



Birch House School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	352/6045
Unique Reference Number	130386
Inspection number	352
Inspection dates	10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector	Ms Honoree Gordon HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group 11–16	Published 5 February 2007	Reference no. 300795
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Birch House school educates pupils aged 11 to 16 years who have moderate to severe emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. Formerly the Didsbury school, it has been housed since 2004 on two sites: Birch House and Newlands, in multi-ethnic areas not far from the centre of Manchester. The buildings are also residential care homes and the pupils from these homes attend the school. The school and care homes are part of the Advanced Childcare group. Other pupils attend as day pupils placed by local authorities. These pupils live either with parents or families, or in other care homes run by the company within an approximate ten mile radius. The vast majority of pupils have statements which specify the provision required to meet their individual behavioural or educational needs. Some pupils, because of their particular behavioural needs, attend the school only part-time. All pupils have had disrupted schooling, many a history of non-attendance and some have severe behavioural problems which have led them into trouble with the law. There are 32 pupils currently on roll. Extension of the accommodation at the Birch House site is nearly complete. This will allow the total number of residential pupils on the two sites to increase to 18.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education at Birch House is satisfactory. The school has improved considerably since its last inspection in 2001, particularly in how effectively the staff manage the pupils' behaviour. As a result, pupils are making satisfactory progress in their learning and are increasingly able to control how they behave. The school's main strengths lie in the quality of care given to pupils and in the good teaching they receive. The most recent Commission for Social Care Inspectorate reports show that the care homes reach the required National Minimum Standards (NMS). Minor shortfalls identified in the reports have nearly all been addressed and the homes provide most attractive accommodation.

Quality of education

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Many are at the school for short periods only or arrive at short notice and the school's records show that they often make rapid early progress in their basic skills, having had disrupted

education before. However, some pupils' progress is hampered by continuing problems with attendance.

The curriculum is satisfactory and helps equip the pupils for the next stage in their lives. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to gain qualifications such as General Certificate of Secondary Education, national unit awards or Key Skills awards, but the range of pathways at ages 14-16 remains narrow, despite some links with local colleges for individual pupils for vocational subjects. All pupils follow a core of English, mathematics, science, physical education (PE), information and communication technology (ICT) and a programme of personal, social, health and religious education (PSHRE). There are some lessons in technology and art and some in humanities subjects. Music is taught only occasionally and there is no provision for modern foreign languages.

The provision for pupils with learning disabilities and difficulties (LDD), including those with statements providing for their additional needs, does not fully meet the regulations. This is because not all subjects of the National Curriculum are offered and some additional specialist services are also not being provided. There is no structured programme for developing literacy. However, pupils' emotional and behavioural needs are addressed well and the small classes allow for much individual attention.

Teaching is good, challenging and well-planned to meet most pupils' needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they make the lessons interesting so that pupils successfully re-engage in learning whereas, in previous schools, they had caused disruption or failed to attend. However, teachers do not make sufficient use of ICT to support learning.

The schemes of work for subjects and the systems for assessing how pupils are progressing are good, especially in the core subjects. Pupils are encouraged to self-assess and to take responsibility for their learning as part of the process. Assessment systems in mathematics are excellent and would serve well as a model for other non-core subjects.

The pupils benefit from small classes and frequent individual support. This support has in the past tended to focus on helping pupils manage their behaviour and the teaching assistants' role could now be broadened to allow them to more directly support pupils' learning. Pupils told inspectors how much they appreciate the good teaching and the time and care given to help them learn. Because of this they are more willing and able to control their behaviour and feel that they have more positive attitudes to learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The provision for their social and moral development is good. Pupils have targets for behaviour and personal action plans. These are underpinned by an effective rewards system, with clear rules and sanctions which staff apply consistently and fairly. As a result, pupils begin to develop trust in relationships and are increasingly able to manage their own behaviour.

The strong, specialist PSHRE programme, and the generous curriculum time allocated to this, reinforce personal development well, but the taught curriculum and the work done in the care homes on these aspects are not sufficiently integrated. One consequence of the split sites for the school is that not all pupils currently get their entitlement to education about citizenship.

Behaviour is satisfactory. In most cases pupils have come a long way to reach this point. Given the very troubled background of many, it is not surprising that there are still instances where behaviour slips and some pupils get into trouble with the law. However, the school's records show evidence of how successfully the school has been able to intervene with some very difficult pupils and to get them to co-operate with others. Pupils have to be restrained much less frequently than in the past. Consequently, the atmosphere in the school is conducive to learning. Attendance for some pupils remains a problem; for those who do attend regularly, school is clearly more enjoyable than it has been in the past.

