

Birchfields Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130380
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	293641
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Arthur Markham

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	686
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Shannon
Headteacher	Miss Offord
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2002
School address	Lytham Road Fallowfield Manchester M14 6PL
Telephone number	0161 2243892
Fax number	0161 2243548

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large three-form entry school serves an inner city area in Manchester. The number of pupils claiming free school meals is above that in most schools. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is very high and a large number are in the early stages of learning English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The numbers of pupils joining and leaving the school during the year is above average in some year groups. The school is part of the South Manchester Excellence in Cities Action Zone.

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 in which pupils make good progress both academically and socially. Achievement throughout the school is good. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage because effective teaching results in close attention being given to overcoming the difficulties many children face with learning English as an additional language. However, most children do not reach the standards expected nationally by the time they enter Year 1.

Throughout Years 1 to 6 pupils experience good teaching and a rich curriculum and they respond well to the range of activities that make learning interesting and relevant for them. Staff work hard to provide a stimulating environment in which they can learn. The strong emphasis given to the arts is reflected in the high quality art evident in the school. Excellent links with other partners, agencies and schools greatly enhance the learning opportunities for pupils. Consequently they enjoy school, work hard and strive to do well. All pupils make good progress, but the difficulties many face with learning English as an additional language has a detrimental impact on the school's overall standards, which are below those expected nationally. The school is not complacent and there is a clear awareness that standards could be higher and work is ongoing to achieve this. The relatively newly appointed headteacher is introducing a number of changes aimed at further improving the achievement of pupils. Her determination to raise standards is shared by the staff who are implementing these changes enthusiastically. However, inconsistencies in the use of assessment and target setting across the school limits pupils' understanding of what they must do to improve even further.

The strong emphasis given to pupils' personal development and well-being is a positive factor in the good rate of progress they make. Pupils develop good attitudes to learning and are well prepared for the next stage of their education because close attention is given to developing their self-esteem and confidence. Their behaviour is good. They work together well in pairs and teams and develop good social skills, enthusiastically carrying out a range of responsibilities well. Their collections for a range of charities reflect pupils' care and concern for others. They are pleased that their views are taken into account through the work of the school council and that a number of improvements have resulted. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and are given many opportunities to participate in physical activities. Parents rate the school highly and value the excellent level of pastoral care provided for their children. Pupils enjoy very positive relations with staff and say they feel confident that there is someone they could go to if they needed help. The careful attention given to equipping pupils with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and developing their personal attributes, prepares them well for the next stage in their education.

The headteacher provides a clear educational direction for the school with a strong focus on ensuring equal opportunities. A new management structure has been drawn up, but this is yet to be fully implemented. As a result middle managers and coordinators do not have enough impact on the work of the school in their areas of responsibility. Governors are involved and provide effective support and challenge. In a climate of rapid change the school has underestimated its overall effectiveness, but self-evaluation procedures are generally accurate and identify the school's strengths and areas requiring development. The school provides good value for money. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Taking into account the determined leadership of the headteacher and the concerted support she is receiving from the staff and governors, the school is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure more consistency in the use of the school's procedures for assessment and target setting to enable pupils to understand better what they need to do to improve.
- Develop the role of middle managers to enable them to take a more active role in improving standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards are below average, pupils' achievement is good. On entry to the Nursery most children have very low level skills, particularly in language. They make a good start to their learning in the Foundation Stage because they are presented with a rich range of teacher directed and independent activities, but standards are still low by the time they enter Year 1. In Years 1 and 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics remain well below those expected nationally, but effective teaching enables pupils to make good progress. This good rate of progress continues through Years 3 to 6, though standards in national tests are still below national averages by the end of Year 6. Close attention is given to equality of opportunity and teachers work hard to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met. The many pupils learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they are supported well in lessons and group situations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school's warm and nurturing atmosphere ensures pupils' good personal development. Pupils are keen to take part in all activities and show great enjoyment of most lessons. Recent effective action to improve attendance has had a positive effect and attendance is now around the national average. Pupils are proud to take responsibilities. For example, representatives of the new school council say how they hope to help to improve the school and point out how they, 'must keep the younger children safe'. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that they are confident that adults will deal with any concerns.

