

Birchwood CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111304
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	325342
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	204
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	Ms Debi Ost
Headteacher	Mrs Brenda Bland
Date of previous school inspection	31 October 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Mount Admirals Road Birchwood Warrington Cheshire WA3 6QG
Telephone number	01925 823316

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2009
Inspection number	325342

Fax number

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Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves an area that is more socially and economically disadvantaged than normal. Larger than average proportions of pupils take a free school meal or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of pupils leaving or joining the school at times other than those of normal transfer is higher than average. Most pupils are White British with the main representation from minority ethnic groups being Asian or Black African. A lower than average proportion uses English as an additional language. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) consists of a Reception class and part-time Nursery class. The school provides a breakfast club and arranges after-school care for pupils at the children's centre which shares the same site. Recent awards include Healthy School and the Activemark. The headteacher took up post the week before the inspection at the beginning of the spring term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, the school has made adequate improvement and continues to provide a satisfactory education for its pupils.

Standards are broadly average which represents satisfactory achievement overall from pupils' starting points. Girls achieve as well as girls do nationally by Year 6, but the standards of boys' writing is not in line with their peers nationally. A strength of the school is in pupils' good personal development. This is exemplified by their sensible behaviour and positive attitudes to learning, even though some of the more able pupils are not always challenged by the work they are set. The quality of provision in the EYFS is good which enables children in the Nursery and Reception classes to develop well in all areas of their learning. The school has a strong sense of community and serves as a focal point for local activities. It houses the local church, used jointly by worshippers from different Christian faiths. Its presence enhances pupils' spiritual and moral awareness. Various local organisations use the school as a venue for their activities. This also helps pupils understand the needs and interests of different age groups. Older pupils especially, delight in and take seriously their responsibilities as school councillors, play leaders and as prefects. They influence school decision making, for example, in the appointment of the headteacher. The Healthy School and Activemark awards reflect the pupils' good awareness of the benefits of a balanced diet and of regular exercise.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with some good practice. Where learning is most successful, pupils enjoy being involved in activities and in contributing to lessons. Where teaching is no better than satisfactory, boys are sometimes motivated too little and some more able pupils are challenged insufficiently by the tasks set. Pupils get on well with each other and with adults, resulting in a positive atmosphere in classrooms and around the school.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Good aspects include a wide range of out-of-class activities, visits and visitors to school. Visitors enhance well pupils' personal and social development, sporting skills and understanding of other faiths and cultures. The curriculum is not always as successful in fully meeting the needs of boys in Key Stage 2, those of more able pupils and in promoting higher literacy skills.

Overall, pupils are well cared for. A recurring theme in parents' comments is how well they feel their children are looked after in school and the degree to which staff respond to individual pupils' particular personal and medical needs. Systems to track pupils' academic progress are thorough but as yet not used as well as they might be to ensure that all pupils achieve well. The concerted effort the school has made to improve attendance and punctuality has paid dividends so that more regular attendance is in evidence from a greater number of pupils than in the past.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has had little time to take stock, but the senior leadership team is realistic about the school's effectiveness and has an increasingly clear grasp of what needs to be done to improve pupils' performance. However, other staff are only just beginning to be included in the school's self-evaluation. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have been effective in improving pupils' personal development and in enhancing community links considerably, especially with parents who are now much more effective partners in their children's learning. Overall standards, however, have improved only marginally and the

relative weaknesses in some groups of pupils' achievement mean that on balance the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Nursery with skills that are mostly below those normally expected. An increasing minority have speech and language difficulties which mean that on entry children's skills in communicating are well below those expected. Recently focused interventions, including close liaison with external agencies to help children overcome the difficulties they experience, have led to improved development in children's communication, language and literacy.

Good quality planning and assessment enable staff to provide tasks which promote children's development well. From the start, children are successfully encouraged to take responsibilities for aspects of their learning and personal development. The safe and positive environment in which they play and learn enables them to explore happily both indoors and out although, at times, activities outdoors are not well focused on developing specific skills. There are good quality resources which promote children's learning well. Staff work skilfully to encourage children to cooperate, take turns and to understand that snack time can be a pleasant social event. Children respond well to the expectations of how they should behave and this helps their learning. Parents are very complimentary about how their children develop personally and typically comment, 'my child was very shy but now has wonderful confidence'.

Provision is led and managed well. Welfare requirements are fully met. Staff work very well together to ensure a smooth transition between Nursery and Reception; for example, the children share story time to enable the children from the Nursery to get to know the Reception staff. As a result of good provision and leadership, children achieve well and many, though not all, enter Year 1 with skills in line with those expected nationally in all areas of their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the standards of writing reached by boys
- Enhance the quality of teaching and that of the curriculum so that they better meet the needs of boys and of more able pupils.
- Ensure all staff in school are fully aware of how to make the most effective use of assessment information, and whole school self-evaluation.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory. Overall, at both key stages standards were broadly average in 2007 and similar in 2008 provisional results. Currently, standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 are similar to those of the last two years. For these groups this represents satisfactory achievement from when they started school.

Since the last inspection, standards have risen in Year 6 in mathematics and science but have fallen slightly in English. In English, in 2007 and 2008 provisional results, data show that boys' standards in writing were well below those of their peers nationally and that the boys in school did less well than the girls. Although the school has firm evidence to show that in 2007 and

2008 boys made satisfactory progress overall, too few made good progress, especially in writing. The 2008 Year 2 teacher assessments show that standards in reading and writing were below average, but that standards in mathematics had improved to average.