Pupils are actively involved in decision-making, for example in the care homes they are able to be involved in choosing décor and share in decorating. The school and the care homes are well cared for, showing the pride pupils have developed in their surroundings.

Multiculturalism is celebrated; the home caters for a range of different ethnic minorities and encourages pupils to follow customs and practices relating to their individual backgrounds or religious beliefs.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. A high priority is given to safety. Pupils are closely supervised and records of behaviour and incidents carefully kept. Pupils are aware of the complaints procedures and the contact details for help or advice should they have any concerns. A comprehensive range of policies underpins this, but occasionally policies, such as the First Aid policy, lack detail. All staff receive training on appointment to introduce them to

the school's policies and they then discuss issues as they arise with their line managers, but further more detailed training has to date been restricted to a few key members of staff.

All pupils receive an initial assessment of their needs on arrival, including advice from an independent educational psychologist, who continues to play a part in supporting pupils through weekly visits, liaising with teaching and care staff. Teachers, teaching assistants and care staff work closely together to promote pupils' welfare. However, information on their academic progress flows less regularly back to the care homes.

The school makes adequate provision for promoting pupils' health and good provision for their emotional well-being. Good eating habits are encouraged as part of daily routine. Pupils have a say in the menu for their meals and commented to inspectors that the meals had improved. Weekly PE sessions out of school enable pupils to exercise regularly. Some pupils smoke, but the health education programmes make them aware of the health risks of this and other substance abuse.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All the required checks, including a check with the Criminal Records Bureau, are undertaken satisfactorily on all staff before they take up their employment at the school or care home. The company organises this centrally and the school and homes are provided with a copy of the checklist.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are good and well maintained. The school is located on two sites comprising the first two floors of Birch House, with the care home on the top floor. There is an inter-connecting ground-floor school unit at the Newlands care home. The Birch House site has more specialist facilities, for example a science laboratory, and more classrooms. The classrooms are located on the first floor. There are two newly-equipped ICT rooms, although one was not yet operational at the time of the inspection. Some pupils and staff have to travel between the sites, which is not ideal and which can be unsettling for pupils. The school strives to keep this to a minimum, but this causes some constraints on the curriculum, such as the unequal provision for citizenship education. Classrooms are bright and welcoming, with pupils' work often on display. There are common rooms with a games facility for free time, shared with the care homes. Both sites have school kitchens and there is additional dining space in the care homes. The care homes provide a very good environment for the pupils and meet the NMS. A programme of extension of accommodation to admit more residential pupils is nearly complete.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information is satisfactory. The school provides nearly all the information required for parents and others. The school brochure has been updated and the latest version, due to be sent out imminently, contains the required information, except that it is not made clear to parents that they can request a list of staff qualifications. There is insufficient detail on the specific provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. An account of how the funding is spent for pupils who have statements providing for their individual needs, is not sent out automatically to the appropriate local authority.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure meets all requirements. There is a useful guide for pupils and the information for parents is clearly set out. There have been a small number of complaints in the last year. Complaints are carefully documented and satisfactorily managed in line with the procedures. Adjustments are made and risk assessments amended, if required, as a result.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide all the requirements specified in pupils' statements of special educational need (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- improve the provision for citizenship so all pupils are provided with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of SEN and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f))

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- ensure that parents are aware that they can request details on the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k))
 - ensure that where a pupil who is registered at the school is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that pupil is submitted to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 6(7)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- coordinate the approach to meeting the needs of pupils with LDD, including a more structured programme for literacy development
- encourage teachers to use ICT more in lessons to better meet pupils' different learning styles.

School details

Name of school	Birch House School		
DfES number	352/6045		
Unique reference number	130386		
Type of school	Special Secondary school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	April 1996		
Age range of pupils	11-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:28	Girls: 4	Total: 32
Number of boarders	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 23	Girls: 3	Total: 26
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 11	Girls: 2	Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,884		
Address of school	Birch House School Birch Lane Longsight Manchester Lancashire M14 0WN		
Telephone number	0161 224 7500		
Fax number	0161 224 3555		
Email address	bilal@birchhouse.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Mahmood Bilal		
Proprietor	Mr Rizan Khan		
Reporting inspector	Ms Honoree Gordon HMI		
Dates of inspection	10-11 January 2007		