

Birches Green Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103168
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336026
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Dobbins

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Bev Roberts
Headteacher	Miss Mary P C McManus
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent more than half of their time looking at learning, saw 14 lessons in whole or in part, observed 10 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They looked at data the school holds on pupils, spoke with the local authority advisor linked to the school and with 28 parents and carers. They scrutinised 103 parent and carer questionnaires.

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

- how well pupils in Year 6 make progress , and the extent to which this continues the improving trend seen in the last three years
- how well the curriculum promotes pupils' learning
- how effectively senior leaders are driving improvement , particularly in teaching and learning.

Information about the school

Birches Green Junior School is average in size. About 60% of pupils are from a White British heritage and most of the rest are from mixed White-Black Caribbean, Black Caribbean or Asian heritages. The proportion of pupils who claim free school meals is much higher than average. The school's social deprivation index is amongst the highest in the city. There has been a change of headteacher since the last inspection and the team of senior leaders is still relatively new. The school holds the ActiveMark and Healthy Schools Award.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Birches Green is a satisfactory and improving school. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning and better progress in their personal and social skills. They develop into well-rounded young people who, when they leave, are ready for the next stage of their education. Most parents and carers are very happy with the school; one parent said, 'My child is leaving Birches Green this July and I am more than happy to recommend the school to other mothers that I know. I have been greatly impressed by the staff and pupils.'

Typically, most pupils join the school with standards expected for their age. Over their time at school they make satisfactory progress in mathematics and science and their attainment is average when they leave. In English, they do better. Pupils' attainment in this subject is above average and they make good progress. Progress measures over the last three years have improved and school data show that this trend is likely to continue.

This improvement in learning is driven by better teaching. Senior leaders have orchestrated a determined effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching is satisfactory. Records show that there are an increasing number of good lessons, as well as an occasional outstanding lesson, which effectively challenge pupils. However, this is not the case in all lessons. In the less effective lessons assessment information is not used well enough and because of this teaching is not targeted precisely to meet the learning needs of all pupils. Also, sometimes pupils are disadvantaged as learners because they do not know what is required of them to move to the next level of their learning.

The school is a happy, caring place. Pupils enjoy coming to school and say they are safe. Most parents and carers agree with them. In a welcoming and supportive environment, pupils behave well and make friends easily. They have a secure understanding of right and wrong and show maturity.

Staff talk enthusiastically about the good developments they have seen in the school over the last three years and are very positive about the future. Through the effective procedures for self-evaluation, leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Improved teaching and progress show that the capacity for sustained improvement is good. Leaders are accurate in their monitoring, including the checking of teaching and learning, and are working towards more rigorous monitoring to ensure an even greater pace of development. Governors know the school well and meet their remit in setting a clear strategy. They challenge senior leaders confidently in matters to do with provision or pupils' personal development, but they do this less well concerning attainment and progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards to above average by making more effective use of assessment information:
 - in planning lessons that are relevant to all pupils
 - in letting pupils know what is required of them to move to the next level of their learning.
 - Sharpen monitoring, particularly:
 - observations of teaching and learning so that senior leaders can quickly ensure improvement
 - the procedures governors use to check the quality of the work of the school, especially the attainment and progress of pupils.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The good relationships between pupils, teachers and teaching assistants help make lessons harmonious events that pupils fully enjoy. Pupils work hard and take as much pleasure from celebrating the successes of their friends as they gain from their own successes. Their positive attitudes to their work and their routinely good behaviour show that they have fully accepted the routines and disciplines for learning. The best lessons rush along. In these, all pupils, irrespective of their capabilities or learning difficulties and/or disabilities, work on tasks that are right for them. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes those in the middle of the class are well-served, but the higher and lower attaining pupils do not do as well against their targets. Across the school, boys, girls and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress over time.

The school has a family feel. Pupils respect each other's cultural heritage and religious beliefs. They get on well with each other and are proud of the school. Their ideas are taken seriously, and members of the school council are particularly pleased that their voice was heard in setting up the tuck shop, the water fountain and in having water available in the classrooms at all times. There is strong emphasis on maintaining a healthy life style, as shown by the healthy foods stocked in the tuck shop and by the high take-up of after-school sporting clubs. Residential visits are much enjoyed by pupils and make a considerable contribution to promoting self confidence and developing the personal and social skills that pupils require for success at the next stage of their education. They gain good awareness of the needs of the wider world through fundraising for international aid charities and the emerging links with schools in other countries.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

At the beginning of lessons, teachers set clear objectives for learning and use questions effectively to gauge pupils' understanding. However, pupils do not always get good enough guidance on what they need to do to improve because they do not always know their next target for learning. In some lessons, the planning does not take sufficient account of what pupils already know and can do. As a result, progress is slowed because some pupils find work too easy and others find it too difficult.

