

Birchfields Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130380
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	341038
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Lynne Read

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	716
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Akbar
Headteacher	Miss S Offord
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 21 lessons and a total of 25 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with governors, managers, staff, groups of pupils and the School Improvement Partner. In observing the school's work they looked at pupils' workbooks, assessment records, school policies, school development plans and the School Improvement Partner's reports. In total, 214 questionnaires completed by parents and carers were received, analysed and considered, alongside 35 questionnaires completed by pupils and eight completed by staff.

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

- pupils' progress in writing and mathematics
- the quality of teaching and the curriculum in meeting the diverse needs of all groups of pupils
- the quality of care, guidance and support in ensuring that all pupils have the best possible opportunities to learn
- whether pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are doing as well as they can.

Information about the school

This three-form entry school is much larger than average-sized primary schools and serves an urban area close to the centre of Manchester. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is almost twice the average. Just over 97% of pupils belong to minority ethnic groups and 90% of pupils speak English as an additional language. The incidence of pupils entering part-way through their education is higher than usual and many of these are new to the country and have little or no knowledge of English language. An average number of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is accredited for its achievements through the Artsmark, Activemark, Healthy Schools and International School awards.

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

This is a good and improving school. The headteacher, ably assisted by the deputy headteacher, leads the successful drive for improvement; she generates good teamwork and a shared vision of excellence. Senior managers regularly complete thorough reviews of provision and performance, and the school sets itself challenging targets. This system of self-evaluation is successful in providing an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has led to many improvements. For example, provision and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage are now good. Progress and attainment in both key stages have improved and the rate of attendance has increased considerably. The capacity for sustained improvement is therefore good.

Standards are now broadly average by the end of Year 6. This represents good progress from pupils' starting points. Reading is a strength and writing is improving rapidly. However, in mathematics, the rate of progress is slower, especially for the more able pupils. Teaching is good overall. Some is outstanding but the school recognises that a small amount of satisfactory practice needs to be improved, especially in mathematics. In some instances, tasks do not fully challenge all pupils, especially the more able. Marking in mathematics is not as helpful as in English and not all pupils have targets to guide their future work. A newly formed group of middle managers plays a part in monitoring the effectiveness of teaching, learning and the curriculum. Currently, these managers' checks are not sufficiently rigorous in mathematics to eliminate inconsistencies in practice. The good curriculum includes a strong emphasis on personal development and some interesting themed weeks during which pupils explore topics such as creative arts.

The school is a harmonious community where pupils from different backgrounds get on very well together. Behaviour is good, both in lessons and leisure time. Pupils assert that they feel safe and know that bullying or harassment is not tolerated. Community cohesion is promoted well. The school reaches out to families so that they are engaged in their children's education. Links with groups beyond the immediate community, and a school overseas, help pupils to develop a good awareness of their place in the world. The school provides a good standard of care for pupils and a dedicated team of professionals seeks out expert help or resources where needed, especially for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress and attainment in mathematics further by:
 - ensuring that lessons consistently provide good challenge for all groups of

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pupils, especially those who are more able

- developing more helpful marking in the subject
- ensuring that all pupils have targets in mathematics to guide their work
- developing more rigour in the monitoring of mathematics lessons to eliminate inconsistencies in classroom practice.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils have good attitudes to their learning and enjoy their lessons. They are enthusiastic about their tasks and enjoy the challenges presented to them. For example, some Year 6 pupils worked on problem solving, sharing ideas and suggesting and trialling different strategies. In Year 3, pupils were inspired through drama, music and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to produce some imaginative writing. However, when work is too easy pupils mark time and their concentration can drift away from their work.

The current Year 1 pupils left Reception with average attainment which marks a very good improvement on previous years. Progress in Key Stage 1 is good. Most Year 2 pupils have caught up on shortfalls in their prior learning and are working at the expected level for their age. All groups of pupils make good progress through Key Stage 2 where the pace of learning has accelerated considerably over the last two years, almost eliminating the underachievement from the past. However, attainment in mathematics lags behind that in English, especially at the higher level. There is very little difference between the attainment of boys and girls or between pupils of different ethnic heritages. Achievement is good for all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The high proportion of pupils who join part-way through a key stage are very well supported and make rapid progress.

Pupils' families are making fewer visits to their countries of origin and this has boosted the rate of attendance so that it is better than in most schools in similar circumstances. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living and enjoy plenty of exercise. They are keen to succeed and have an average range of skills as they move on to their next schools. Good opportunities exist for pupils to take responsibility. For example, prefects and school councillors contribute much to the day-to-day running of the school and to the process of decision making.

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	3
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	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?

Lessons have very clear objectives so pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Planning takes good account of pupils' interests to keep them well motivated and lessons include good opportunities for practical and collaborative work. Teachers have a detailed view of pupils' progress and generally plan tasks to build on pupils' prior learning. There are occasions, however, when the work for the more able pupils is sometimes only marginally more difficult than the work for other pupils and does not challenge the more able fully, particularly in mathematics. Teachers check progress during lessons and adapt the work if pupils are experiencing difficulty. They are less adept at injecting extra pace or extension tasks when pupils learn quickly. The marking of writing is good but is sometimes less helpful in mathematics. Pupils have very useful targets for learning in writing so they know where to focus their efforts, but this is not consistent practice in mathematics.

The curriculum includes French lessons and good opportunities for creative work. Pupils especially enjoy their themed weeks when parents and carers, and governors learn alongside them. Skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are extended well through study in other subjects. A strength of the curriculum lies in the tailoring of tasks and support to meet specific needs. A range of intervention programmes and individual tuition provide very good support for personal, academic and language development. Extra provision for the more able is not as well developed. Pupils take good advantage of an interesting programme of extra-curricular clubs and competitive sport.

