

Benchill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132241
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	323195
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Jon Lovgreen

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	347
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kim King
Headteacher	Mrs Brenda Portman
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2007
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Benchill Road Wythenshawe Manchester M22 8EJ
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Benchill is a larger than average primary school. It serves an area of high disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is four times the national average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average.

The school has recently become federated with a neighbouring high school. It has gained Activemark Gold status for its provision in sport, and a Healthy Schools Award. In 2008 it was selected for a national 'Futures Vision Award' for schools judged to be taking a lead role in helping their communities develop. The school has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision.

When inspected in September 2007 the school was given a Notice to Improve. Areas for improvement included: pupils' achievement and standards, attendance, the use of assessment to plan challenging lessons and checking that initiatives resulted in improvement. A monitoring visit in April 2008 judged that the school was making satisfactory progress in tackling these issues.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Benchill Primary school is a satisfactory and improving school, which is already effective in several aspects of its work. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is a school at the heart of its community: committed to doing the best for its pupils, and welcoming families and their involvement. The calm and purposeful atmosphere and delightful displays of pupils' art and craft work show the good relationships and levels of care which pupils appreciate. Parents are very supportive of the school. However, some still fail to see the importance of regular attendance. While overall attendance has improved, the poor attendance of a minority of pupils remains a concern. It restricts school standards and the life chances of the youngsters concerned. Standards, although low, are rising and pupils make satisfactory progress. English remains a weakness because teachers do not expect enough extended writing where pupils, especially boys, concentrate on working quietly, accurately and neatly. The school has gone to great lengths to ensure that it has good and frequent information about how pupils are getting on. All staff share this and it is giving them a clearer idea of what pupils are capable of.

Becoming part of a federation with a local high school has formalised links which have been developed for some time. There is now an exciting, shared vision of how working in partnership can benefit both the school and the community. A 'can do' culture has become a 'will do' one. This has come about because of the strong and committed leadership of senior staff and the governing body. The headteacher and deputy headteacher balance enthusiasm with astute school evaluation. The governing body is both imaginative and challenging in terms of what it believes the school should achieve. Other staff share the vision and are keen to play a part in improvement. Middle managers work hard and organise things well. However, the decision to delegate monitoring of some aspects of the school's work to recently appointed staff has resulted in less rigour about the types of marking, lesson planning and teaching style which best suit pupils. As a result marking, though regular, does not give pupils enough guidance about precisely what they need to concentrate on. Similarly, too few lessons see higher attaining pupils given tasks which make them strive to reach their potential.

Personal development is good. Pupils behave well and settle to work quickly. They are thoughtful and sensible when asked to work together. They know that they can always rely on the adults in school to look after them and that they will be helped to overcome problems. Teaching is consistently at least satisfactory. Pupils respond well to the interesting and creative approaches which teachers work hard to provide. This is seen in the good quality curriculum where basic skills have a high profile and there is good planning for how pupils can use and develop these in other topics. The school is careful to see not only that there is a good range of extra-curricular opportunity, but also that activities included in this widen horizons and extend knowledge. Value for money is satisfactory. The progress the school has made over the past 12 months coupled with the clarity and ambition of its development planning demonstrate good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the EYFS is satisfactory. Children enter the EYFS with very low skill levels. Social and communication skills are particularly weak. Satisfactory induction arrangements help children settle quickly. They make good friends, treat each other and adults with respect, and become happy learners. Good home–school links result from parents being encouraged to get involved. Morning 'Stay and play' sessions see parents joining their children in a wide range of activities. Satisfactory teaching helps children progress steadily, but their standards are still well below national expectations by the time they enter Year 1. A focus on improving speaking and listening is effective in helping children become more confident and able to work with others. Teachers and support staff work enthusiastically to improve what is on offer. Observation and assessment of children by their key worker is thorough. The new EYFS manager is ensuring good teamwork, and care and welfare have a high priority. Indoor areas are interesting and provide an appropriate focus on personal development and basic skills, as well as the wider curriculum. Provision in the outside area is restricted and this limits children's choice of activity.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, especially boys' ability to work with greater speed and accuracy.
- Improve marking so that it gives pupils more precise guidance about standards they have reached and exactly how their work could be improved.
- Ensure that lessons provide greater challenge for higher attaining pupils.
- Improve the attendance of a minority of pupils.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an OfSTED inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards remain low, but achievement has improved and is now satisfactory. Better teaching and much improved assessment are improving things. The school has reversed the previous downward trend in results at Key Stage 2. Inspection evidence shows that standards rose in all three core subjects in 2008. The school met its targets in science, but fell short in English and mathematics. Too few pupils reached the higher levels. Despite this, pupils did make notable progress during their final year in the school, recovering some of the underachievement from previous years. Writing remains a weakness, especially for boys, because too many pupils work slowly and do not present neat and accurate work. Teachers keep careful records of what pupils have achieved and where their understanding is lacking. This also helps teachers to assess accurately the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This, coupled with increased support and small-group booster work, enables these pupils to make satisfactory progress. Assessments show standards reached by Year 2 pupils in 2008 to be lower than in previous years. This was because of the much higher number of lower attaining pupils in this year group, and greater rigour in marking. As part of its strategy of thoroughly checking standards, the school had these assessments externally marked so that they can be an accurate baseline for checking pupils' future achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils mature well and develop strong values about care, honesty, hard work and fairness. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. Lessons enable them to consider issues such as discrimination and equality. They respond well to a link with a school in South Africa by sending favourite books to its disadvantaged pupils. Educational visits make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. They visit art galleries, theatres and museums and this makes a considerable contribution to their cultural development. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils enjoy all that the school has to offer. For example, lunchtime dance creates a buzz of excitement around the school and participants love the 'street' and other forms of dance taught. Corridor displays support pupils' good awareness of healthy living. This enabled them to plan and prepare a healthy and nutritional meal on a set budget during 'maths week'. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and know what to do if anyone bullies them. Their contribution to the school community is good, for example, through the school council, prefect roles and the buddies scheme. They are adequately prepared for their future economic well-being, learning about different jobs and having clear aspirations for the future. Attendance is satisfactory. However, some pupils fail to respond to the school's considerable efforts to reduce their absence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with good elements. As a result, pupils make satisfactory progress and show good attitudes to their work. Teachers are skilled at presenting interesting topics so that pupils want to learn. High quality classroom displays and interactive whiteboards are used to stimulate and focus pupils' understanding. Effective teamwork between adults supports learning and skilled classroom management ensures good behaviour. Good organisation sees lessons moving along crisply. The increased use of practical activities and group discussion is helping pupils become more confident. However, some lessons see pupils given too much time to discuss things in groups so that they do not improve their ideas or vocabulary enough. In a Year 2 literacy lesson pupils enjoyed the

