

Perry Beeches School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103492
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323841
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Davinder Dosanjh HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	900
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Turner
Headteacher	Liam Nolan
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2007
School address	Beeches Road Great Barr Birmingham B42 2PY
Telephone number	0121 3604242
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Age group	11–16
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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

Perry Beeches serves an extended area in which there are significant levels of social deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average, as is the number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Half of the school population is White British. Caribbean and Indian students form the largest minority ethnic groups with many other groups represented. For many students English is an additional language but few are at an early stage in learning English. The school gained specialist status for technology in 2004 and became an extended school in 2006. It shares a campus with four other schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. The school has made a remarkable journey over the last 18 months and is a rapidly improving school. It has successfully addressed the weaknesses found at the previous inspection. Therefore, in accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. It is a good school with outstanding features. The inspirational and charismatic leadership of the headteacher has revitalised the school and engaged all members of the school community. There is a shared commitment to the core principles of good discipline and high standards of uniform and behaviour, with an ethos of mutual respect running as a thread throughout all activities. The headteacher is well supported by a strong senior leadership team and dedicated and committed staff. There is a culture of accountability across the school.

Students really enjoy school. It is a harmonious and inclusive community where all are valued and diversity is celebrated. Everyone is full of pride for what has been achieved in a short space of time. There is a real sense of belonging to team 'PB'. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Such comments as 'I had to fight to get my child into Perry Beeches and I am so glad she was accepted', and, 'I couldn't wish for a better school' are very common. The school deservedly has an excellent reputation within the local community. The personal development of students is outstanding. Behaviour is outstanding and attendance has improved and is now good. The 'student voice' has been central in changing the ethos and attitudes to learning in the school. This is a school where students are at the centre of everything.

Achievement is good. Standards at the end of Year 9 were below the national average for some years but have now improved to be broadly in line. The most dramatic improvement is in Key Stage 4 where the legacy of underachievement has been overcome. This is evident in the school's best ever GCSE results in 2008, which are now above the national average. A combination of factors account for this success. The curriculum has been changed so it better meets the needs of individual learners. It is outstanding. All students leave with a qualification, signifying the inclusive nature of the school. Alongside this is the excellent care, support and guidance provided to all students which helps them to achieve well. A further significant factor in the school's success has been the improvements in teaching which is now good with an increasing number of outstanding lessons. Students know what they are expected to learn and marking gives good guidance on how work can be improved. However, more able students often finish work quickly and are not always provided with sufficient challenge. Discussion activities tend to be too teacher led with not enough opportunities for students to discuss amongst themselves.

The school's specialism is making a bigger impact on its success with all specialist subjects showing improvement in standards at GCSE. Technology is making a telling contribution to raising standards and achievement. Good practice has been spread to other subjects, for example, in the use of assessment in design and technology. The school collaborates well with partner schools, not least the four other schools sharing the campus. Information and communication technology is well used to support learning.

The school has an outstanding capacity to improve further. This is due to its comprehensive systems to track progress and tackle any pockets of underachievement and because of its rapid improvement. The policy to enter students early for examinations has been both motivational for students and has helped to ensure students are achieving to their full potential.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more challenge for the most able students in lessons to increase the proportion obtaining the highest grades in external examinations.
- Develop students' classroom discussion skills to enable students to make a more effective contribution and ensure learning develops at a rapid pace.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of students enter the school with standards that are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, standards had been below the national average. The school responded to this weak performance by the introduction of a more appropriate curriculum. In 2008, robust teacher assessments and progress in lessons showed that standards had reached the national average and students are now making good progress.

In one year, the school has made an incredible improvement in its achievement at Key Stage 4, after a legacy of underachievement. The school achieved its best ever GCSE at grades A* to C results in 2008 rising to 77% from 43% in 2007. Alongside this there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including mathematics and English. This has risen from 21% to 51% in 2008 and is now above national average. This represents outstanding achievement for the Year 11 students who have since left the school. The establishment of courses that better match students interest, for example vocational courses, has helped to raise standards.

The combination of individual support, a relentless drive to improve standards, and comprehensive tracking systems that identify students at risk of underperforming have been successful in ensuring all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, now make at least good progress overall. Current assessments for Years 10 and 11 indicate students are on course to do even better, with students being very successful who entered examinations early in both English and religious education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are extremely proud of the school and their own achievements. They are articulate, polite and show mature attitudes towards school. Through the year and school councils, students play a significant role in improving the school. For example, attractive areas inside the school have been created for use at break and lunchtimes. Students say that the headteacher's insistence on mutual respect has greatly improved relationships between students, and between students and staff which are now excellent. It has also improved behaviour, which is now outstanding. They like the many changes in the school and, as one student said, 'School is now like a 'second home'.' Students feel very safe. They say bullying is rare, and they are confident that any problems are quickly sorted out. Their great enjoyment of school is reflected in the improved attendance which is now above average. Celebrating events, such as 'black history month' and the religious festivals of Eid and Diwali, contribute very well to students' excellent understanding of different beliefs, values and cultures.

