

Byrchall High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106533
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	336690
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mark Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1090
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr I Bragg
Headteacher	Mr A Birchall
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons and spoke with governors, staff, groups of pupils, the School Improvement Partner, and a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including 100 parental questionnaires.

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

- whether or not achievement is good for all students, including the more-able
- how well students demonstrate strong features of personal development
- how well provision meets the needs of individuals, including those who are vulnerable
- whether the curriculum is outstanding
- the effectiveness of leaders in improving outcomes for all groups of students.

Information about the school

The school, situated in an urban area, is larger in size compared with other secondary schools in England although there are about 100 fewer students than at the time of the previous inspection. Since 2007 it has been a specialist mathematics and computing college. It is also a Training school and Leading Edge school. Students, nearly all of whom are of White British heritage, are drawn from around 30 primary schools. About one fifth have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is broadly average. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is now broadly average. The school has recently acquired Trust status. It holds a large number of awards including the International 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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Byrchall is a good, effective, happy and improving school. It has made significant improvement since it was previously inspected just under two and a half years ago. This is because excellent leadership, particularly from the headteacher, has successfully focused the school's efforts on improving standards, raising levels of achievement for all groups of pupils and creating an outstanding curriculum that is stimulating, highly relevant and meets the needs of students very well. The development of very effective partnerships and the positive impact of the specialisms have also contributed to the school's improvement. Leaders know well the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. They are demonstrating a good and strengthening capacity to sustain the improvement already made.

Students are now achieving well. The progress they make in their learning is good and they attain above average standards in their GCSEs. In addition, more students are gaining the highest A* to A grades. Recently, results in the sciences have been less positive. The school has recognised this and is undertaking good quality work to rectify this. Striking features of the school include some outstanding attributes the students demonstrate, particularly their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their contribution to the wider community. They are polite, articulate and relish opportunities to take responsibility. They are a credit to the school and to themselves.

The quality of teaching and use of assessment have been enhanced since the previous inspection and are now good. There remain a few instances of satisfactory practice which prevents some learning from being no better than satisfactory. Nonetheless, nearly one-third of teaching observed during this inspection was outstanding in quality. The school offers good and improving care, guidance and support which promote the smooth transition from primary school, provide strong pastoral systems, and aid successful movement to further education, training or employment for nearly all students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise levels of students' achievement further by:
 - bringing the few satisfactory elements of teaching and assessment up to the good standard found elsewhere in the school
 - making further improvements in science.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

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

Students enjoy their learning and achieve well both in the classroom and in examinations. The proportion gaining 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is above average. This is because they make good progress in their lessons and courses from broadly average starting points. This progress is the result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching and is evident in both Key Stages 3 and 4. This is pleasing, as historically the progress students have made in Key Stage 3 has been satisfactory compared to very good in Key Stage 4. In addition, teachers build on what students know and provide good levels of challenge. This challenge is evidenced in lessons observed during the inspection, work in students' books and in the increase in the proportion of students attaining the highest A* to A grades. This good progress applies equally to students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Strong subjects in terms of students' progress and attainment include English, mathematics, geography and physical education. Science is less strong. The school is undertaking good quality work to rectify this.

Students have strong personal qualities. Very good examples of behaviour were observed, although on some occasions in a few lessons, it was not of the standard expected. Nonetheless, the students acquit themselves well and are confident in their abilities. Their attendance is above average and their understanding of safety issues and personal health is good. They are also developing good skills to prepare them for their next stage of learning, training or employment through the range of opportunities the school's curriculum and partnerships provides.

The most striking qualities demonstrated by pupils are their contributions to the school and the wider community and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, all of which are outstanding. Students, through the very effective school council, for example, have excellent opportunities to make decisions which have a positive impact on the school. Some students are learning analysts and observe lessons and offer pertinent suggestions. Prefects take their roles and responsibilities very seriously and carry them out to a high standard. They know the school and its students very well. This enables learning to take place in a very sociable community and one in which older students look out for younger ones in a positive way. Students reach out into the wider community very well. They have, for example, helped to develop a local parkland area. They have also developed strong links with schools overseas, including raising funds through selling fair trade produce to provide aids to infrastructure to communities in Africa, for example, goats and irrigation systems. Their spiritual development is very strong. During an outstanding Year 11 Art lesson, for example, students worked on pieces for their final assessment with an attitude of serenity which allowed them to reflect very maturely on the qualities of their own efforts and those of their peers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are both good. In a Year 10 drama lesson, for example, the teacher provided an excellent range of paired and group work activities and asked challenging and incisive questions. These enabled the students to participate confidently in role play promoting good social interaction. Excellent discussion also took place in a Year 7 history lesson, in which students portrayed different aspects of the first crusades. They were able to do this well because expectations of what students were to learn were made clear, the lesson proceeded at a suitably quick pace, students had opportunities to express themselves and the teacher captivated them with the subject. Such positive qualities, which are typical features of good or better teaching, are key reasons why students, overall, make good progress in their learning. There are a few lessons in which the picture is not as consistent and these features are just satisfactory. In these lessons, students usually make no better than satisfactory progress.

