

Benson Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103362
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308290
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Watters HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	356
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Beardsmore
Headteacher	Cath Rindl
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2004
School address	Benson Road Hockley Birmingham B18 5TD
Telephone number	0121 554 4913
Fax number	0121 523 3448

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is situated on the north-western edge of Birmingham city centre. It serves an area of high social deprivation with a mobile pupil population. Nearly all pupils are from ethnic minority families, with the highest numbers from Pakistani, Indian, Black Caribbean and Black African heritages. Over half the pupils speak English as an additional language. Pupils enter the school with generally low levels of social, emotional and academic skills, particularly in reading, writing and number. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is much higher than the national average. The percentage of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs is also significantly higher than the national figure.

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 buoyant and vibrant school, which is making a positive difference to the community and the life chances of the pupils. Overall effectiveness is good and the pupils achieve well, although there are inconsistent rates of progress between classes and year groups. While standards are too low in most year groups, they are rising, with 80% of Year 6 pupils reaching the level expected for their age. Given their low starting points, and that many speak English as an additional language, this is a significant achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and those with disabilities make good progress. Adults and pupils work together well in a spirit of tolerance and harmony. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They behave well, take good care of each other and respect their teachers and friends. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, reflected best in their commitment to cultural diversity. Attendance is satisfactory and improving rapidly. Pupils really enjoy coming to school. Nearly all parents who responded to inspection questionnaires are overwhelmingly positive. One parent said: 'My child loves coming to school and loves to learn. She counts down the number of days in the holidays before returning to school.' The quality of teaching and learning is good, although there are inconsistencies between classes, particularly in the quality of teachers' marking and the progress pupils make in lessons. The curriculum is outstanding because of the very strong impact of the Extended School initiative. There is some exemplary practice to teach pupils about keeping safe, particularly in relation to the dangers of drugs- and kniferelated crimes. Care, guidance and support are good and pastoral care is particularly strong. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Targets are challenging and an increasing number of pupils know what to do next to improve their work, although this is not secure in all year groups and classes. The school is well led and managed, and staff morale is high. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have high expectations and aspirations. These reflect best in the school's overriding priority to raise achievement and standards. Monitoring and evaluation are good, although arrangements for eliminating inconsistencies in teaching and learning and pupils' progress are not sufficiently rigorous. Governance is satisfactory. The chair of governors gives good support and accurately recognises that more governors need to be involved in holding the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. It provides good value for money and there is good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of education in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Children make good progress because their learning activities are interesting, relevant and stimulating. They play well together, enjoy the company of their friends and support each other well. They are happy, safe and secure and trust the adults who work with them. A good range of structured play activities extend and develop the children's natural curiosity well. Adults support pupils' independent learning and choices well, although on occasions some of the youngest children in the nursery spend too long without sufficient adult intervention.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, ensuring pupils' rates of progress are good in all year groups, leading to consistently good and better achievement.

- Introduce more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning in lessons, to eliminate inconsistencies and ensure all teaching is good and better.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. From a very low base, standards are rising well and the gap between the pupils' current attainment and the levels they should be reaching for their age is narrowing steadily. Just over half the pupils on the school's register of special educational needs make good progress. Early indications from the outcomes of the 2008 national tests for 11-year-olds show a significant rise in standards from the previous year. Over 80% of the Year 6 pupils have attained or exceeded the level expected for their age. The school's unvalidated 2008 results are well above the local authority floor target, exceeding it by 18%. While pupils' achievement is good overall, with nearly half the pupils making good progress towards reaching their challenging targets, and almost a fifth making exceptional progress, there are inconsistencies between year groups and classes. As a result, pupils' progress slows in some year groups and then accelerates again in subsequent years, in order to make up the shortfall in pupils' learning. The proportion of pupils whose progress is too slow is currently just over 20%, with about a third of the pupils attaining standards below the levels expected for their age.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' personal development and well-being are consistently good. The pupils enjoy their lessons and being in school. Their behaviour is good, if a little boisterous at times on the playground. Pupils are consistently polite, courteous, confident and good humoured, and greatly appreciate the school's strong supportive ethos. They trust their teachers and are proud of them. One pupil said: 'Our teachers work hard and want us to learn.' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, particularly their tolerance towards each other and their commitment to cultural diversity. Pupils look after themselves and each other well. All these personal qualities prepare them well for life in the community. They show an excellent understanding of how to stay safe, in school and in the wider community. The school council is proud of its responsibilities and is beginning to play an active part in making decisions, for example, in extending the range of after-school clubs. Bullying is tackled well and arguments are usually resolved quickly, with the support of adults. The pupils' awareness of looking after the environment is developing well. They take regular exercise and keep fit. Their choice of snacks at lunch and break times does not always reflect their commitment to healthy eating.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers enjoy good relationships with their pupils and this promotes a positive attitude to learning, which is characterised by the Benson 'I can do it' motto. Specialist teaching in physical education is exemplary. Most teachers provide a range of interesting activities, which motivates the pupils to work hard. In the best lessons, pupils work independently and are encouraged to assess their work against clear success criteria. For example, in a good mathematics lesson, pupils made good progress identifying different strategies to make sure the measurements they were taking were accurate and fair. Teachers

