

Birdwell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109083
Local Authority	North Somerset
Inspection number	324891
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Collard

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoff Mountjoy
Headteacher	Nick Shopland
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Hollis Close, Long Ashton Bristol, Somerset BS41 9AZ
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 14 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils, parents and the school improvement partner. They observed the school's work, scrutinised documentation about pupils' progress, checked on safeguarding procedures and analysed 48 parental questionnaires returned during the inspection.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The achievement of pupils and whether the legacy of underachievement from the past had been eradicated.
- How well the leadership and management of the school had improved the school's provision and set realistic challenges for the future.
- Whether there are still any barriers to learning that are impeding the achievement of pupils.

Information about the school

Pupils in this average-sized school come from the local area. The number of pupils has increased significantly in the last three years. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average as is the proportion with statements of special educational needs. There has been significant staff turnover since the last inspection, including some senior leaders.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Since its last inspection, the headteacher, with ever-increasing staff support, has worked successfully to raise the school's self-esteem and overcome the legacy of underachievement. Whilst the school provides a satisfactory quality of education, there are clear signs of sustainable improvement such as the improved national test results in Year 2 and better progress for pupils in Years 3 to 6. The school recognises that there is still more to do, particularly raising standards in English and mathematics by Year 6, but pupils, staff and parents are proud of what has been achieved so far.

The drive to raise teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities has been at the heart of improvement. This work has been aimed at developing consistency and raising the overall quality of teaching from satisfactory to good. To aid this, there have been innovative developments. Lessons and curricular planning show that pupils' basic skills are combined with developing good lifeskills. These include working together and, through real-life challenges, being given the ability to make convincing decisions. For example, one class is currently designing a new garden for a member of staff. This involves negotiating within groups, timekeeping and researching. Calculation skills are essential to decide how, within a limited budget, their designs fulfil the requirements, while persuasive written texts are needed to convince others. Pupils say that they really do have to think hard and that the different groupings have made them learn how to get on with everybody.

Pupils attend school regularly, behave well and enjoy their learning. Many pupils are keen to become involved in school activities. They have also initiated ideas themselves, such as selling their own apple chutney to raise funds for the school council. All this, along with the good support and guidance they receive, ensures that pupils' personal development is good. Despite only average standards in basic skills at present, pupils' creativity and ability to work well on decision-making processes mean that they are being effectively provided with the ongoing lifeskills they will need. As one pupil said, 'the headteacher wants you to learn how to be independent.'

Good, accurate assessment procedures demonstrate that pupils' academic achievement is much more consistent than it was. From broadly average starting points, children make a satisfactory start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress here is not more rapid because children spend too long in a formal setting

and are not given enough time to learn through well-thought-out play activities. Pupils' progress is good through Years 1 and 2 and, as they have done for a number of years, they reach above average standards in Year 2. The most significant improvement has been to overcome previously weaker teaching in Years 3 to 6 which had resulted in low standards. While it is still less consistent than in Years 1 and 2, it is very clear from pupils' work and lessons that standards are improving. Three quarters of those currently in Year 6 are on course to achieve at least the expected levels for their age in English, mathematics and science and approximately a quarter are already doing better than this.

While the school, at this time, has a satisfactory capacity to improve, the increasingly better use of all staff expertise has the potential to increase the rate of improvement. Whole-school targets have been constantly revised in the light of improving performance so these are suitably challenging. However, much of this work has, by necessity, been carried out by the most senior team. Until very recently, middle leaders had not taken a full and active role in whole-school developments and in helping formulate strategic decisions. As a result, while good improvements are evident, self-evaluation is overgenerous about how far the school has moved forward.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the summer term 2010, raise the proportion of pupils in Year 6 achieving at or above the age-expected levels to 80% or better in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring consistently good teaching through Years 3 to 6;
 - ensuring any remaining gaps in pupils' learning are identified and addressed;
 - using the subject leaders' expertise to monitor, evaluate and support teaching and learning, and feeding their findings into whole-school developments.
- Raise the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - developing learning more effectively through better play opportunities;
 - making better use of the outside area so that children can make choices about where they want to learn;
 - ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation of children's progress is more sharply focused on what they have learnt and what they need to do to improve.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