The school provides good quality care, guidance and support. Clear systems exist to identify students who may have needs and then to provide appropriate intervention. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with good quality support and all groups, no matter what stage they are at, now make good progress in their learning. Excellent arrangements are in place to ensure students transfer from primary school smoothly. These include sessions where both student and parent/carer may attend. Students are provided with very good advice regarding post 16 options. The result is very few students leave without employment, a training placement or a place at a further education institution.

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The curriculum is outstanding. It is relevant and stimulating. It meets the needs of students very well. Programmes of study at Key Stage 3 have been modified to increase rates of students' progress from previously satisfactory levels. A key feature at this key stage is the opportunity the curriculum provides for developing students' thinking skills. At Key Stage 4, there has been an expansion of vocational options, thereby allowing students with differing learning needs to be catered for more fully.

Indeed there is a multitude of pathways and great flexibility to cater for individual needs. Very good opportunities exist for students to gain accreditation in a number of areas. Work-based learning is promoted through excellent collaboration with other high schools and providers. The impact of the specialisms has been very positive, particularly with regard to the use of technology to support teaching and learning. Opportunities for enrichment abound through, for example, 'gold days' which allow for further opportunities to develop skills and learning across the curriculum, and a wide range of extra-curricular activities both in an out of school which excite students'. The combination of music, drama and dance, for example, in order to rehearse for a production of The Wizard of Oz has captured the imagination of boys and girls across the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Several aspects of the leadership and management of the school are outstanding, not least the leadership of the headteacher. He has a clear vision for the school focusing on raising achievement further. He is supported and challenged very well by his senior leaders and impressive governors. He, in turn, provides support and challenge for all. The accountability of all is a very strong presence in the school. The school's evaluation of its strengths and areas for development is robust and accurate. The good quality teaching is secure and checked regularly and most thoroughly. Throughout the school, there is a strong sense of purpose and commitment. Also outstanding are partnerships with external agencies. These benefit students greatly by, for example, enabling the school to deliver high quality training to its staff resulting in improved outcomes for students. In addition, the school uses its specialisms to enhance its work with partners very well, for example, with other secondary schools to create a skills centre locally. Procedures for safeguarding students are excellent. The school benefits from expert advice in this area.

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Good aspects of leadership and management include the engagement of parents/carers, the way in which the school promotes equality of opportunity, and the promotion of community cohesion. Parents/carers have a positive view of the school which has adopted a number of measures, including log-in details to the school's virtual learning environment, to keep them informed about what is going on. The good outcomes students demonstrate – with no groups underachieving - indicate good opportunities for all. Good work has been undertaken to promote community cohesion. The school has evaluated its work in this aspect and inspectors agree that its links with and resulting students' awareness of the wider world are very strong. The school is right to focus now on the wider community of the United Kingdom and, to this end, has already established a link with a school in Hackney.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

One hundred parents/carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Their responses overall are positive and support the school. Several indicated how well the school had helped their child to settle in. Where a few responses were less positive, the inspectors found the school's work to be good, for example, in the quality of information given to parents/carers and in the quality of leadership and management.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Byrchall High 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 100 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,090 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	41	60	55	5	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	40	61	55	4	4	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	43	39	57	52	10	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	39	56	51	8	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	28	67	61	8	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	20	70	64	15	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	15	81	74	7	6	0	0
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)	38	35	54	49	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	30	67	61	7	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	25	53	48	11	10	6	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	15	63	57	16	15	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	26	24	65	59	8	7	5	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	34	63	57	6	5	3	3

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.



26 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Byrchall High School, Wigan, WN4 9PQ

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the findings of our recent inspection. First of all, I want to thank you for the very warm welcome you afforded us all and the polite, friendly and articulate ways you spoke with us. As you know we spoke with many of you both formally and informally in and around school. You impressed us very much. You make a striking contribution to this school, for example, in the way in which you act as learning analysts, and to the wider community in your efforts to improve local parks and provide support to the school in Tanzania. You are a credit to the school and to each other.

So, what are our judgements? You will be pleased to know that we agree with your leaders that Byrchall is a good and improving school. It looks after you well. You attain standards that are above average and make good progress in your learning. This is because you have excellent school leaders and governors, particularly the headteacher. They have ensured you have an excellent and stimulating curriculum. In addition, they have very effective partnerships, for example, with a local university. There is also good quality teaching in the school; indeed, nearly one-third is outstanding.

You may ask then, what does the school need to do to improve further? We know that you and the school's leaders want Byrchall to be outstanding overall. We are, therefore, asking leaders and governors to raise your levels of achievement further by bringing the few satisfactory elements of teaching and assessment up to the good standard found elsewhere in the school and by continuing to make improvements in science. We have seen enough of you all to know that you will want to play a full part in this. We wish you every success!

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

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