provide appropriate challenge for pupils who find learning more difficult and for those who are gifted and talented. However, this good teaching is not always consistent and, in less successful lessons, pupils' work is not always sufficiently challenging and expectations are too low. This leads to slower rates of progress. Pupils' work is marked regularly and some teachers make helpful comments that identify the next steps pupils should take to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Excellent use is made of the Extended Schools initiative to respond positively to the needs of the local community. The out-of-hours learning programme includes a range of exemplary activities for vulnerable pupils. For example, pupils' attendance at a 'Guns and Gangs' drama course improved their awareness of the dangers of gang culture. The curriculum within school hours is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Teachers provide good support for the increasing numbers of pupils who are learning English as an additional language. The school is developing strategies to track their progress more systematically. A particularly impressive feature of the wider curriculum is the opportunity provided for involving parents in their children's learning. For example, the school runs Family Literacy sessions in which parents learn alongside their children with the aid of an adult learning tutor. This has raised the aspirations of parents for themselves and their children. The school provides pupils with an impressive range of sports activities and, as a result, pupils have high levels of self-esteem and confidence, which helps them make a smooth transition to secondary education. The school is breaking down the barriers to good community cohesion and strong academic achievement outstandingly well. Consequently, pupils are poised to take their place in society as responsible and skilled citizens.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive good care, guidance and support. Pastoral care is particularly strong. There are robust procedures for safeguarding the pupils. Child protection arrangements, health and safety checks and risk assessments are thorough and regularly reviewed. The learning mentor and the school's inclusion team provide good support for vulnerable pupils, whose progress is monitored carefully, with teachers intervening well to address their specific needs. The pupils who have learning difficulties and those with disabilities receive good support and make good progress. Attendance is satisfactory and improving rapidly. This is because the strategies used by the school to improve attendance are having a very positive impact. For example, punctuality and attendance are monitored rigorously, with good attendance celebrated each week. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The older pupils in Key Stage 2 know their levels of achievement and some know what they should do next to improve their work. However, this is not a consistent feature in all year groups. The school works very effectively with parents and families. One parent said: 'This is a community school that... appreciates and supports... all nationalities, and that is what makes Benson so special to me.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher sets a positive example and knows the school extremely well. She shows sensitive and caring leadership, combined with

a strong drive to ensure all pupils achieve as well as they can. In this, she is increasingly successful. She receives very good support from the deputy headteacher, who is an excellent role model for other staff. The senior management team has made a positive contribution to establishing good staff morale and a strong sense of teamwork. Senior teachers recognise the importance of developing their role further by providing better challenge, support and training for their colleagues. The recent introduction of pupil progress meetings with teachers holds them to account for the standards achieved by the pupils in their care. This is a very positive development. Pupils' progress and standards are tracked systematically, and assessment information is used well to set challenging targets for improvement. Monitoring and evaluation are good and strategic planning is secure. However, the current arrangements for checking the quality of teaching in lessons are not having enough impact to eliminate inconsistencies in teaching and pupils' progress. The work of the governing body meets statutory requirements, although the role of all governors in acting as a critical friend is underdeveloped.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	1
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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
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

6 June 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of Benson Community School, Birmingham B18 5TD Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed seeing you work and play so well together and talking with you about your time at Benson. You are all polite and friendly and look after each other well. You told us that you are proud of your school and appreciate all the interesting and challenging things that you do. Many of you said how much difference Benson is making in helping you become better readers and writers and understand how to get on with each other well. We are really impressed with this! We are pleased to tell you that you go to a very good school. All the adults who work with you help you to feel safe and well looked after, and to do well in your work. You are kind to each other and very understanding of all your different views and beliefs. Your school does really well helping you and your families learn together, to make sure you have a good chance of doing well when you go to your next school. You also told us that you really appreciate learning about dangers out of school. We think this is very important and agree with you. To help your school get even better we have asked Mrs Rindl to check your lessons more carefully, and to give the teachers the help they need to make sure all of you make the best progress you can and reach even higher standards in your work. Thank you again for being so friendly, cheerful and helpful. We have taken away many happy memories and feel that we have been really lucky to have spent two days with you at your school. Yours sincerely Andrew Watters Her Majesty's Inspector

6 June 2008



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Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector