



# Birches Head High School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 124390  
**LEA** Stoke-On-Trent  
**Inspection number** 294365  
**Inspection dates** 21 June 2006 to 22 June 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Michelle Parker HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Birches Head Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Hanley
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST2 8DD
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 233595
<b>Number on roll</b>	897	<b>Fax number</b>	01782 236647
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Steve Barlow
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24 January 2005	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Karen Healey

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 16	<b>Inspection dates</b> 21 June 2006 - 22 June 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 294365
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Birches Head High School is an 11–16 mixed comprehensive school serving a diverse community from the Birches Head, Northwood, Shelton and Abbey Hulton areas of Stoke on Trent. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is above the national average. Fourteen per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and eight per cent speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special needs is above the national average. The school is supported by a visually impaired unit and a student support centre.

The school is a phase 1 extended school and at present is a phase 1 school in Building Schools for the Future.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

This is a satisfactory and improving school. The school now has a clear and accurate view of its own performance. Standards still remain low but the improved quality of teaching has led to at least satisfactory progress overall. The large number of pupils participating in the Learning Action Team has contributed to improvements in teaching.

Teaching is now at least satisfactory with much that is good and some that is outstanding. However, at times learning is not sufficiently interesting to maintain the attention of pupils. Middle managers gather an appropriate range of data about pupils' performance and ensure that this is used by staff to plan teaching effectively and match support to pupils' needs. This has led to the development of successful intervention strategies. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good and, because of this, pupils make at least satisfactory progress. The curriculum is good and provides a suitable range of work-related opportunities. Care, guidance and support are good and this has ensured that pupils make well considered choices at the end of each key stage. Strong links to colleges have allowed pupils a taste of college life and encouraged them to continue their learning after leaving school.

Behaviour around the school and in lessons is satisfactory. Most pupils enjoy school. However, a small minority of pupils' poor attendance brings the school's overall attendance rate below the national average. The school is working hard to address this. The school encourages pupils to be healthy and the right changes have been made to the physical education curriculum to encourage greater participation. Leadership and management are now good at all levels and this has ensured that effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection. The school provides satisfactory value for money. It now has a good capacity to improve.

### What the school should do to improve further

- ? Ensure that effective systems are in place to monitor and improve attendance.
- ? Ensure that all learning is interesting so that it motivates the pupils.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. Overall, pupils make broadly satisfactory progress by the time they leave school. In 2005, 36% of the Year 11 pupils attained five or more GCSE grades at A\*–C. This was marginally below what the pupils should have attained and more able and talented pupils did not achieve as consistently well as they should. The standards reached by pupils in the current Year 11 are broadly in line with national expectations. The school's rigorous assessment systems predict that approximately 45% of the pupils, both boys and girls, will attain five or more GCSE A\*–C grades this year. Achievement in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and information

and communication technology (ICT) is now satisfactory. Improvements have been secured largely because of the successful and wide ranging intervention strategies aimed particularly at pupils on the C/D borderline. The school sets appropriately challenging targets and tracks pupils' progress against prior attainment accurately and regularly across all subjects. In addition, pupils' literacy and numeracy have successfully improved through the use of adult literacy and numeracy courses. In Year 11, success rates of between 70% and 80% were attained in both courses. Many lessons observed during the inspection promoted literacy and numeracy in a range of curriculum areas.

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

### **Grade: 3**

The personal development and well-being of pupils are satisfactory with many good features. The pupils' behaviour is satisfactory, overall. Pupils speak positively about what is expected of them and the opportunities they have to take responsibility. Around 150 pupils are members of Student Action Teams. These are concerned with improving the environment, developing a school radio and TV service, interviewing older people in the community to record their histories, and an impressive number of other initiatives. As part of an ongoing project, discussions with a group of visiting primary pupils allowed pupils to think more deeply about how and what they are taught and what helps them to learn well. They are therefore enabled to voice their views on school activities and they are encouraged to do so.

