

Birch House School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 352/6045
Unique reference number 130386
Inspection number 342474
Inspection dates 22-23 September 2009
Reporting inspector Christine Graham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

Age group: 11-16

Published: 14 October 2009

Reference no: 342474

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090070

© Crown copyright 2009



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

Information about the school

Birch House School is an independent special day school. It is part of the Advanced Childcare Group. The school is located on the outskirts of Manchester city centre and it admits students from local authorities in the North West and from care homes within the group. The school caters for 24 students between the ages of 11-16. The school admits students throughout the year and there are 13 boys currently registered at the school. Ten attend full time and three attend part time because they are being integrated into school. The school admits girls but there were none registered at the time of the inspection. All students have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and other associated special educational needs and/or disabilities. Twelve students have a statement of special educational needs and six students are in the care of a local authority.

The school aims to 'provide a safe and caring environment within which young people and staff feel happy and secure and able to promote the learning and development of all members of the community. It hopes to help students to achieve their personal goals and develop an awareness and consideration of the needs of others.'

The school was last inspected in January 2007.

Evaluation of the school

The school has made good progress since its last inspection. It has managed the difficulties caused by a significant reduction in staffing and the move to a single site and it has tackled successfully all the recommendations from the last inspection. The school provides a good education for its students. The curriculum and teaching and assessment are good. The provision made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and for their welfare, health and safety are also good. The school safeguards the welfare of all its students and has produced all the relevant policies and guidelines. The school meets all the regulations necessary for its continued registration as an independent school.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good and it has improved significantly since the last inspection. The school covers all the subjects of the National Curriculum and it ensures that students develop the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Students have a satisfactory understanding of British history and traditions. Students' access vocational courses at local colleges and some students work with an organisation that refurbishes ambulances which are later sent to Cuba. Students in their final year of school have opportunities for work experience placements and the school works with the Connexions service to support the most vulnerable students. There are an adequate range of visits and extra-curricular activities and the school has plans for a residential trip to Spain which will be linked to the teaching of Spanish.

Assessment is strength of the school. Most students join the school at a very late stage in their education. Many have attended a number of schools or have not been in school for some time. Birch House does not always receive up-to-date information about students' attainment and many individual education plans are out of date. When students join the school they have a range of skills and some are very able. However, many students have significant gaps in their learning and a history of negative attitudes towards education. They find it difficult to concentrate in lessons or write for long periods of time. The school assesses students during their first weeks in school and they are asked what they want to achieve. Students and their teachers then use this information to set behavioural and other targets. The school tracks students' progress carefully. Their targets are monitored each week and are rated on a red, amber, green system. All tracking information is shared with individual students and they comment on their success or lack of progress. Students provide feedback to their teachers and teachers are expected to learn from their comments and, if necessary, make changes to their lesson planning. Students are learning to evaluate their own progress and they are given effective oral feedback in lessons.

Teaching and assessment are good. Teachers benefit from very effective professional development. The headteacher observes their lessons and provides them with clear guidance which helps them to improve their work. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use questioning well. They make good use information and communication technology (ICT) to motivate students and to give them experiences which might otherwise be difficult to arrange. Most students say that they want to do well but they have a great deal of ground to make up. On-line revision aids and textbooks although well matched to their age and ability, are not well enough matched to their literacy skills and they can become discouraged in lessons which rely too heavily on these resources. When students work on practical tasks or investigations they are interested and well motivated and they make good and often very good progress during the lesson. Support staff are very effective. They make a very good contribution to lessons and their tactful support and encouragement helps students participate in lessons for longer than might otherwise be the case.