Students greatly relish the many outstanding opportunities they have to contribute to the school community, including through peer mentoring, buddies, or prefects and senior students. They appreciate the training they receive and the personal skills they develop. Students value

their education and really want to achieve. They like the opportunities they have to take examinations early, saying, 'This greatly boosts our confidence and gives us a chance to improve our grades.' These positive attitudes, together with their exceptional personal skills and good literacy and numeracy skills, are preparing students extremely well for their future economic well-being. High participation in sport, together with their excellent knowledge about diet, drugs and sexual relationships, contributes very well to students' understanding of healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students learn well as a result of good teaching. The majority of teaching is at least good, with a growing proportion which is outstanding. In the very best lessons, students develop skills and understanding at a rapid rate because the challenge is exciting and demanding, yet achievable. One example was in an art lesson where students were not allowed to say they 'can't do' something and were regularly shown what fellow students were achieving. Learning has improved swiftly and continues to improve because of a common understanding of what makes a good lesson, with all staff manifestly committed to meeting and exceeding the school's expectations. School leaders monitor teaching scrupulously to drive up standards and to root out any unsatisfactory practice. Teachers consistently establish a purposeful working atmosphere which is respected and appreciated by learners. Students understand what they should learn in each lesson and later review what they have achieved. Work is marked in detail so that students know what to concentrate on next to improve their work. In a minority of less successful lessons, additional challenges for those quickly grasping the topic, or the provision of additional materials for those taking longer than expected, are not systematically planned for, so reducing the achievement of some students. Teachers place appropriate importance upon ensuring students understand key terms. Whilst students answer questions confidently in lessons, teachers do not always encourage them to comment on, or challenge, the views of other students to take learning to a greater depth. Teaching assistants know their students' needs well, which contributes to students, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, progressing well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum has contributed significantly to raising standards and achievement. Courses are imaginatively planned to meet the needs of students and the local community. A shining example is the way in which the 'Pathways' programme has remotivated students who were previously achieving very little. By spending part of their week in local companies and learning skills such as construction and social care, many of these students consistently exceeded expectations in the 2008 examinations. The use of additional tests in mathematics and English has shown students that they can achieve well, leading to increased confidence and then surpassing expectations at GCSE. The needs of more able students are well met with the opportunity to take examinations earlier than is usually the case. This permits these students to follow advanced courses whilst still at Perry Beeches. A finely tuned mix of academic and vocational courses caters very well for the differing needs of learners. There has been an increasing involvement in sport by all students starting a vocational course in Year 8. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, which further enriches learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All staff go out of their way to provide outstanding care and support to students which enables them to achieve well. The school is extremely adept at tailoring provision to meet the needs of vulnerable students and those experiencing problems, making very good use of the close links with other agencies and organisations. Robust and rigorous safeguarding procedures are in place to ensure students' safety and well-being. Students receive exceptionally good academic guidance. Teachers constantly tell them how well they have done and how to improve through marking and in lessons. Students' progress is closely monitored, and those who fall behind are swiftly identified and action taken. Outstanding provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables these students to achieve as well as their peers. Good information and advice about careers and further education, in addition to well organised work experience, help to prepare students well for their next steps in life.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher has empowered all staff and governors to focus on the core elements of learning, teaching and respect in order to raise standards. This vision is shared and supported by a dedicated, knowledgeable and enthusiastic senior leadership team. Teams at all levels have been restructured so that individuals within those teams are now working to their strengths. This has brought about a confident, coordinated approach to learning across the school which is evident not only in lessons but also in planning. Middle leaders talk with enthusiasm about the key role which they have played in the improvement agenda of the school and how they can sustain this through continuous professional development and good planning. There is a shared commitment to the key values of high standards of behaviour and an ethos of mutual respect. Students have responded well to this and, as a result, behaviour and attitudes to learning have significantly improved. Students of all ages appreciate the fact that their views are listened to and that they too are given opportunities to be leaders within their school community. Parents have overwhelmingly identified the new leadership structure and the change in ethos as significant reasons for the improvement in standards. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion by creating one common vision and a sense of belonging with all the communities it serves. There are extensive partnerships with the local community which enhance the students' strong sense of the world around them.

Performance management for staff is rigorous and well managed and links to the priorities of the school improvement plan. The monitoring and tracking of students' progress has been significantly improved and the majority of students know their targets and what they need to do to improve. Any underachievement is now identified early and appropriate, planned intervention has paid significant dividends in terms of improving student outcomes.

Self-evaluation procedures are rigorous. The curriculum has improved significantly since the last inspection and is very closely structured to meet the diverse needs of all students. Governors are now very clear about their roles and rightly hold the school to account for its progress. They contribute fully to the school improvement planning cycle and are very proud to be part of what the chair describes as 'very definitely a student-centred school'.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

26 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Perry Beeches School, Birmingham B42 2PY

My colleagues and I really enjoyed our visit to your school and came away thinking what a remarkable improvement the school has made since its previous inspection a year ago. You are right to be proud of what team 'PB' has achieved because Perry Beeches is now a good school with outstanding features. Our main findings are:

- the inspirational and charismatic leadership of the headteacher has revitalised the school and engaged all members of the school community
- you make outstanding progress in your personal development, displaying exemplary behaviour and mutual respect for each other
- the school is a harmonious community and you have played a significant role in improving the school
- results in tests at the end of Year 9 have improved and GCSE results have made a dramatic improvement
- the outstanding curriculum, with its choice of courses alongside the excellent care support and guidance you receive, is now allowing you to fulfil your potential
- the quality of teaching is good; some of the teaching is outstanding and lessons make it clear what you have to learn
- the school's leaders and dedicated and committed staff have been very successful in improving the quality of education you receive, and they show relentless drive to carry on with this.

In order to make your learning even better, we have asked the staff to seek ways in which the most able students can be more challenged in lessons in order to increase the proportion obtaining the highest grades. We have also asked the school to help teachers to develop your classroom discussion skills so you can question and discuss amongst each other more.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh Her Majesty's Inspector