

Birch Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109893
Local Authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	325052
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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)	441
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	Mr Mark Fletcher
Headteacher	Mr Alan Harding
Date of previous school inspection	3 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Leppington Bracknell RG12 7WW
Telephone number	01344 455815
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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

Birch Hill Primary School is a larger-than-average school with an Early Years Foundation Stage that admits children part-time from the age of three. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are a small minority of pupils from other ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broad, including speech and communication problems and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and physical needs. There is an on-site after school care club that is not managed by the governing body. This was inspected on the first day of the school inspection and is reported separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement of pupils at Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics, and in the quality of teaching and learning.

Although teaching in the lessons seen during inspection was mostly satisfactory, there is a history of underachievement and the pace of recent improvement has not been fast enough to enable all pupils to achieve their potential. Teachers are not consistently using information on pupils' progress to plan work, and this leads to insufficient challenge in some lessons. Many positive strategies to improve teaching and learning have been introduced recently but have not yet had time to demonstrate their full effect. In spite of these weaknesses, adequate support for pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that they are making satisfactory progress.

Standards of attainment are average by the end of Year 6. Pupils' achievements in Years 3 to 6, while starting to improve, are still not as good as they should be. This has been the case for a significant number of pupils for some time. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are happy to come to school and they enjoy their lessons, particularly the practical and group work. They recognise that the school takes really good care of them and this is also the overwhelming view of parents. As expressed by one parent, 'The teachers and the headteacher are very supportive and no issue is too small to deal with.'

The headteacher provides satisfactory leadership and has a clear vision for the future of the school. He has tackled successfully several difficult issues in order to move the school forward. The school has introduced a more rigorous approach to assessment and tracking of pupils' progress, and developed teaching strategies that encourage pupils to think about how they can improve their learning. The use of challenging targets to raise achievement has only been introduced recently and the reliability and use of assessment data are not yet fully established. The school has a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and areas for further development and new initiatives are beginning to raise standards in English. Senior leaders have still to develop fully their roles and responsibilities. For example, they are not closely monitoring and evaluating their subjects. This means that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning between classes have not been resolved. The school's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

When they enter the school, most children are below the expected starting point for their age. Children in the Nursery classes receive a good start, with a minority making excellent progress in their personal development. They make satisfactory progress in the Reception classes and indications from children's profiles confirm that the majority are on track to meet national expectations in all areas of learning and development by the time they start in Year 1. They settle in quickly and love learning in the caring and supportive environment. Children work well together in groups, and sustain their interest when required to learn without direct adult

support. They benefit from the close partnership between parents and staff. Management of the provision is satisfactory but as yet there is not enough shared planning across the Early Years Foundation Stage; this results in unevenness in provision. Adults provide suitable routines so that children develop their independence and provide good opportunities for children to question, explain and engage in discussion with each other. This encourages good development of their language and communication skills. The planning of children's learning is of variable quality and in some cases information on their progress is not used sufficiently well. There is a good balance between activities chosen by the children and those led or supported by adults. The outdoor provision is not used as well as it might be, to enhance children's learning in parallel with their classroom experiences, because planning does not consistently link indoor and outdoor activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate at which pupils make progress in Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics, by using assessment data more effectively to set challenging targets.
- Ensure that more of the teaching and learning is of good quality by matching work more accurately to pupils' needs.
- Improve the rigour of monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress and their learning in lessons to speed up improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Over the last four years, standards by the end of Year 2 have fluctuated from being above average or average. In 2008, although pupils in Year 2 achieved average standards overall, they were above average in writing. This represents good achievement in Key Stage 1. Pupils acquire good attitudes to learning and have developed good speaking and listening skills. By the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are broadly average but, when taking into consideration pupils' good attainment at the end of Year 2, this represents inadequate progress. Inspection evidence shows that as pupils move through the school, their progress varies too much between year groups in reading, writing and mathematics, and is inadequate overall. Although there is some evidence of improving progress since the last inspection, the school is not rigorously implementing agreed strategies for improvement to ensure that all pupils are making the progress of which they are capable. Early indications are that a significant minority of pupils in Year 6 might not reach the moderate targets set for them and at best this would only represent satisfactory achievement through Key Stage 2. The school has introduced sharper assessment and has improved the use of targets to raise standards and to close the gap for less-able pupils. However, these do not adequately stretch the performance of more-able pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because of the individual tuition and extra support in class provided for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

A girl in Year 6 summed up the views of pupils very aptly in saying, 'I'll be sad to leave school. I love it here.' Pupils enjoy school because they feel safe, secure and cared for. This is reflected in their regular and prompt attendance, which is above average this year. Many pupils talk about how behaviour has improved in the last year and, in most lessons, behaviour and attention are good. Relationships are good throughout the school. Pupils are friendly, helpful and

confident talkers. Their moral and social development is good. They work well together in pairs and groups and show a pride in their work. Spiritual and cultural development is adequate. For instance, they know about major religions and life in the wider world but have a weaker understanding of life in multi-cultural Britain. They have an adequate awareness of healthy living, especially the value of regular exercise. Their awareness of safety issues is good, especially road safety given the busy roads nearby. They make a strong contribution to the school community through the active school council, and by being 'Buddies' and 'Peer Mentors'. Their confidence, self-esteem and social skills are particularly well developed and they are prepared adequately for their future life and well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