Students are taught in key stage ability groups and follow courses which are well matched to their ability and current needs. All students know their current National Curriculum levels and what they must do to improve. Students have at least one-to-one support and some of those with the most challenging needs who are cared for in an Advanced Childcare setting are supported by two care staff. This very high level of support helps all students to focus on learning and make the most of their time in school. School data shows that students who attend regularly make good progress. The most able follow GCSE courses in the core subjects, often very successfully. In recent years some Year 11 students have left the school with two or more GCSE grades at C to G including English and mathematics. Students with low literacy skills follow a structured programme which helps them acquire functional literacy skills. Students also follow courses leading to accredited qualifications in physical education (PE), food technology, ICT and transition.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. Personal, social and health education and citizenship is implemented effectively. There is a detailed scheme of work and teaching is adapted to meet the needs of individual students. Students have an adequate understanding of their own culture and religion and that of others. Teachers and support staff have very good relationships with students. School rules are applied consistently and unacceptable language or behaviour is challenged promptly. Behaviour is good. During their time at school students learn to get along with others and begin to overcome negative attitudes or behaviour. They learn to value others and challenge any stereotypical thinking or behaviour. Students are usually polite to each other and they are courteous to staff and visitors. They say that they enjoy school and they have positive attitudes in lessons. Students are given clear moral guidance. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and they learn that there will be consequences if they make the wrong decisions. They are given a great deal of praise and accept oral feedback about their work or behaviour very positively. Students develop attitudes and skills which help them to make a positive contribution to the school and local community. They tidy the classrooms and the school grounds and have some involvement in community projects such as gardening for the neighbours and conforming to the 'good neighbour policy'. Students learn how to manage money and they are encouraged to open a bank account and to save their financial rewards. This, together with the improvements made to their basic skills means that they are well prepared for their future lives.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. The school has implemented all the latest guidance on safeguarding students and there are rigorous procedures to ensure that they are kept safe. Thorough risk assessments are carried out for all outdoor and educational visits and there are effective procedures to keep students safe during the school day. Students are given very good advice on how to

stay or become healthy and on how to stop habits which might put them at risk. Students are not allowed fizzy drinks and school meals are well balanced and nutritious, however, most students smoke. The school provides smoking cessation advice but most students choose not to take it although they are aware that smoking is bad for them. The school works with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and the youth offending team (YOT). An educational psychologist visits the school each week and students are encouraged to discuss any difficulties with her. The school nurse looks after their medical needs. Attendance is satisfactory. Most students attend regularly and the school does all it can to encourage regular attendance and ensure that students are safe. However, despite its best efforts some students do not attend well enough. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has carried out the necessary safeguarding checks for all staff. It maintains a single central register of such checks as required.

School's premises and accommodation

There are well equipped, specialist teaching rooms for science, art and design and technology (DT), food technology and ICT. The use of specialist resources helps to motivate students so that they make progress with their work. There are also two recreation rooms which can also be used as halls and pleasant dining room.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers receive a range of information. There are written reports and a range of formal and informal meetings. The school keeps in close touch with parents by telephone. The prospectus is clear and informative.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, fair and well-written complaints procedure. The school values feedback on its work and investigates informal complaints made by students, staff or parents very thoroughly. There have been no formal complaints in the last year.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Increase opportunities for students to work on practical or investigative tasks during lessons
- Ensure that written resources are well enough matched to students' literacy and other skills.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs		√		
How well students make progress in their learning		√		

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of students		√		

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students		√		
--	--	---	--	--

School details

Name of school	Birch House		
DCSF number	352/6045		
Unique reference number	130386		
Type of school	Special Secondary School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	April 1996		
Age range of students	11-16		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 10	Girls: 0	Total: 10
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 12	Girls: 0	Total: 12
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 0	Total: 6
Annual fees (day students)	£ 27,288.00		
Address of school	Birch House School Birch Lane Longsight Manchester Lancashire M14 0WN		
Telephone number	0161 2247500		
Fax number	0161 2247500		
Email address	bilal@birchhouseschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Mahmud Bilal		
Proprietor	Advanced Childcare Group Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Mrs Christine Graham HMI		
Dates of inspection	22-23 September 2009		