Pupils behave, concentrate and collaborate well. They work hard and, in lessons, make at least the progress that they should. Where good teaching is most consistent, in Years 1 and 2, pupils make good progress. When comparing lessons seen during the inspection in Years 3 to 6 with those from previous monitoring by the school, there is clearly an improvement. Nevertheless, until last year there were considerable gaps in learning that were not fully addressed, and so standards for those then in Year 6 were low. Progress is better now because of improved teaching and extra support for those who most need it. However, there is still some inconsistency in the learning for those in the middle and lower ability range. From recent school testing, approximately three quarters of pupils are achieving the age expected levels and those who have higher ability are almost all achieving above average levels. However, this only matches the national picture and so represents satisfactory rather than good achievement from pupils' average starting points. Those with learning difficulties are making similar levels of progress to others. Pupils with identified gaps in learning, and particularly in mathematics, have started an intensive programme of specialist support such as being invited to a 'Maths Club'. Pupils say they feel more confident about using different calculation methods and this is evident in their books.

The increasing numbers of pupils who arrive part way through the year are very well supported, particularly by other pupils. They have buddies to help them settle and 'challenge groups' to help them make friends. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to develop a healthy lifestyle and a good understanding of how to stay safe. Pupils' participation in the running club, healthy meals, horse-riding and involvement in local community sports are just some of the ways that have helped the school gain a 'Healthy Schools Award'. As part of a drive to raise the school's profile locally, the pupils have been instrumental in suggesting ways to improve. They invite local residents to the school, have sewn a blanket for an orphanage in India, studied and been involved in fair-trade fortnight and parents have been invited to listen to a school treaty on the subject. All this shows an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

Teaching is satisfactory over the longer term, although of the individual lessons seen during the inspection, many were good. In the good lessons, planning develops from what has gone before and the methods used interest and excite pupils. For example, a group of pupils enthusiastically participated in performance poetry after studying the style of a poet through seeing a video. They worked as a team and helped those who found it difficult to read or understand the text. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, this is because not all pupils are fully challenged by what they are expected to do. This is most evident in the pupils' work over a period of time. For example, a well-planned lesson was being used to help pupils develop persuasive writing. While the essence of the lesson was well founded, some pupils found difficulty in reading the text while others were not sure what was expected of them. To help improve learning, targets have been developed that help pupils see what they need to do next. Good marking is used to indicate where improvements are needed. However, some of the language used for the pupils' targets is not always easily understood and some of the targets, particularly in English, do not follow on from the previous ones. Nevertheless, whole-school assessment is used well and has been instrumental in identifying where significant underachievement was happening.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about the restyling of the curriculum. They rightly feel it is more relevant and can see a purpose for learning. They relish the opportunity to take an active part such as by becoming a facilitator, timekeeper or scribe when setting up their working groups. In discussion, they talked confidently about their Victorian newspapers and described from their research how they knew that at her coronation, Queen Victoria had the ring placed on the wrong finger. The methods for developing writing through the curriculum are good. Skills in information and communication technology are still developing, but have stalled due to difficulties with setting up the new hardware. Nevertheless, most pupils use computers, video cameras, presentational software and spreadsheets regularly. Pupils relish all the clubs, visits, visitors and events that have happened and, as they said, 'there are just so many of them.'

