

# Birches First School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	124077
<b>Local Authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	292883
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rajinder Harrison

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	174
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Vacant Position
<b>Headteacher</b>	J Willcox
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 June 2002
<b>School address</b>	Birches Avenue Codsall Wolverhampton WV8 2JG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01902 434100
<b>Fax number</b>	01902 434104

---

<b>Age group</b>	3–9
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 May 2007
<b>Inspection number</b>	292883

---

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school, located on the outskirts of Wolverhampton, is smaller than average and is regularly oversubscribed. Most pupils are of White British origin and the remainder represent a wide range of other ethnic heritages. A few of these do not speak English at home. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) is low. Private out-of-school care provision is located in the school premises.

## 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 some outstanding features. Pupils' excellent attendance, their love of learning and their eagerness to take part in all that the school provides reflect their outstanding personal development. A warm, caring environment helps pupils feel happy and secure at school, form excellent relationships and trust the adults who work with them. Pupils' high levels of confidence, together with their good academic progress, prepare them well for their future.

Children start school with levels of knowledge and skills typical for their age. Excellent teaching in the Nursery and Reception Years and very well-planned activities help them to settle quickly and achieve high levels of success. At the end of the Reception Year, children reach, and very many exceed, the expected levels in all areas of learning. Good teaching and learning result in good progress being maintained in Years 1 to 2. At the end of Year 2, pupils reach above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics, with writing being a particular strength. In Years 3 and 4 these above-average standards are maintained in English, mathematics and science. However, the progress is less rapid for more-able pupils, who do not attain the very highest standards of which they are capable because they are not always set work that challenges them to the full. Very good support helps pupils with LDD to achieve as well as their classmates.

Curriculum provision has been improved considerably since the last inspection. It now contains a very rich and creative mix of experiences, tasks and activity days, such as cultural events, that enhance learning. These, alongside excellent 'Eco- activities', sports and other clubs and extensive community links, make the curriculum outstanding. Care, guidance and support are good. Care arrangements are excellent and parents are very confident that if any problems arise these are dealt with promptly. However, the academic targets that pupils have do not always challenge them enough.

Leadership and management is good. The headteacher's inspirational leadership ensures continued improvement. Staff and governors trust her ability to make certain that pupils have the best possible foundation to their future education. The school is a happy place. A strong 'learning for pleasure' culture underpins the school's aim to be the best. All staff are involved in checking the school's performance regularly, but the procedures to check that the more able pupils in Years 3 and 4 are challenged fully through target setting are not as rigorous as they might be. Governors are very supportive and present a high level of challenge to the leadership team but they are less involved in checking the school's performance. The school judged itself as outstanding but agrees that this is overgenerous in light of the fact that some pupils could achieve more. However, the school's continued good performance, high quality curriculum, pupils' excellent personal development and the fact that managers know what needs to be done to make improvements indicate their good capacity to secure further success.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that more-able pupils in Years 3 and 4 are challenged fully.
- Improve the procedures to check the performance of more able pupils more closely in Years 3 and 4.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Excellent provision in the Nursery and Reception classes, including very good assessments and individual support, helps all children make rapid gains in their learning. Children make especially good progress in their personal development and speaking skills. Children leave the Reception Year having reached the levels expected, and very many exceed them.

Achievement in Years 1 to 4 is good and standards are above average. In the national assessments in 2006, pupils in Year 2 reached standards that were above the national average in reading and mathematics, and very high in writing. Raising standards in writing has been a specific focus and the success of initiatives is evident in these results. In Years 3 and 4, pupils are working at similarly above-average levels but more-able pupils, if fully challenged, could achieve even more. Improved provision in mathematics to promote pupils' calculation and problem-solving skills is beginning to raise standards further. Pupils' speaking skills are particularly good because they have many good opportunities to talk and discuss their work as they learn.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they show high regard for others. They are very happy at school and want to do well. As one pupil said, 'This school is superb!' Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Older pupils look after younger ones very well and the 'buddy bench' ensures no one is lonely at playtimes. Pupils enjoy helping, for example, by organising play equipment. Through assemblies, work in art and visits to many places of worship, they gain a very strong feel for cultural diversity. Their spiritual development emerges as they reflect on the importance of looking after the world through environmental projects. School council members and eco monitors influence decisions regarding, for example, recycling activities. Through residential visits and other social events pupils very successfully learn to work with others. They are very active in community events, raising funds for charities and organising lunches for grandparents.