There is not yet enough good teaching in Key Stage 2 to ensure that pupils make up for their lack of progress in recent years. The school has introduced several strategies which are beginning to improve the teaching of writing, and so raise standards. Teachers are providing more variety in their planning and increasing opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas and to learn through active participation in practical tasks. Inconsistency still exists between classes, especially in the use of assessment information to match work accurately to pupils' needs, and maintain the pace of learning. Too much of the weekly and daily planning is not effective in identifying the specific learning objectives for pupils of differing needs. This sometimes results in the activities not providing sufficient challenge which limits progress. This is the main reason why progress is inadequate in Key Stage 2. There is a pleasant atmosphere in lessons which ensures pupils feel happy and behave well. Some teachers are relatively new to the school. They are enthusiastic and committed and show good potential. Teaching assistants offer satisfactory support in lessons, often working closely with pupils who have learning difficulties. Inconsistencies in the use of individual education plans to adjust provision in lessons for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities prevent their progress from being better than satisfactory.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Engaging activities, practical work and good enrichment are strong features of the curriculum. Work to improve opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 2 to develop their skills across a range of subjects, by ensuring a better match of work to pupils' individual needs, has not advanced since the last inspection. The emphasis on developing imagination is good and this shows in improvements in the quality of pupils' writing. Other changes to improve pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics are relatively new and have not yet had a significant impact on pupils' confidence or their skill levels. However, better planning and increased provision of computers have helped to improve pupils' familiarity with and confidence in using them. Regular visitors to school and visits to places of interest help broaden the pupils' horizons. A promising start has been made on work to extend what is available for those identified as gifted and talented. However, the curriculum overall lacks well-planned opportunities for stretching more-able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good pastoral and emotional support is provided, ensuring that pupils, including those more vulnerable, feel safe, secure and well cared for. They know who to turn to for support if they have a problem or injury. Child protection, safeguarding, health and safety and first aid arrangements are secure and understood by all. Behaviour, anti-bullying and anti-racist procedures are good and consistent application is appreciated by the pupils, who understand how to behave well. Monitoring of attendance is good, enabling the early identification of persistent absentees and reducing their numbers. This has resulted in above-average attendance this year. Academic support and guidance are adequate for most pupils in relation to advice on how to improve their work. However, teachers are not consistent in their approach to marking and, often, targets for improvements relate to groups and not individuals.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with good individual education plans and support in specific areas such as reading is leading to better progress. The support for them in lessons is inconsistent. The school has recently introduced a number of changes to show pupils how to improve in different subjects. For example, all pupils now have targets for improvement in English and mathematics and they are also encouraged to evaluate their own work. These improvements are not consistently applied in all classes and they have not had time to make a significant difference to standards and pupils' rates of progress. Targets for some pupils are not yet challenging enough and, as a consequence, pupils are not well informed about their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior leaders have a satisfactory understanding of the relative strengths and areas for improvement. As a consequence of monitoring lessons, leaders and managers have introduced strategies that are beginning to improve learning and help groups of pupils to catch up. These include the introduction of a systematic approach to building pupils' learning capabilities and use of a spreadsheet to track pupils' progress term by term. While monitoring is now more regular, it does not focus enough on the extent to which all pupils are learning and this limits the effectiveness of leaders to drive improvement. The closer checks on pupils' rates of progress are, however, holding teachers to greater account for the progress of pupils in their class. The provision of well-managed, intensive support groups for groups who are underperforming is proving effective. As a result, pupils are now in a much stronger position to improve their work. The school is inclusive and works well with its partners in the local community, but promoting an understanding of multicultural Britain is not systematically planned for.

There has been a recent restructuring of the school management team. An agreed set of values is helping to steer school improvement, but there are too many developments on a range of fronts. The lack of prioritisation and gaps in expertise among managers mean that strategic planning has not developed into a driving force for improving teaching and raising expectations across the whole school. Governors, many of whom are new to the role, are gradually honing their skills in evaluating the school's performance. The chair, in particular, demonstrates a perceptive analysis of where improvements are needed.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

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

09 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birch Hill Primary School, Bracknell, RG12 7WW

We very much enjoyed meeting you on our visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming. I am writing to let you know what we thought about your school. The school is already changing for the better, but it has not done enough to make sure that you all do as well as you should, both in lessons and through your time at Birch Hill. We are asking the staff and governors to make some more improvements and we are recommending that the school receive some extra help over the next year. Here are the main points.

- Your school is a happy place; you enjoy coming to school and your behaviour is good.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes settle in well and quickly feel at home.
- You said you feel safe and all the staff make sure that you do.
- Not all of you make the progress that could be expected of you in Years 3 to 6 and many of you should do much better in mathematics.
- Teachers often make lessons interesting and enjoyable for you, but they do not always stretch your thinking.
- You get involved in the life of the school and in the wider community, for example through the school council and raising money for charity at the Christmas Bazaar.
- The headteacher, staff and governors work together well. They have introduced new ideas to help you make faster progress, but need to do more to check if these are working.

We have asked the school to do three things:

- use targets to help you make quicker progress in Years 3 to 6, especially in mathematics
- help teachers to make better use of information on your progress so work is set at the right level
- check up on the things they have already done to improve teaching, to be sure it is having a good effect.

You can help by trying your best and working hard, particularly in mathematics.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector