



Birchwood Avenue Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 132105
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 293944
Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007
Reporting inspector Robert Drew

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Birchwood Avenue
School category	Community		Hatfield
Age range of pupils	4–11		Hertfordshire AL10 0PS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01707262503
Number on roll (school)	171	Fax number	01707258206
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Kate Wright
		Headteacher	Miss Samantha Magee
Date of previous school inspection	29 April 2002		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007	Inspection number 293944
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and set in a local authority housing estate in north Hatfield. The majority of pupils are White British with significant minorities from Black African, Bangladeshi and Traveller families. Slightly more pupils than average speak English as an additional language, and more than average have learning difficulties or disabilities. The proportion entitled to free school meals is twice the national average. More pupils than usual join or leave the school part way through any year.

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 and improving school. Its overall effectiveness has increased significantly over the last two years. Crucially, pupils now make good progress between entering Reception and leaving Year 6. The headteacher's actions to improve the quality of teaching have played a major part in this improvement, while the Local Authority (LA) has also contributed significantly.

Teaching and learning are good. The school has been bold in challenging poor performance by staff, retraining where necessary and making good new appointments. Learning is now predominantly good because teachers structure lessons well and make sure pupils understand precisely what is required for them to succeed. Outstanding practice exists where the active involvement of pupils is maximised, pace is exceptional and pupils thoroughly enjoy themselves. Inadequate teaching, once too prominent, has been virtually eliminated.

The impact of improved teaching is seen in rising standards. While these are significantly below national levels overall, results improved noticeably in 2006, a trend sustained in current Years 2 and 6. Aspects of current standards, such as Key Stage 1 reading and Key Stage 2 mathematics, are already close to national averages. In the light of pupils' low levels of attainment when they enter school, the standards now being reached represent good achievement. Foundation Stage provision gives them a very good start. The school is aware that the quality of writing is still too low, especially amongst boys, and that in both key stages, too few gain the higher levels.

Personal development is good because pupils receive good care, guidance and support. Some aspects are particularly impressive, especially the good behaviour and excellent levels of enjoyment typical in lessons and around school. This represents an improvement on earlier reports and reflects the school's recent 'zero tolerance' approach to unacceptable attitudes. Extensive use of praise for mature behaviour has also been successful. Attendance levels are still too low, despite the school's best efforts, but the once high exclusion rates have been totally eradicated. Pupils show a good awareness of personal safety and healthy lifestyles. The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' learning. They gain confidence and a sense of success by joining in extra-curricular activities, and the brass lessons for all Year 5 and 6 pupils make an exceptional contribution to both enjoyment and learning.

These gains demonstrate that leadership and management are good. The headteacher's personal contribution is particularly effective, providing clear vision and a willingness to make difficult decisions. She has good support from a much strengthened senior team. Governance is now good and subject leaders make a satisfactory contribution to the running of the school. A good capacity to improve is shown by the accuracy of self-evaluation and the beneficial changes made since the last inspection. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards of writing, especially amongst boys

- Raise attendance to improve the education received by poor-attending pupils
- Increase the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels at the end of both key stages