real-life aspect of their learning as they wrote instructions on how to make toast. Their progress was good because of the high level of challenge offered to pupils of all abilities. However, challenge for the most able is too often lacking in lessons. In some lessons teachers are not clear enough about how the task they set will develop pupils' knowledge. Assessment is satisfactory and accurate, but guidance as to how to improve is variable in its usefulness. This is especially the case in English, where advice tends to be vague and pupils are not taught to work quickly and with concentration when writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum enables pupils to achieve satisfactorily and promotes their personal development well. There is a growing focus on literacy and numeracy being used across the curriculum. Pupils on an activities visit to Ghyll Head wrote poems by torchlight to record their emotions and

impressions, having just watched the sunset over a lake. Recently introduced small-group booster sessions are having a good impact on pupils who experience difficulties with basic skills. Strong links with the local high school provide all pupils with valuable extra opportunities in sport, drama, music and dance. Higher attaining pupils benefit from specialist small-group teaching in mathematics and science. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good. As a result, pupils are beginning to make informed choices about their personal safety and well-being. The school is introducing a new curriculum following consultation with pupils through the school council. A wide range of visits and visitors to the school, always closely linked to topics being studied, enriches the curriculum. Such events also increase pupils' understanding of the wider community. Pupils with behavioural difficulties are strongly encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities and this has resulted in the improved behaviour of many. Similarly the Madoka room provides a stimulating and rewarding experience for pupils experiencing difficulty.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are highly committed to the care and well-being of pupils and positively encourage hard work, enjoyment and achievement. The school has a good reward system which has been successful in improving progress, attendance and behaviour. Merits and certificates are presented at weekly assemblies for achievement, acts of kindness and improved attendance. The school's learning support centre does sterling work and is highly successful in changing attitudes towards learning. Pupils benefit from the calm, nurturing ethos and the skilful attention to individual needs. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also those for who speak English as an additional language is well organised, ensuring that they make the same progress as their classmates. Procedures to ensure health and safety and to safeguard pupils are clear and regularly reviewed. Academic guidance is satisfactory and improving. Detailed assessment and tracking give clear information about standards and progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The strong partnership between the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the governing body has enabled the school to make good progress over the past year. Senior leaders have set a clear and demanding agenda for school improvement and have tackled the task with determination. They have not shirked difficult decisions. Evaluation is good so the school is very clear about what works and what needs improvement. Phase leaders and coordinators, many relatively new in post, are keen to get things moving and are well organised. Agreed systems for tackling issues are resulting in much greater consistency, for instance in assessment, pupils' behaviour and teaching quality. Systems for checking the quality of lessons and marking involve all staff, but this has resulted in some lack of rigour. The need to improve marking and amend some lesson styles has not been picked up quickly enough. Assessment systems now involve all staff on a regular basis so that tracking of pupils' progress is accurate and informative. However, this is not being used sufficiently well with pupils. Too many older pupils are uncertain of what skills they need to work on to succeed. The governing body is both active and committed. It is very supportive of the school, but able to ask searching questions when necessary. It, too, has had a pivotal role in moving the school forward. Community cohesion has been successfully promoted. The school has a very good understanding of what will benefit

the community and is working hard with it to improve the access families have to education. The school has been successful in reducing exclusions and in helping vulnerable pupils to find ways to cope with school.

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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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which 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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

As you know, we visited your school recently to see how you are getting on, and whether Benchill had improved enough. Thank you for being so friendly and polite. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing your work. A special 'thank you' to the school council and the other pupils chosen to talk to us about how you find things – you were very helpful.

We are pleased to tell you that your school has improved. It is now satisfactory and no longer needs extra checks by inspectors. Well done! Most of you are attending regularly and you enjoy lessons. You behave well, listen carefully to adults and work well together. You are careful and sensible in practical work so that teachers can plan more of it. You appreciate the help you get. 'All the adults in school really care for us and explain things well,' was a typical comment. This is helping you to make better progress with your work. The senior staff and governors have worked very hard to make sure that things are well organised and that you enjoy school. Classrooms and corridors are bright and cheerful thanks to all the excellent displays, and teachers plan really interesting things for you to do.

Of course there are always ways to improve and we have suggested four things which could help the school to do even better. These are:

- helping you all, especially the boys, to do better in written work
- planning more interesting tasks for those of you who find work easy
- marking work to show you just what you need to concentrate on to improve it
- getting some of you to attend school more regularly.

You can help by doing your very best not to miss any lessons, working as hard as you can, and listening carefully to all the good advice your teachers give you.

Our best wishes to you and the school for future success and happiness.