All safeguarding procedures are thorough and pupils feel safe and secure. Even though there are a small number of pupils with challenging behaviour, these are dealt with well. Pupils are encouraged to share their problems and concerns through regular discussion sessions and any ongoing personal problems are sensitively dealt with by staff. A problem and solution board is prominently displayed with individual worries that have occurred, such as 'I don't want to be involved in gangs' which then provides ways to overcome them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	3
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has very successfully rebuilt the confidence of the school after a turbulent and transitional period where staff relationships were difficult. One parent described the school as having 'lost its way'. The aim was to make sustainable improvements which initially involved radically improving the consistency and quality of teaching and ensuring that pupils were excited by being at school. This clear educational direction has been achieved although it has taken longer than anticipated to see a lasting effect on better academic standards higher up the school. Further staffing difficulties along the way have meant that much of the strategic work has fallen to the headteacher and deputy headteacher. While this is at an early stage, other middle managers are now taking a more active role in developing their own areas and are being provided with additional training to help develop whole-school strategies.

Through diligent analysis, different groups of pupils are targeted for support, ensuring all make at least satisfactory progress. Where pupils risk underachieving, either academically or personally, then a strong support network ensures that they are provided with the help they need. As part of this, child protection procedures and effective partnerships with a wide range of outside agencies are utilised to good effect. Parents are highly supportive of the school and good relationships have developed as a result of the interpersonal skills of many staff.

The governing body is effective. Governors receive regular reports on progress and act as a good sounding board for ideas. Equally, they are quite capable of challenging decisions should they need more information. They have begun the process of developing a coherent strategy for better community cohesion and are ensuring that this involves as many stakeholders as possible. Its effectiveness can be seen in the enthusiastic reports from school events and the strong community spirit that is being engendered.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	3
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2

Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children start school with skills appropriate for their age and leave the Reception class with standards broadly in line with other schools. Personal development is good. For example, even the youngest children follow instructions and are able to sit quietly and listen to each other. Children showed inspectors some advanced skills such as when they were cutting and drawing their ‘trophies’. Positive relationships have been established so children feel safe and enjoy their learning. Children are keen to share their work with adults and some are already able to read simple words when practising their rhyming words such as ‘pets at vets’. Provision for more formal activities, for instance reading, learning letter sounds and numbers, is stronger than the opportunities for more independent learning through play. On occasions, opportunities are missed to move learning on, such as when children are told which activity to go to but not what to try out or practise. Access to the outside area is restricted and this limits children’s learning . In addition, because they cannot move there freely, it also limits children’s ability to choose outside activities for themselves. The satisfactory leadership has enabled the newly appointed teacher to be supported by specialists and to observe best practice in other schools, although this expertise has not yet been fully used to improve the effectiveness.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents’ views are similar to those of the inspection findings. Parents expressed their support for what the school has achieved, in particular since the present headteacher was appointed. All parents who responded said their children enjoyed school, felt safe and were encouraged to be healthy. General positive comments included those about how they felt teaching had improved, how concerns were dealt with well and how the school was seen as a very caring environment for their children. There were no general themes to the small number of written concerns except some parents would like to see better channels of communication. The school is now in the process of reviewing this such as by improving the school website.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birdwell Primary School, Bristol BS41 9AZ

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit. We enjoyed joining you in lessons and hearing about all the things you are doing at school. We think that you are receiving a satisfactory education and making the progress that is expected. I have included the main points of my report below.

- You told us that you were proud of your school and felt it had improved. We agree and can see that there have been a number of very positive changes that have helped you learn better.
- You also told us that you enjoyed learning and we can see why that is. The challenges that you often undertake are helping you become well prepared for when you move schools. In addition, we have said that you have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and know how to keep safe.
- Your teachers are providing you with some exciting activities and know what to do to help you improve. You seem to know your targets and what to do next to help raise your skills in English, mathematics and science.
- We have asked your teachers to make sure that you all do as well as you can by making sure that all the lessons are as exciting as the best ones and by monitoring what is happening in literacy and numeracy. This should help the standards to improve by the time you leave in Year 6.
- We have also asked that those in the Reception class have the opportunity to use the outside area more because, as you know it is quite difficult to get down the steps.

Your headteacher, along with the staff, know what to do to help improve things. They have many plans for the future which you can help with. Make sure you attend regularly and continue to suggest ways to make your school one of the best.

Finally, I would like to wish you all the best for your future education.

Yours faithfully

David Collard
Lead Inspector

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