The school's care team is instrumental in supporting individuals and groups, and the support worker provides a range of help for families, both in school time and out.

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Supervision is good, the building and grounds are secure and there is a safe handover of younger pupils to parents and carers. The implementation of a new, rigorous attendance policy and the strenuous efforts of the school's attendance officer have almost eliminated persistent absence. Some pupils attend an early morning breakfast and study club that provides good support for reading and personal development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides strong, focused leadership and clear direction. With good support from senior and middle managers, she has set about driving the school forward. As a result, standards have risen and progress is much improved. This very large school is well run; procedures and policies are consistently followed. Good systems are in place for critically evaluating the work of the school and to plan improvements. Some excellent tracking of pupils' progress means that senior managers have a clear and accurate view of achievements for all the different groups of pupils in the school. They use the information to target support and provide a boost to learning, where needed. Newly established curriculum leaders check classroom provision and the quality of pupils' work. However, they are still developing the skills needed to have a full impact on the teaching of mathematics.

The school promotes community cohesion well. It does an excellent job at the school level and this underpins the harmonious relationships among the different ethnic and religious groups. Links with the local community are good. Engagement with groups beyond the immediate area and overseas provides pupils with a global awareness of life. Safeguarding meets requirements and is satisfactory. Staff have regular updates in their child protection training and are equipped to deal with concerns. The vetting of staff is thorough and pupils are safe. The school pays good attention to ensuring that no groups of pupils are disadvantaged. For example, those who join the school at other than the usual times are supported so well that they settle in very quickly. Governors bring a wide range of skills to enhance management and have a secure overview of attainment and progress. They are currently developing a more active role in monitoring and evaluating key policies.

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	3
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good induction procedures ensure that children settle quickly and their needs are accurately assessed. This thorough assessment continues throughout Nursery and Reception and enables staff to provide effectively for the interests and abilities of all children. As a result, children thoroughly enjoy their work; their behaviour and personal skills are good.

Children's development at entry to the Nursery is often below what is expected of the age group. A very large majority are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. Teaching is good. Lessons take account of children's interests in order to keep them well motivated and they include varied opportunities for children to choose their own activities and develop independence. A good number of skilled and experienced adults are deployed to this age group and provide good support. Bilingual assistants provide a vital bridge for those who are learning English as an additional language and imaginative planning includes rich opportunities for speaking and listening. Children have good opportunities to learn in the outdoors. For example, they enjoyed building dens and using their binoculars to 'search for animals' hidden among the trees. Children make rapid progress, especially through an increased emphasis on learning about letters and sounds and early mathematics work. Currently, the majority are working at expected levels by the time they enter Year 1. Leadership and management are good and ensure good standards of welfare, as well as profitable partnerships with parents and carers. The 'stay and play' sessions are great fun for children, and parents and carers, alike. They are very successful in promoting learning for children while also informing parents and carers of exciting ways to support their children's development. Plans are in place to develop home-school diaries with ideas and activities for parents

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and carers to extend learning at home.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers have positive views of the school. A very large majority of those who replied to the questionnaire agree that their children enjoy school. Quotes include, 'The school has made tremendous progress,' and, 'My child is so happy – he loves school.' There is commendation for the good quality of teaching and parents and carers feel that the school environment is safe. Inspectors endorse these views. A minority of parents and carers raised concerns about the amount of information they receive about their children's progress and how the school helps them to support learning. Inspectors found that parents and carers are welcomed into school to discuss issues, the parent–teacher interviews are held regularly and teachers are readily available at the end of each day. In addition, workshops for parents and carers, 'stay and play' sessions, booklets and the parent support adviser offer lots of useful information and ideas on how to support learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birchfields Primary 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 214 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 716 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	115	54	93	44	4	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	111	52	99	47	1	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	78	37	117	55	14	7	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	79	37	115	54	11	5	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	87	41	111	52	8	4	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	90	42	100	47	16	8	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	88	42	112	53	11	5	1	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)	72	34	113	53	13	6	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	65	31	121	57	17	8	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	62	29	124	58	16	8	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	25	132	62	12	6	7	3
The school is led and managed effectively	61	29	124	58	8	4	9	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	91	43	108	51	6	3	3	1

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



30 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchfields Primary School, Manchester, M14 6PL

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave the inspectors when we visited your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you and appreciated all the help you gave us.

Birchfields is a good school. You all get on very well together and take good care of each other. You are a credit to your families and your teachers. Thank you to the pupils who filled in their questionnaire and those who chatted with us. You think that the school council does a good job in representing your views and are pleased with the improvements to the playground.

You are keen to learn, work hard and are making good progress. The children in the Nursery and Reception classes enjoy their work and play and are doing well. In Years 1 to 6 your reading has improved and your writing is coming along very well. We enjoyed reading some of your 'Big Write' work. We think you could do better in mathematics so we have asked your teachers to:

- make sure that the tasks in your mathematics lessons give you lots of challenge, especially for those who learn quickly
- provide you with learning targets in mathematics, just as they do in writing
- improve the marking in mathematics so that it is as helpful as that in writing
- make more regular checks in mathematics lessons to ensure that any improvements made are working well.

You can help by continuing to maintain the improved attendance and to work hard. Thank you once again for the interesting conversations we had and for letting us share your work and play. Please accept our best wishes for the future and continue to enjoy your happy school.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Lynne Read

Lead Inspector

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