The strength of the curriculum is the wide range of additional activities that broaden and enrich pupils' learning experiences. Learning in many subjects is made exciting through visits to local places. Pupils regularly visit local museums and religious places and, for example when learning about World War II, talk with local veterans with first-hand experience. In two of the terms, popular after-school clubs are available in many sports, the arts, writing, French and computing. The link with the nearby sports college allows pupils to access superior facilities and specialist teachers, although there are few other links outside those with the cluster schools. Pupils say they most enjoy the residential visits organised annually for each year group, to Wales and the Midlands. Each year up

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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to 60% of pupils go away. Staff are quick to say that the experiences they and the pupils have together make a substantial contribution to developing pupils as rounded young people and in helping enhance the school's caring and supportive ethos.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those learning English as an additional language receive good support. Arrangements for the care and support of pupils during their passage through the school and in transition to secondary schools work well. The school has good procedures to encourage regular attendance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have formed a unified and effective team. They have improved the quality of teaching and learning and driven up standards. Governors are committed and are now able to spend more time in challenging leaders to continue to improve the quality of the school. Staff morale is high and they are enthusiastic about continuing the improvement through, for example, raising standards in their subjects. The self-evaluation procedures are more rigorous since the introduction of the new tracking system.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough; the school ensures it adopts good practice. The school has paid due regard to its responsibilities to community cohesion. Links with the local community are already well established and take good account of religious and ethnic traditions. Pupils gain great benefit from their regular contact with senior citizens and from talking with the many who visit them, to chat and offer advice, when they are working on the school's allotment. Planning for more national and international links is well advanced.

Vulnerable pupils are supported well. There is no discrimination of any sort and all pupils have equal access to all the school offers. Most of the parents and carers see the school as a cohesive place in which staff and pupils work well with each other. One parent praised the work of the senior leaders by saying that, through the programme of residential visits, senior leaders had 'given them [her children] opportunities they may not otherwise have had.'

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire or spoke with inspectors say they like the school very much because their children enjoy being there. Most are confident that their children are safe and happy and they are appreciative of the work of staff. A small minority of parents and carers, through the questionnaire and discussions with inspectors, suggest that senior leaders have not been effective in dealing with the inappropriate behaviour of a very small number of pupils, and this has had a limiting effect on the progress of others. Inspectors looked closely at the behaviour of pupils, especially those being supported by individual behaviour plans, and judged that during the inspection the progress of no pupils was compromised by the poor behaviour of others. Some parents and carers feel that senior leaders take too little account of their suggestions and also that they are not provided with sufficient advice in helping their child at home. Inspectors judge that senior leaders and governors are ready to listen to the suggestions of parents and carers. Through the coffee mornings, courses specifically created for parents and carers and the regular opportunities to meet formally with staff to discuss their children's progress, parents and carers have appropriate access to senior leaders and to other staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birches Green Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 103 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 214 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	42	49	49	7	7	3	3
The school keeps my child safe	43	43	48	48	7	7	3	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	31	54	53	13	13	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	32	52	51	12	12	5	5
The teaching is good at this school	38	37	52	51	8	8	3	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	31	54	53	12	12	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	31	62	61	7	7	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	26	60	59	7	7	3	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	36	48	48	11	11	4	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	27	50	49	13	13	9	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	29	50	51	10	10	9	9
The school is led and managed effectively	34	34	47	47	8	8	8	8
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	40	47	46	8	8	7	7

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birches Green Junior School, Birmingham, B24 9SR

It was lovely for me and my colleagues to meet and talk with you when we visited your school. Thank you for making us so welcome. We found the school to be providing you with a satisfactory education, which means that it does some things well but could do other things better. We know that you like coming to school and, we want your senior leaders to make the school even better for you. These are some of the things we especially liked.

You told us you feel safe and comfortable at school and you get on very well with your teachers and each other.

You make especially good progress in English.

You behave well and always do your best.

You know the importance of a healthy lifestyle and most of you make healthy choices most of the time.

Senior leaders are improving the school.

There are a few things we have asked the school to work on.

Teachers need to make sure that the work is always just right for you - not too hard and not too easy.

They need to make sure that you know your targets and what you need to do to reach the next level of your learning.

Your leaders and governors need to keep a closer check on how the school is doing and how well you are learning.

You can help as well, by continuing to work hard and behave well.

Thank you again for being so welcoming. I will always have pleasant memories of the time I spent with you. Good luck to each one of you in the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Dobbins

Lead inspector

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