Pupils behave well and learn to work and play together extremely cooperatively. Their spiritual, moral, social and, particularly, cultural development are good and is enhanced by the very successful arts and extension activities in the school. Pupils have increasing understanding of how to keep fit and healthy. They are successfully developing the skills they will need for future education and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning across the school is good and enables the majority of pupils to make good progress. Secure relationships, careful planning of activities, clear explanations, effective questioning and good class management skills are the key features that help pupils to work purposefully, enjoy their activities and understand what they are to learn in lessons. Teaching assistants provide an additional and effective layer of teaching, especially in supporting pupils who find learning difficult and those who are learning English as an additional language. There are, however, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In a small

proportion of classes teachers are not effectively using the information about how well pupils are progressing in order to influence what they teach. In these instances work is not well planned to challenge pupils or to move their learning forward. In addition, the marking of pupils' work often fails to provide the advice that will help them to progress further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum meets the academic needs of all pupils' and very successfully promotes their personal development. Children in the Foundation Stage are provided with many interesting and challenging ways for them to learn. Activities outdoors extend and enhance fully what is learned indoors. Provision for those learning English as an additional language is particularly effective, enabling these pupils to gain confidence from an early age and to make good gains in their learning. A strong emphasis is given to developing skills in literacy and numeracy, but due attention is also given to other subjects. The school has invested in new technology to support the progression of skills in information and communication technology, but insufficient use is made of computers to support learning in all subjects. Rich and stimulating creative and performing arts experiences, recognised by the Artsmark award, contribute significantly to pupils' enjoyment in learning. Their awareness of the need for healthy lifestyles is reflected in the school's achievement of the Healthy Schools Award and ActiveMark.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This aspect is good overall. Excellent pastoral support ensures all pupils are cared for and supported extremely well. Despite the school's large size, staff know each individual pupil very well and have developed a truly family atmosphere. Staff who have responsibilities for different groups of pupils work extremely closely with many outside agencies. This ensures successful identification and action to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the very large number at an early stage of learning English. Careful attention is paid to health and safety issues and child protection procedures are in place. The academic guidance given to pupils is less effective. Recently introduced assessment systems are beginning to give a clearer picture of pupils' progress. However, staff are not yet using these systems to their full potential to identify how well pupils are doing. The arrangements for setting pupils targets are not consistent or rigorous enough to help them understand what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. The new headteacher is providing strong leadership. Her clear vision of what must be done to improve the work of the school in order to raise standards has been successfully conveyed to staff. They are supporting her well, although the skills of middle managers are not well developed. Effective self-evaluation procedures take due account of the views of pupils and parents and ensure that the school has a good awareness of the areas needing development. The recently drawn up school improvement plan gives close attention to improving the progress of pupils in order to raise standards. Governors are supportive of the school and carry out their responsibilities well. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and share the staff's commitment to 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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	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?	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	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	2

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	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Birchfields Primary School, Manchester M14 6PL

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you so much for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and getting your views of your school. Many of you said it was a good school and we agree.

We particularly liked the warm and friendly atmosphere and the way the staff take good care of you so that you feel safe and happy. They work hard to make learning interesting for you so that you do well. We were very impressed by the wide range of activities that they plan for you and it was very clear that this helps you to really enjoy school. Many of you told us this and how much you like your teachers. The way you work hard for your teachers is the main reason that you make good progress and achieve well. Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school and we liked the way that older pupils take care of the younger ones. Your awareness of the importance of a healthy diet and how to keep fit and healthy was clearly evident when we talked to some of you at lunchtime.

We think there are some things the school needs to do to make it even better. We have asked the headteacher and staff to make sure that they keep checking how well you are doing and set you targets so that you know what you need to do to improve. They can then make comments when marking your work that help you to understand if you are reaching your targets. We have also asked them to ensure that those teachers in charge of areas of the school's work are given opportunities to make the school even better and help you improve.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope that you will continue to work hard in school and help the teachers so that Birchfields Primary becomes an even better school.