Pupils apply their understanding of the importance of healthy living extremely well as they select salad for lunch and take exercise through tai chi and other physical activities. They have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and that drugs are dangerous. Many visitors and visits introduce pupils to life and work beyond the school. Pupils' excellent personal skills and their good academic skills are secure foundations for their future success.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Pupils enjoy learning because, as some said, 'Teachers make lessons fun'. Excellent teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes encourages children to learn through exploring and talking. A vast array of well-organised and well-resourced activities and experiences helps them make sense of new information as they confidently set about their tasks. These same approaches are evident through the school as teachers encourage pupils to think and question what they are doing. Teachers place a good emphasis on using practical approaches, for example, in investigating mathematical problems, so that pupils apply what they know when facing new

tasks. Pupils listen attentively, show high levels of interest and work relentlessly to do their best. They discuss sensibly with their classmates and work quite happily on their own. Pupils are even more enthusiastic when teachers use the interactive whiteboards because learning is far more visual and helps them understand information more clearly. At times, however, teachers do not challenge the more able pupils enough in Years 3 to 4, where these pupils say they could do harder work. Very good support helps pupils with LDD to be fully involved and thus achieve well.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

Skilfully interwoven with high quality experiences, the curriculum underpins pupils' good achievement. Emphasis on developing skills rather than teaching information helps pupils make sensible links with previous work and between subjects. For example, through science and physical exercise, pupils learn about eating sensibly and keeping fit. Planning takes very good account of the different ways pupils learn and activities incorporate discussions, practical investigations and research opportunities using books and computers. Greater focus on writing has helped raise standards considerably and more time on calculation and problem-solving skills is improving achievement in mathematics.

The creative combination of work and play makes school an adventure in the Nursery and Reception classes, so these children are learning outstandingly well. Provision for pupils with LDD is very good, allowing them to participate fully. Similarly, pupils with specific gifts and talents now have opportunities to take up additional opportunities in the areas in which they are identified as having strengths. A well-considered programme of personal, social and health education supports pupils' excellent personal development. Numerous visits and visitors such as artists and sports coaches make the curriculum come to life and extend pupils' awareness of the world beyond school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Pastoral care for pupils is excellent. The work of all the staff is instrumental in making life pleasurable and worthwhile for pupils, especially those who need extra care and support to achieve well. The support for the most vulnerable pupils is particularly strong, with external agencies contacted where appropriate. Pupils trust all the adults who work with them and are confident they will be listened to if problems arise. Procedures for child protection, health and safety and safeguarding pupils are all very secure, as are those for the reporting of racial incidents. Prompt action is taken if issues arise.

Pupils' attainment is tracked very carefully to check they make good progress. Any pupils not making the expected rate of progress are quickly identified and given additional support. A great deal of data is gathered but the targets teachers set, particularly in Years 3 and 4, are not challenging or personalised enough to help more-able pupils achieve all they are capable of. While there is some very good practice in advising pupils through marking, this is inconsistent.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The headteacher is determined to give pupils the best education and improving pupils' achievement is a high priority. Her skilful analysis of the school's work has resulted in changes, for example, in assessment procedures to check pupils' progress, and developing more practical approaches to develop pupils' skills. Pupils' excellent personal development and attendance indicate that they want to be there and want to learn. The school enjoys high standing in the community and parents know their children thrive here.

Teamwork is strong and everyone has a role to play in checking the school's performance. Good procedures are in place to check, for example, that pupils have more opportunities to practise their calculation and problem-solving skills. Checks to assess the quality of teaching and review each pupil's progress involve all staff and take place regularly but these procedures are not as refined as they might be to ensure all pupils are fully challenged. Governors are very supportive, manage the school's finances very efficiently and ensure parents are consulted about school improvement regularly. They are not as effective in their checking of the school's performance. Nevertheless, the school has addressed the points raised in the last inspection well and standards are continuing to improve.





## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
---	-----------------------

### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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

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

28 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birches First School, Codsall, Wolverhampton WV82JG

I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school when we visited recently to look at your work and talk to your teachers. It was good to meet such friendly and polite young people – we felt most welcome. Please thank your parents for completing the questionnaires about what they think of the school. We are pleased they like it and really thrilled to hear you say you think your school is superb! It was particularly delightful to watch the Reception class do their assembly and to watch everyone join in the keep-fit activities in the hall.

- Your school is good at everything it does and some things are excellent.
- You work hard and get higher results than we would expect from children of your age in all subjects. Your writing and speaking skills are particularly good and your numeracy skills are nearly as high;
- Teachers plan excellent activities and teach you well. You have fun in lessons, go on exciting visits and meet so many interesting people who help you learn;
- The school takes excellent care of you and all the adults in your school listen to you and help you if you have problems;
- Your behaviour is excellent and we really like the way you look after each other, try to keep fit and healthy and know why recycling is so important;
- Your headteacher, staff and governors work hard to try and make your school one of the best;
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes get off to an excellent start and this helps all of you do so well;
- There are two things we have asked your teachers and governors to do to improve your school.
- Teachers should make sure everyone in Years 3 and 4 has work that is hard enough to help you achieve even better results;
- Teachers and governors should check that the targets they set you help you work to the best of your ability. They should also keep checking on your progress towards your target;.

There are things you could do to help. For example, ask your teachers what you have to do to get the highest results you can and how you can make your work better.

We are pleased you love school and have good friends there. We hope that you continue to do well and the school becomes the 'best ever'.

Yours sincerely

Rajinder Harrison Lead Inspector