Pupils know how to look after themselves and others because of the well planned programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) which is underpinned by the central principles of the school development plan – respect, honesty and challenge. Opportunities to get and stay fit through sport and a healthy diet are clearly provided. However, only a minority of pupils actively participate in sports teams and clubs and the overall figure for attendance is below the national average. Consequently, a proportion of pupils do not benefit from the substantial opportunities which the school offers.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory so that in the majority of lessons all pupils make at least satisfactory progress. In many lessons the teaching is good and in some it is outstanding. In these, work is thoroughly planned, takes account of what pupils have done before, and engages them in a range of interesting learning activities. All teachers share the lesson objectives clearly so pupils know what they are learning. Teachers know their subject well and skillfully use questions to extend pupils' knowledge and to assess what they have learnt. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively by most teachers to improve pupils' learning. Relationships between pupils and staff are good. As a result, the pupils are generally attentive and well behaved. In a small number of

lessons, where teaching lacks pace and variety, some pupils lose interest, too much time is allowed for tasks, pupils became restless, and the poor behavior of some distracts others from learning. Ongoing assessment information on pupils' progress is used well and most teachers are successful in helping pupils to identify how to improve their work and make better progress. Pupils at risk of underachievement are identified quickly and a suitable range of strategies is used to support them.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good. In Years 10 and 11, pupils choose from a wide range of GCSE and vocational courses. The school takes care to find out what pupils need and then ensures provision matches their needs through, for example, providing psychology and sociology for the higher attaining pupils. Provision is planned in conjunction with neighbouring high schools and colleges to offer a wide range of work-related courses. Potentially disaffected pupils in Year 10 and 11 have particularly benefited from this development and their attendance and behaviour have improved as a result. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support in lessons, enabling them to fulfill their potential. Gifted and talented pupils are provided with a satisfactory range of activities to meet their needs and interests. The programmes for PSHE and citizenship, and the range of extra-curricular clubs and visits, make significant contributions to pupils' personal development. There are strong links with primary schools. The good attention given to enterprise education and work-based learning helps prepare pupils for future employment.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils. There are good arrangements, highly valued by pupils, parents and carers, for the successful transition from primary school. Pupils also receive good support in making decisions about educational and vocational options at the ages of 14 and 16. All pupils have target grades which are shared with parents and carers, who receive termly progress reports. The monitoring of pupils' progress has improved and now takes place consistently across all subjects. Information is used to make clear to pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Information given to parents and carers has improved since the last inspection and parents now appreciate the increased opportunities to visit the school to discuss their children's progress. More reliable and rigorous systems for safeguarding pupils' health and safety have been implemented since the last inspection, particularly in the supervision of pupils at all recreational times. Bullying is infrequent and is dealt with quickly and effectively when it occurs.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The strong leadership of the headteacher and senior management team has moved the school forward. Their clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses has enabled them to strategically develop the school's capacity and has placed it in a strong position to develop further.

Middle managers are now effective and are clear about their roles in improving teaching and learning. Information from a range of monitoring activities and data on pupils' performance are used well to develop teachers' planning and teaching. This has led to an improvement in the quality of lessons. Teachers respect and listen to pupils' evaluations of lessons. This has helped pupils develop as independent learners. Teachers' confidence has grown to the extent that there is now a culture of innovation and appropriate risk taking in the school.

Recently appointed middle managers have moved speedily to improve the curriculum, schemes of work and teaching in their areas. As a result, pupils have already benefited and speak positively about these changes.

Governors have continued to grow in confidence and are more rigorous in making challenging suggestions and holding the school to account. They think strategically about their role. As a result, governor training and committees are used effectively to ensure governors fulfil their monitoring roles. The views of parents are regularly sought through questionnaires and the parents' forum. The school works hard to respond to these. The school provides satisfactory value for money. It has a good capacity to improve.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### 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>	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for the very polite and friendly welcome you gave to the team when we came to inspect your school. Although we have enjoyed coming to your school, we will not be visiting it for a while because the school is no longer in special measures.

You looked very smart in your school uniform. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. It was very interesting to watch you work and talk to your teachers about your progress. You were very mature in your discussions with us. Your Learning Action Team members talked very impressively about how they evaluated lessons and the changes they had helped to influence from their curriculum walks. We noticed how well you and the staff respect each other and work well together.

We think you go to a satisfactory school which is improving and has many good features. All the staff work hard to support you and help you to learn well. We have seen an improvement in the quality of lessons and the work you do. However, we have asked the school to make learning more interesting so that you will enjoy lessons. We were pleased you could explain clearly to us how you could improve your work.

The curriculum is good as is the care, guidance and support you receive. This has helped you to make appropriate choices at the end of Year 9 and Year 11.

The school is led extremely well by your headteacher and senior staff. All the teachers are trying hard to make the school an even better place for you to come to and learn. Your teachers care for you and work hard. Most of you try hard in lessons, behave well and take care over your work. However, while we believe that all of you make at least satisfactory progress, some of you are not attending school frequently enough to ensure you learn well.

We wish you well for the future and hope you are successful in whatever you want to do.