Too few pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 attain the higher levels. This is because the tasks set do not always meet their needs and the time they are given to practise and refine their skills is sometimes too short. The pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities makes satisfactory progress overall. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their behaviour is consistently good in the classroom and around the school. They have positive attitudes to learning and take responsibility for other pupils and within the local community. Pupils are friendly, courteous and get on well together. Their awareness of how to stay safe and healthy is good and they enjoy participating in sporting activities. Older pupils take pride in and enjoy organising play with younger children. The school council provides opportunities for pupils to participate in elections, to present personal manifestos and to become officers within a committee.

Pupils develop a strong sense of community. Their understanding of the lifestyles of children who live in very different circumstances has recently been considerably enhanced as a result of exchanging photographs and letters with pupils from a school in a township in South Africa. Pupils' economic awareness is encouraged through close links with local businesses. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Where teaching is at its best, pupils are given clear learning objectives for the lesson, effective instruction during introductions, set appropriate tasks and enabled to participate actively and to contribute ideas. Pupils rightly are very certain that lessons they enjoy and learn the most from are those in which they work in pairs and groups on practical tasks. A consistent strength in teaching and learning is the warmth in the relationships between adults and pupils. This is particularly significant in helping pupils who have more difficulty than most in learning or in meeting the school's expectations as regards their behaviour. Where teaching and learning are least successful, pupils' needs, especially those of boys and the more able are not fully met. This is because more able pupils spend too long listening to explanations from teachers about things they understand already rather than having more time to practise skills and improve their knowledge and understanding. Sometimes teachers pay too little attention to the specific learning needs of boys; for example, topics in writing do not always capture the boys' interest or relate to their everyday lives. Teachers increasingly use targets in English and mathematics to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Overall, the curriculum meets pupils' needs satisfactorily. It is most successful in promoting pupils' good personal and social development. This is as a result of its effective programme for relationships education, health promotion and enrichment activities. The variety of visits and visitors contributes significantly to pupils' enjoyment, their spiritual and cultural development and in helping those who find it difficult to conform so that they can learn more effectively. The provision for the arts is increasingly effective, particularly in art and music. Recently introduced systems in the EYFS to better promote children's speaking and early reading skills have proved successful. However, initiatives to help pupils in Years 1 to 6 to improve their writing do not impact enough on standards. The weaknesses in the curriculum are that the needs of some boys and those of the more able are not yet fully met, especially in English.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

A considerable strength is in the care taken by adults to ensure that pupils, including those who join mid-year are well looked after, feel safe and are confident that there is someone they can talk to if they are troubled. The system for safeguarding meets government requirements. A significant feature is the nurture group which helps pupils to modify their behaviour and to achieve better academically. The school has made good strides recently in encouraging more regular attendance from persistent absentees, and works hard to ensure that new arrivals are quick to settle. Attendance is broadly average because of effective whole-school initiatives, such as the breakfast club, close partnerships with the local authority and the strenuous efforts of staff.

Although there are systems to track pupils' academic progress, these are not fully shared with, or used by, all class teachers. This means that the information gained is not used systematically across the school. Overall, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. Children in the EYFS who have difficulties are identified early and appropriate support provided. By sensitively supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, teaching assistants make an effective contribution to pupils' satisfactory achievements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior leadership team have a pragmatic view of the pupils' performance and of the school's overall effectiveness. There is a realistic understanding of what needs to be done. Individually, staff want to see improvement but are insufficiently involved as a team in school self-evaluation. This limits their effectiveness in promoting higher standards and achievement. The performance of pupils and of teachers is checked on satisfactorily and appropriate training provided to improve aspects of pupils' achievement, such as in mathematics and science. Other steps taken, in English for example, have not had enough impact on raising standards.

Since the last inspection, teachers and managers have been most effective in promoting pupils' good personal development. They have established and maintained close links with the local

authority, local businesses and other schools, all of which have contributed well to pupils' better social and cultural development. The consistently strong partnership with the church has further nourished pupils' spiritual development. Alongside these strengths lies the school's good promotion of community cohesion. Governors and school leaders have encouraged the local community to regard the school as a centre for its activities. They have also involved more parents in school life and in supporting their children's learning. Governors carry out their duties satisfactorily. Governors' ability to manage the school's financial affairs prudently has been recognised by gaining the Financial Management Standard in 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?	3
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?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	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	3
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?	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	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

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

Thank you on behalf of the inspectors for your friendly welcome when your school was inspected recently. You confidently and honestly chatted to the inspectors about school and your work.

The school is giving you a satisfactory education and children in the Nursery and Reception have a good start. What the school does particularly well is to help you become well behaved young people: you have positive attitudes, are capable of and enjoy taking responsibilities, and help the school to make some decisions such as when school councillors were involved in the appointment of your headteacher. There are lots of interesting visits and visitors to school to help you understand more about the world. The link you have with the school in South Africa is great and is already helping you appreciate how different school and life can be in other countries.

You told the inspectors that the lessons you enjoy most are those in which you do practical things and contribute to. I agree with you that you learn more in those lessons and I have asked the school to make sure that there are more of these, especially to help the boys and those of you who find learning easier than most to make faster progress. At the moment, boys in Key Stage 2 are not doing as well as they should, especially in their writing and so I have asked your headteacher to look for better ways to help them improve their English. I have also asked your headteacher to make sure that all the staff are involved more in looking at how well the school is doing so that everyone can give their ideas about how to make things even better.

Thank you for your help with the inspection. I hope you can work really hard and enjoy your time at Birchwood School.