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Pupils are progressing well due to effective teaching and leadership and management. Standards are below national averages, but are rising. In Key Stage 1, current reading levels come close to matching those found nationally and the same is true of Key Stage 2 mathematics. Targets are challenging and close to being met. While boys perform significantly less well than girls, especially in writing, the school is beginning to close the gap. Pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress because their needs are well diagnosed and supported. More able pupils are increasingly given tasks to stretch them, but too few reach the higher levels in tests. Good collaboration with LA officers has made staff very proficient at monitoring pupils' progress so that they take swift action when weaknesses come to light. In the Foundation Stage, pupils enter with very low attainment, especially in writing and mathematics. They make very good progress because of well organised teaching and support and leave with standards which are below average but by a much reduced margin.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils show exceptional enjoyment in lessons and around school. During the inspection, the Reception children had fun and made the most of their time out in the snow to give them exciting ideas for their early writing. Behaviour has improved well over the last few years and is now good, but attendance remains too low. The school is doing what it can to reduce absence, but many parents too readily take their children out of school for holidays in term time. A minority of pupils still have particularly high absence.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They eat healthily and take exercise by walking to school and participating in physical education and clubs. They contribute satisfactorily to the life of the school and the local community. However, there is scope for the older pupils to take more of a lead in supporting younger ones and running daily activities. Pupils are progressing well in reading, writing and numeracy skills to prepare them for the world of work. Most are beginning to learn to think for themselves and take the initiative in their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and are clearly leading to improvements in standards and achievement. Relationships are very strong so that pupils want to do their best for their teachers. Although some pupils are potentially disruptive, teachers are adept at managing this challenge. Staff are now good at engaging boys in their learning, which is helping to improve their writing skills. Pace is good and activities last just the right length of time to sustain attention. Teachers have improved their skill at matching work to the needs of pupils. They are good at pushing the less able pupils to reach expected standards, but are less consistent in challenging able pupils to achieve even more. Marking is regular, with clear links to the pupils' targets, but not all teachers add constructive comments to stretch them further. Teaching assistants are valuable members of the teaching team and support learning well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. In addition to meeting all statutory requirements, it has been adapted well to local needs. Many pupils have low levels of academic skills and personal competence when they enter the reception class, so the school has given even greater emphasis than do other schools to literacy and numeracy. The Year 1 curriculum has been modified for those with particularly low initial standards, giving them more scope for learning through guided play and reduced formal instruction. The 'Wider Opportunities Programme' makes it possible for all Years 5 and 6 pupils to learn a brass instrument free of charge. Those who have learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported and there is high-quality specialist English as an additional language support. Children of Traveller families are also well supported and make very good progress as a result. Extra-curricular activities are numerous and of good quality. The curriculum offers satisfactory challenge for more able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are looked after well. Relationships are very good and pupils have great confidence in their teachers, so they learn well. Academic support systems are good. Teachers know when pupils are not doing as well as they should and are quick to find ways to get them back on track. All pupils are included very well in lessons and activities. Pupils who have learning difficulties, Travellers' children and pupils who speak English as an additional language receive good levels of support and achieve just as well as their classmates. Parents see the school as truly inclusive irrespective of a child's background. Personal, social and health education is a high priority and leads to pupils leading healthy and safe lives. The day-to-day care of pupils is

satisfactory. They are safe and secure on the school site. First aid and medical attention are good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

This aspect is good overall, but the headteacher's contribution is very good. She has been accurate in evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has set out a clear path to improvement and taken decisive action to implement changes. A strong team of colleagues now exists to support her effectively. Many key subject leaders are new in post, but collectively they offer satisfactory direction and management. Governors have relatively recently acquired much greater involvement in school life. They show a good understanding of its needs and give effective strategic support to the school. The headteacher and staff have worked very closely with the LA in the last two years to improve radically the rigour of teaching and learning. The LA's intensive, well-focused support and the headteacher's willingness to challenge anything other than good performance create a strong teaching force, ensuring good progress by pupils. This track record indicates a good capacity for improvement.

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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?	2
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	1
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	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.

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

25 January 2007

Dear Pupils

Birchwood Avenue Primary School, Birchwood Avenue, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 0PS

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school.

We liked many things about the school:

- Your headteacher is very successful in leading the school and improving the standards you reach
- You are making good progress
- Your behaviour is good
- The teaching you get is good and some lessons are excellent
- We saw a lot more pupils really enjoying themselves than we usually do
- Staff look after you very well

If the school is going to be even better in the next few years it needs to:

- Help you produce even better writing, especially the boys
- Stop so many children missing school regularly
- Make sure you have more chance of getting the really high levels in tests

We hope you continue to enjoy your time at this school.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew

Lead inspector