things for him to do in school and after school.' The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support for its pupils. Pastoral care is good, with the school firmly committed to ensuring the health and safety of all pupils. However, academic guidance is not as strong because the information gathered about pupils' progress is not always used effectively to show them what they need to do next to improve their performance.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, with the newly formed senior management team having good insights into the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They had identified the areas for development highlighted by the inspection and already introduced a range of initiatives to help bring about improvement. These include making sure that teachers act upon any areas for development indicated by senior staff during lesson observations. The school is developing a system to measure the impact of these initiatives but as yet it is not rigorous enough to ensure priorities have been reached.

Effective steps have been made to ensure improvement since the last inspection, shown in higher standards and recently improved attendance rates. The school's recent track record, allied to the good quality of senior leaders, shows there is a good capacity to make further improvements.

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.

What the school should do to improve further

- Challenge pupils more effectively in mathematics to raise standards and achievement.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that all pupils make faster progress.
- Check the school's performance and evaluate the impact of recent initiatives more rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

From their starting points on entry to school, most pupils achieve satisfactorily and reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. Boys' achievement in writing has been a concern as it has been much less than that of girls. However, the recent strategies put into place are having a positive effect and the gap between boys' and girls' performance is narrowing. Achievement in mathematics is weaker than in English and science because pupils in some classes are not challenged to perform as well as they could. Progress in science has been steadily increasing as a result of the more structured practical activities pupils receive to develop their scientific investigative skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Although behaviour is generally good, a small number behave inappropriately. Members of the school council are keen to contribute to improving behaviour, saying that 'teachers have the right to teach and pupils have the right to learn'. Pupils feel safe and are confident that they can turn to an adult for help if needed. There is a sense of being part of a community, one pupil commenting 'we can work better when we work as a team'. Pupils make a positive contribution to the community such as bulb planting at the local park and singing at the local hospice. They clearly understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle through developing good eating habits and participating in the wide range of sporting activities provided during the year. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the faiths and beliefs of other cultures. The school is working to improve this understanding as more pupils are joining school from a wider range of cultural and religious backgrounds. Pupils are suitably prepared for future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers generally explain the learning objectives for lessons well so that pupils are clear about what they are to learn and what they need to do to achieve success. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to ensure all pupils are involved in their learning. Pupils do not learn as quickly in some classes as in others because the teaching, especially in mathematics, does not challenge them sufficiently. Pupils usually show positive attitudes to their work but become disinterested when the activity is too easy. Teachers are beginning to employ a variety of teaching styles to capture the interest of boys more effectively. This is exemplified in the increasing use of visual stimuli, such as film, as a starting point for pupils' activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has been modified recently to improve the performance of boys, especially in writing. There are more planned opportunities for teachers to use images as an inspiration for writing tasks, such as in Year 3 where pupils dressed up as fairy story characters to help motivate their writing. This is proving successful with the gap between boys' and girls' performance narrowing. The wide range of out of school clubs and educational visits effectively supports pupils' personal and social development. The curriculum is successfully extended by links with others, such as professional sports coaches, to develop pupils' skills further. Planning in mathematics is not always effective in providing sufficient challenge for pupils, especially the more able. There have been limited opportunities in the past for pupils to be actively involved in their learning. Recent changes mean pupils are able to show more initiative in their learning, particularly in practical activities involving role play, drama, music and art.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils work in a happy and secure environment. Child protection procedures are thorough and arrangements to ensure the safety of pupils meet requirements. Risk assessments are firmly in place to promote pupils' safety in school and during off-site visits. Good use is made of external agencies to provide support for those pupils who need extra help. This plays an important part in the good progress that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make. The school checks the progress pupils make but does not effectively use this information to set targets for improvement. All pupils have year group maths and English targets but these are not always sufficiently challenging, and as one pupil pointed out, 'sometimes we have to wait for others to achieve it, even if we can do it'. The school is currently working towards setting individual targets for pupils so they can work at a pace which is more appropriate to them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and other key leaders have quickly developed an effective working relationship. They complement each other's skills well and have forged a common vision amongst all staff of enabling pupils to achieve to their full capability. The headteacher's leadership is purposeful and her high expectations of all involved in the school sets the tone for leadership at all levels. To this end, training is being given to subject leaders to develop their role in school improvement. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and has correctly identified the priority areas for development. A range of strategies has been introduced to bring about improvement in standards and achievement. Some of these are beginning to bear fruit. For example, boys are more interested in their work and are making better progress in their writing. The school checks its performance in a variety of ways but some of these methods are not rigorous enough. This is shown by the lack of systematic monitoring of recent initiatives to ensure that priorities have been reached. Governors are receiving support in how to ask relevant questions of the decisions of the school and this aspect of their role is improving.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	3
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	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	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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Benfield Junior School, Brighton and Hove, BN41 1XS

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited your school. You were so friendly and keen to tell us about what goes on in school. We really enjoyed our time with you and consider your school is a satisfactory one that is improving.

Teaching is satisfactory, as is your achievement, and you reach average standards by the end of Year 6. You told us that sometimes your work is too easy, especially in mathematics. Boys have not done as well as girls in writing in the past. However, because of an improved range of teaching methods, such as using film as a starting point for your writing, boys are now making better progress. We hope the boys will keep this up!

Your personal development is good and nearly all of you behave well, although you say a few pupils could behave better. The school council is trying to help these pupils act more sensibly. You work well to make your local community a better place in which to live, such as by planting bulbs in the park. You obviously enjoy school because your attendance rate is improving. The curriculum is satisfactory and you told us you really like the out of school clubs, especially the drama club. We can see this as over 120 of you are members of this club. Well done! The school takes good care of you and you told us you feel safe and secure in school. The adults who are in charge of managing the school are successfully helping it to improve. Those few pupils who do not always behave well could help the school be a better place to work and play by behaving as well as everyone else.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- Improve standards in mathematics by making sure you are all given work that makes you think hard.
- Make sure that all of you make the progress of which you are capable in lessons.
- Regularly check if recent improvements are helping you to achieve better and reach higher standards.

Best wishes for the future

Melvyn Hemmings Lead Inspector